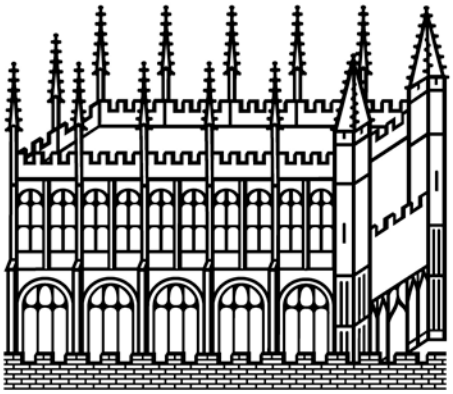


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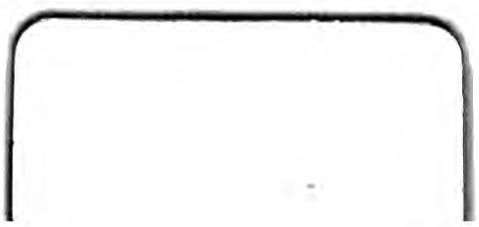


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Newness of life, a series of sermons and addresses

William Hay M.H. Aitken





NEWNESS OF LIFE.

NEWNESS OF LIFE:

A SERIES OF

Sermons and Addresses to True Believers.

DELIVERED ON MISSIONS AND SIMILAR OCCASIONS BY

REV. W. HAY M. H. AITKEN, M.A.,

MISSION PREACHER.



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PREFACE.

THE happiest moments of a Mission, so far as the mission-preacher is concerned, are those in which he is permitted to minister words of counsel and encouragement to the Lord's flock. The mission service, pure and simple, cannot be otherwise regarded than as a severe battle against recognized forces of evil. It has to be fought; by God's blessing it must be won; but how refreshing it is to turn aside for a few moments from this stern hand-to-hand conflict with the powers of darkness, and to take "sweet counsel together" with those whose hearts are already surrendered to Christ.

Nor are such services to be regarded merely in the light of a spiritual indulgence for the mission-preacher; one object of every Mission—secondary indeed, but not unimportant—will be to afford spiritual assistance and direction and refreshment to the true servants of God. At such a time these will be predisposed to receive truth suited for their spiritual condition by the very circumstances by which they are surrounded, and it is of the greatest importance that they *should* obtain ere the Mission passes some fresh and definite blessing.

The Sermons contained in this volume have been for the most part delivered on such occasions, and I publish them in the hope that they may be useful to those who are already at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

As I have found by experience that the usefulness of an evangelizing sermon may be greatly increased and extended by committing it to print, so I hope that many true Christians whom my voice has never reached may derive some assistance from the perusal of sermons addressed to the class to which they belong.

I also hope that these words of exposition and counsel may be helpful to the many who in various places where I have preached the gospel have been led to accept God's salvation, and who will perhaps receive spiritual teaching from no one more readily than from him whose voice God was pleased to use in the first instance to call them to the Cross.

One or two of the sermons, though not delivered at missions, are so much in harmony with the character of the volume, that I have not hesitated to insert them; the last sermon in the volume—preached on a memorable occasion—is one of these, and I would venture to crave for it the serious and thoughtful consideration of my fellow-churchmen.

I have felt no small difficulty in deciding upon a title for this volume which should indicate its object and suggest its true character. That which I have at length fixed upon will be found to correspond pretty accurately with the subject-matter of the first few sermons at any rate, nor will it be out of harmony with the general purport of the remainder. The volume will have answered its purpose if it contributes in any degree to the development and manifestation of that spiritual experience in the hearts of God's people which is indeed NEWNESS OF LIFE.

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I.

Newness of Life.

AN EASTER SERMON.

"Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."—ROMANS vi. 4.

TO these words I desire to direct your special attention, "newness of life."

We are called upon this morning, my dear brethren, to contemplate the crowning miracle, of Christianity the miracle of miracles. The Resurrection may justly so be described because it is not only in itself a miracle, but it is the master miracle of Divine love set against and triumphing over the masterpiece of Satan's malignity, which we call death. As death in one form or another, either spiritual, temporal, or eternal, must be regarded as the supreme development of evil, so resurrection in one form or another, either spiritual resurrection or final resurrection, must be regarded as the highest possible triumph of good. Now I want you to observe, dear friends, that not only does God, in His infinite love, triumph over death, but that He actually employs the enemy to be the means of producing this greater benefit. Death itself becomes subservient to the purposes of a higher life, and we may truly say, employing the well-known riddle of Samson, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," so that at this moment death itself occupies a most important place in the moral economy of the universe, and is actually the introduction to the highest good of all.

It would have been a great thing if the Lord Jesus Christ had simply robbed death of his string, so that you and I might have looked the tyrant in the face without a tremor of fear; but the glory of God seems to me so specially revealed in this, —not only has death been robbed of his sting, but death has become the condition of attaining to resurrection life and

glory: through death we rise to that newness of life which belongs to us in virtue of our union with our Head.

The question which Nicodemus asked of our blessed Lord, if you will reflect for a few moments, is a very natural one. He is met by the statement, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." An ancient heathen poet has said, "Of this one thing the gods are impotent, to undo the past." Nicodemus might well conclude, "I must of necessity carry my old self along with me to the grave; I must still be bound down by the recollection of the past; I must still be enchained by habits formed in bygone years." Not so, Nicodemus! The Master's message is, "Ye must be born again." But what form of birth is there for the man grown old in habits of sin? The great discovery was not made until this day, when from the womb of darkness and death arose the new-born man, "the first-begotten of the dead," "the first-born of many brethren!" Rising up Him self from darkness and from death, He already, we may say, raised His Church along with Him. In the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God the resurrection Church arose with the risen Christ, and from that time forward it became possible for the sinner to be severed from the incubus of the past, and to rise into newness of life in virtue of his consociation and union with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, observe the difference between God's way of dealing with fallen man, and our way,—the way we should naturally adopt when dealing with ourselves. Nicodemus at once objects, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" How is it to be done? what process is there by which this mysterious change can be effected? A moment's reflection will show us that the change in itself is exceedingly desirable. If Nicodemus had been asked the question, "Do you not think it a desirable thing that a person should be born again?" he would have replied, "Of course it is. Any one can see at once that our present is crippled by our past. We carry along the journey of life the fatal incubus of the habits and memories of the past. The influence which the past exercises on the present is only too familiar to us. We are weak because we have been weak. We sin because we have sinned. We are bound by an iron chain because we have been forging that chain all our long life through. If there could be any means contrived by

which I could be cut off from my past self, so as to make a really fresh start without any of that fatal influence, what a grand and wonderful discovery such a process would be! what vantage-ground it would place me on! and what hopes it would breed within me! How possible it would become to attain to something approaching to a life of holiness, if I could only cut off this sad entail! but I cannot do it; and one would almost think that this is the one thing which even God Himself is unable to effect."

All we can suggest for ourselves is to endeavour to mend and patch up the old creature; but a thing seldom looks well after it is mended, and is never very servicable, and it becomes ever less and less servicable the more frequently it is mended. There is a good deal of difference between a new and a patched garment; the fact of its being patched indicates that it is nearly worn out, and will soon be laid aside; but a man with a new garment makes a fresh start, and if that garment possesses the characteristics of the garments of the Israelites in the wilderness, which were not worn out even by forty years of travel and labour, the man who obtains such a new suit is set up for a lifetime. We should naturally endeavour to patch up ourselves, to add a little here, to take off a little there, and gradually to work out something like, at any rate, a decent patchwork garment in which we should not be altogether ashamed to stand before the eyes of our fellow-men, even if we should have a lingering suspicion that it would scarcely stand the scrutiny of Heaven. But the Lord will have nothing to do with patchwork. God does not mend!—He recreates; and He recreates by employing that which we most shrink from; He presses death into the service of immortality, and through the open jaws, the dismal abyss of the grave, we rise to newness of life, in which we are able to stand as free from every uncleanness as though the impurities of the past had never existed, and so long as we walk by faith in the invisible, as safe as though sin had never had dominion over us.

There is a thought suggested to our minds when we go out into the country at this time of the year, and gaze on the opening leaves and flowers. On a former occasion I called your attention to one great lesson which nature teaches at this season—the lesson of resurrection power. I pointed out what a mighty force resurrection power is. This morning I want to call your attention to another lesson from nature—the *new-*

ness by which we are surrounded in spring-time. God might have arranged the thing differently. He might have resuscitated that which seemed to be dying away, and have restored nature by a species of renovation or a process of repair; but no! until the withered dead leaf is swept away into the tomb of corruption and decay, the new germ does not shoot forth from the branch, the new leaf does not unfold itself; but as soon as the old is dead and buried there arises a newness of life, and if you go into the fields or woods at this time there is a virgin freshness about everything that seems to speak of resurrection: how new it all looks! how pure! how vigorous! how like the work of God! Does not all seem to have come fresh from the very touch of God? The most skilful artist who endeavours to imitate nature utterly fails in this. He cannot reproduce nature's freshness. You see that flower bathed in dew: there is a virgin bloom about it, a purity and freshness which cannot be either imitated or even described, though you are at once impressed by it. Even so with the human soul. There are many imitations of real religion, but these imitations will all be devoid of this newness of life, they will all be without that virgin freshness which is only produced by the touch of the Life-giver. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a *new* creature. Old things have passed away, and all things are become new." He comes forth from the tomb of his Lord with whom he has been buried, clothed with that garb of childlike innocence and purity which belongs to one who has passed through the hands of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

As the Lord teaches us this lesson very forcibly in nature, He enforces it by the striking symbolism of one of the two Christian sacraments. In this passage St. Paul speaks of our being buried with Him by baptism into death. We never understand Holy Baptism till we take this view of it. It is not a mere washing; it is a burial and a raising from the grave; its lesson is death and resurrection. We can understand how eloquently this symbol must have appealed to the feelings of those converted to God from heathen or Jewish systems. We can understand as they passed down into the waters of baptism, and rose up again recognized Christians, how completely they would feel they were severed from their old relations, and identified with Him in whom they had professed their faith. They were saying farewell to all the asso-

ciations of their former years; they were saying farewell to all the habits of their former lives; they were turning their backs on their old selves. As they rose up from the water they must have felt that they occupied a new relationship to the world, a new relationship to their fellow-Christians; nay, a new relationship (if I may use such an anomalous expression) to themselves; their own nature possessing a harmony in itself to which it had previously been a stranger, and most of all, a new relationship to the God into whose family they had thus been introduced, and to whom they had become bound by an indissoluble tie. It was not the mere ordinance which did it, but the ordinance was the symbol of the spiritual fact, and where God gives a symbol it is always a pledge, so that the ordinance was not only a symbol, but a pledge that the fact was accomplished in those cases where faith had laid hold of what was taught through the symbol. That it was accomplished through no mere mechanical operation is very clearly shown by another passage, "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him *through the faith of the operation of God*, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. ii. 12). I am more and more impressed with the conviction that in a vast majority of cases in primitive times, where mission work was carried on by the apostles and their successors, the act of baptism was synchronous with the act of faith. The people were led up to the act of faith by the outward ordinance of baptism. An awakened and convicted heathen, for instance, already disposed to accept the gospel, would be directed in the words of St. Peter to repent and be baptized. It would be pointed out to him that when he descended voluntarily into the waters of baptism, it was nothing less than an assertion on his part by action of his identification of himself with Christ in death and resurrection. He would thus be brought by the decisive act of submitting to the ordinance to the point of accepting for himself, and resting his heart upon, the work of Christ, to which the ordinance bore witness, while the sacrament itself assured him that thus submitting himself to Christ in the obedience of faith there was a complete severance in the eyes of God between his present and his former condition. So it was, at any rate, in the case of Saul of Tarsus himself: the moment of his baptism seems to have been the moment of his committing himself by faith into the hands of Christ; and so it would seem to have been with those to whom on the day

of Pentecost St. Peter gave the direction which I have just quoted.

The act of faith by which the teaching of Baptism was apprehended, and the actual ordinance, were coincident in point of time: the man believed in the act of baptism, and was baptized in the act of believing; so that the Apostle is able to look back definitely to the point of Baptism, and say, "Then, at that moment, you were buried with Christ, and rose from the water a new man, in newness of relationship to man and God;" and this is shown (and we are guarded against that mechanical view of Baptism which I am sorry to say obtains in our own Church in too many cases, and which has been one great cause of spiritual death within our Church,) by the statement contained in this verse: "Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him *through the faith of the operation of God.*" If there be no faith in the operation of God, the mere outward observance of the ordinances can never produce either death or resurrection. "Very well; then," you say, "what has Baptism got to do with it? If the thing is dependent on the act of faith by which we rise to the newness, how are we affected by the Baptism?" Whether the ordinance has been performed before the faith is exercised, or whether the ordinance is performed after the faith has been exercised, the point turns not upon the time of the performance of the ordinance. The substance of the benefit indicated to us by Baptism is apprehended when faith lays hold upon it, and when faith, taking the ordinance as a sort of additional claim, demands, apprehends, appropriates the blessing of which the ordinance is the symbol and the pledge. In other words, when I have faith in the operation of God, whether that faith takes place the moment of baptism, or five months or five years after baptism, or five months before baptism, makes no difference to God. The point is this, that when my faith lays hold on the operation of God, which was manifested in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and which is symbolised in the ordinance of baptism, then that ordinance in itself is a pledge that the reality of the blessing which the ordinance typifies is actually mine. So that, in plain language, when I have accepted this operation of God as a fact, and rested my soul upon it, I may look back to the waters of baptism which were shed on me in my infant days, and I may say, "There and then, in that ordinance, God gave me His own assurance

that my soul, trusting to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, is raised by the operation of God from its old position into a state of newness of life as surely as was the body of Christ Himself raised from the tomb by the same mighty operation of God. I have thus two things on which to fall back in that respect as a pledge and assurance of my own standing before God; first, the testimony of the word, and then, side by side with that, the testimony of the ordinance, so that by the outward written word, and by the ordinance appointed by our Lord Himself, I may have the firm assurance, without doubt or question, that having now my faith grounded in the operation of God, and resting entirely upon the grand fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I am lifted up out of the old into the new—"old things are passed away, and all things are become new."

With these thoughts present to our minds, I want you further to observe in this notable passage St. Paul goes on to say that "we are buried with him in baptism unto death," and raised up again out of the waters of baptism, *with a definite object.* Let us refer to the words "that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in *newness of life.*" This is the great object of all, dear friends,—the *walk in* newness of life. You cannot walk in a place if you do not reach that place. I cannot walk in Liverpool without first getting to Liverpool; and I cannot walk in newness of life without having first of all been introduced into a condition of newness of life. But when I have been introduced into a condition of newness of life, let me remember God has a right to expect that newness to reveal itself in my walk. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, even so *walk in Him*, rooted and grounded and built up in Him. And now, my dear brethren, what are the distinguishing features and characteristics of this walk in newness of life? The primary and strongest contrast will lie between our former and our present relations with God. In the old life we may have had a considerable amount of religious thought and feeling, but our relationship to God was this: we felt there was something wrong between God and us; we desired that that something should be set right, and we may have hoped gradually to win His approval by a life of sufficient consistency. Some of us have laboured very hard to earn that approval, and yet the end was disappointment and

defeat; and even while endeavouring to do our best in this old religious life, we were conscious that we were leading the life of slaves, and not of children; we were serving under the fear of the lash, and under a sense of necessity, and not because it was a joy to serve Him whom we loved so dearly. How was all this to be changed, and every barrier to confidence and love between us on either side to be swept away? There is only one answer—by death and resurrection. Not by patching ourselves up, not by endeavouring to effect reformation or improvement, did the change come. There was only one way: we had to go right down into the tomb; we saw ourselves, represented by Christ, as enduring the penalty of the law; we saw that penalty fully borne, and were content to reckon ourselves as crucified with Christ; but "he that is dead is justified from sin," and so we found that there was now no further condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. From the grave and gate of death, we rose into newness of life, and our very first experience of that life was the discovery that God was "with us" no longer a condemning Judge at whose very name we trembled, but a reconciled Father, bound to us, and we to Him, by the mediatorial work of Jesus. From God, at length, we have nothing to fear; and if not from Him—from whom? The guilty terror that kept us at a distance, the sense of unfitness to approach, the consequent want of interest in religious things at large, the dreary sense of bondage, the legal slavery,—all these are amongst the old things which have passed away: they have been swept into the sepulchre of Jesus, and left there for ever; and we enter into newness of relationship to our God, while His Spirit is sent into our hearts, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."

Do I speak to any here this morning who are still under the oldness of the letter? You call yourself a Christian. Consider what you are losing! You are losing all the brightness of the sunlight, the joy, the blessing of Christian experience. You are shutting the door against your own interests, walling yourself off in that dark dungeon of death which the Easter light cannot penetrate, and excluding yourself from the enjoyment of that life which issues forth from yonder broken tomb.

But I pass on. What is the practical result of this new relationship in which I stand to God, and which springs from

"newness of life"? Nothing less than this: that all the treasuries of Divine power are open to me, and I am in a position to appropriate the treasure as my needs arise. No longer am I going a warfare at my own charges, and trusting that God will help me out when I fail; but I begin by definitely recognizing that the old self-contained, self-dependent life is at an end, and that "*all things are*" *now* "*of God,* who hath reconciled us to Himself." Faith in the operation of God introduced me into this blessed condition; faith in the operation of God is to be the law of my experience in it. There is a power now working within me; it is the power of God Himself, whose mighty Spirit has taken possession of me, and is working out His purposes within me according to the law of His operation, just as He is at this moment working according to law in universal nature. Plants and trees have no independent will, and therefore they are not required to yield themselves to Him. We possess the most exalted of all responsibilities in having a will which is capable of acting independently of the direct control of God; hence the necessity of "yielding our members instruments of righteousness unto holiness;" but this is where our co-operation lies, not in endeavouring by a renewal of the old system of struggling and trying to do for ourselves what God has already undertaken to do for us. Does it seem to you a strange and inexplicable thing that a new power should thus be capable of entering and pervading our nature? Certainly the subject is full of wondrous mystery, yet even the phenomena of outward nature may serve to throw some light upon the subject, showing us how possible it is under certain conditions for a new power to enter our nature and to turn our weakness into strength. Electricians will tell us that our nervous system is so constituted that under the force of electricity we can perform prodigies of strength and endurance which would be impossible under ordinary circumstances. We will suppose this book to contain a weight of several pounds. I hold it out at arm's length, my arm being in a horizontal position. Ere many minutes have passed, the sense of fatigue becomes insupportable, and my arm must fall to my side; but turn on a current of electricity to the outstretched arm, and I am able to sustain the weight indefinitely, without any such sense of fatigue. Where does my part in the matter lie?—not in struggling to force my arm to do what it is too weak to do, but in yielding my member to the power which can enable it to

accomplish what is otherwise impossible. I have to see to it that no non-conductor shuts me off from the generating mechanism, and breaks the invisible stream of power; and that is just what I have to see to, above everything else, in my spiritual experience. Am I in full connection with Divine Omnipotence? Listen to the language of St. Paul: "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." How does Christ strengthen him? By enduing his nature with a new and adequate power: "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet *not I*, but the grace of God which was with me." Now, brethren, do you not see the difference between going about the work of life flurried with anxiety and weighted with care,—now straining every nerve in an agony of effort, and now, weary and discouraged, sinking into a lethargic condition,—and the quiet, happy confidence of him who is walking in *newness of life*, assured that, whatever may arise, the new life within him is equal to any and every emergency, and exercising a calm watchfulness most chiefly on this point—that the communications between him and Omnipotence are unimpeded, and that the new life is more and more abundantly filling his soul. Such an one counts not his enemies, he recks not of the difficulties with which he is surrounded; he has laid it down for certain, more are they that are for us than all that can be against us; and so he presses forward in this his might, even when youths faint and grow weary, and young men utterly fail. There is no slavery in such service; there is a spontaneous power of extension and development in life; it is a joy to exercise its activities; but when the life-current sinks low, when intercourse with the Life-giver is interrupted, service soon becomes drudgery, and we have to stimulate our flagging energies with the sound of the taskmaster's whip. Do not misunderstand me: I do not say that the man who is walking in newness of life will not work, and work hard. He will really do more work, and better work, than his fellow-Christian who is serving in oldness of the letter; but he will do his work by power claimed and applied by faith, where the other has to try and get it all out of his labouring and disheartened will. St. Paul truly speaks of running, wrestling, fighting, subduing the body, pressing to the mark; but then he lets us into the secret of it all when he says, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Dear

Christian brethren, are you walking in newness of life, or in oldness of the letter, trying to do your best, endeavouring to lead a good sort of life as if you had not renounced all these phrases when first you became a true Christian? Do I speak to any of you who, as you compare your present life with your life in the old time, before you knew the power of the grace of God, are not able to detect any considerable difference between the phenomena of the two experiences? Are you drawing from the same resources now as then, and pretty much in the same way? Then I beseech you, brethren, take heed lest the terrible saying of the apostle become true of you, "Ye are fallen from grace." Ah, let us get back to the cross, and see once again our old man crucified with Him, and then claim by faith the blessed result "that the body of sin might be destroyed (rendered impotent), that we should not henceforth serve sin." Let us claim our spiritual liberties: "Sin shall not have dominion over you." And if we are brought to discover that there is, as it were, a non-conductor between us and God, let us not trifle with it. See in it the fatal cause of all your misery and failure; and while you honestly turn your back upon it and renounce it, look up into the face of Him to whom all power is given, and claim from Him that this obstacle to your fellowship with Him shall be swept away.

But once again: this "newness of life" is shown not only in newness of relation to God, and in the possession of newness of power, but also, as a result of this, in *newness of character.* I meet with a great many Christians who do not seem to expect this. How many of us are there who have been converted to God for some years, and yet there is so very much of the old self about us that even our fellow-Christians cannot help being distressed and pained at it?

Dear children of God, you who perhaps several years ago were brought to the knowledge of Jesus in this church, let me press home upon your minds, as well as my own, this morning, the solemn inquiry, "Are we walking in newness of life? Are the old features passing away?—have they passed away? You who were naturally violent and uncontrolled, have you acquired the habit of self-restraint? are your natural passions well in hand?—not in your hand—in Christ's hand? You who were naturally rugged, rough, careless of the feelings of other people, —you who were ready now and then to say a bitter word without thinking how much pain it might give, who rather plumed

yourself on being blunt even to rudeness,—is the beauty of the Lord our God beginning to rest upon you?—the refinement, the tenderness? Are you become like the Lord Jesus Christ, a perfect gentleman?—as sensitive of the feelings of others, yea, ten times more sensitive of the feelings of others, than you are about your own? You who were naturally quarrelsome, and, somehow or other, were always falling out with those with whom you were connected, are you able to say with holy satisfaction this morning, through the power of the resurrection of Christ, "All that is passed away, and anybody can get on with me now, because Christ liveth in me"? Does your experience prove that it is so? You, whose gifts of conversation were apt to degenerate into idle gossip, and whose tongue ran so fast you had to spend half your time regretting what you had said in the other half, have you learned to keep the little member in its place?—does it run riot, unbridled, no longer? Are you beginning to learn what the apostle meant when he said, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God"?—he might have said, "Whether ye talk or are silent."

Come, dear friends, these are practical questions. It is no use going and gazing at that broken tomb, crying out about resurrection power and glory, and then, like St. James's man, after having beheld our face in the glass, going our way, and straightway forgetting what manner of men we are. What manner of men are we? We are children of the resurrection. If we are really one with Jesus, we are lifted up out of the tomb together with Him into the newness of life which is represented yonder by our Head in glory. Just as the life in my own physical head permeates my whole physical system, so there is a real substantial unity of life between my Divine Head and me, if I am living in Him; so that I have no right to go away and forget what manner of man I am. When we get down to the exchange, to the workshop, do we forget what manner of men we are? Are there any of us who, when we get behind our counter, forget what manner of men we are? We remember it at the Lord's table, we commemorate the fact there, that we are bought with a price, that our position is in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. That is what manner of men we are in theory, in our moments of contemplation; but what about it when we come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, when the glories have for a moment disappeared, when the majesty of God

is no longer engrossing our attention,—what manner of men are we then? Have we forgot it? Oh that we had better memories! Unbelief has a very short memory, but faith has a very long one; and the man who walks by faith cannot forget one thing—Christ in him, the hope of glory. That is the secret of resurrection life and power.

So it has come to pass, dear brethren and friends, that the glorious beauty of the Lord our God is for us; His freshness, purity, the very bloom of newness of life, is ours. Oh, how beautiful He is! He was always beautiful, but was He ever more beautiful than when He stood in the garden in His resurrection glory, when that sorrowing woman heard Him say, "Mary"? As she gazes at Him in wondering love, how beautiful He seems! When He stands in the midst of His little company of disciples, and smiles on them, and says, "Peace be unto you," they thought that He was a spirit, He was so celestial and unearthlike, the beauty of the Lord resting upon Him. He was a citizen of the heavenly city. Already the very atmosphere of a higher world was wrapping Him round. He stands there in the beauty of His love, and says, "Peace be unto you." What a beauty there is in the risen Saviour's pity! I see Him turning to Thomas;—how angry I should have been with Thomas!—but look how tenderly Jesus fixes His eyes on Thomas, as He says, "Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." I see Him standing by the shores of Galilee, and there is the man who denied Him with oaths and curses. Jesus won't pass over his sin. Some of us who are naturally soft and good-natured in our disposition, who have not the strength of other people, would rather see a man go to hell than reprove a fault. Jesus takes care to remind Peter, by His threefold inquiry, of his fall and of his frailty; but even while He probes the scarcely healed wound, in order that it may be healed perfectly, He goes on to restore him to full apostolic dignity and power, "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep."

How beautiful He must have been when He turned round on the beloved disciple, who, I suppose, like the rest, had fled in the garden of Gethsemane, and hid himself, and bid him "Follow Me!" I don't suppose John ever forgot that look. And how beautiful He seems in that lesson which we have heard read to-day, where once again that same John was per-

mitted to hear His voice in the glory! How I love to think of Him drawing near with such condescension to that poor trembling child of earth, that John who once had laid his head upon His bosom, laying His right hand upon him, just as we should lay our hand on the shoulder of an old friend whom we met after a long interval, as though He would claim acquaintance with him afresh! And then that blessed word of salutation, so familiar in the old days, how St. John's heart must have bounded as he heard it, "Fear not." If there is a watchword in heaven, it is that word, "*Fear not.*" John had heard it on the Sea of Galilee, and again and again, all through His human ministry, that word had fallen from the Master's lips, bringing healing and peace, and the calm of heaven, and now he hears it in heaven.

"How beautiful Thou art in Thy resurrection majesty, in Thy resurrection power! How beautiful Thou art in Thy resurrection love: having loved Thine own who were in the world, Thou lovest them to the end."

That is the life we are called upon to live, and that is the life it is our privilege to lead; for God never gives us a call without its being a privilege; and He never gives us the privilege to come up higher without stretching out to us His hand to lift us up.

I wish to leave this message with you, Come up higher and higher into the realities and glories of the resurrection life, knowing that your life is hid with Christ in God. Shake yourself loose of every encumbrance, turn your back on every defilement, give yourself over like clay to the hand of the potter, that He may stamp upon you the fulness of His own resurrection glory, that we, beholding as in a mirror the glories of the Lord, may be changed from glory unto glory as by the Spirit of God.

II.

The Three Laws.

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh. to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."—ROMANS viii. 12, 13.

THE Apostle commences this passage with one of those pregnant "therefores" which are so common in his writings. In order fully to understand the expression in this case, it is necessary we should glance back to the preceding chapter, and endeavour to follow, as far as possible, the thread of the argument, so as to comprehend the conclusion at which he arrives.

In the middle of the third chapter of this Epistle (Rom. iii. 20), St. Paul enters upon the great subject of Justification, and states in the strongest terms that it is by faith, and by faith only, that we are to be justified. This subject he pursues in the fourth chapter, and brings to a conclusion at the commencement of the fifth, in the words, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." After a digression, in which he places in contrast the effect of primeval sin on the one hand, and the atonement of Christ on the other, he passes on in the sixth chapter to consider the practical effects of justification upon our life and character: "What shall we say then?" he asks; "shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" and in demonstrating the impossibility of this, he proceeds to indicate the nature of the relation which is established between the justified man and sin. This relation he represents as being the reverse of that which previously existed. Formerly, sin was the master, and man was the slave. Now by death, and resurrection, man is freed from sin (Rom. vi. 7). Sin hath lost its dominion, and we are free to yield ourselves to a life of righteousness. But there was another question full of interest to the mind of one

who, like the Apostle, had been brought up under the ancient law revealed from Sinai. He has just been affirming that the gospel revelation is to produce practical effects, such as the law had proved itself incapable of producing. It therefore naturally suggests itself to his mind to indicate, as precisely as possible, why it was that the law had been thus unsuccessful, and, in doing so, to call our attention to the nature of the Christian's present relation to that ancient law, and to justify his statement of this relation by pointing out wherein the law had failed to produce the desired effect. Thus he is led on to a definite statement of the nature of the relation between ancient law and sin in our own subjective experience; and upon this subject he is led to make statements which, however startling they may seem at first sight, are none the less borne out and justified by human experience. He represents sin as, in a certain sense, originating in law, or, at any rate, as incapable of existing without law.

Here we are reminded of St. John's definition of sin: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law." Obviously, if this be a correct definition, until a law be given sin cannot exist; we cannot transgress a law until we have the law to transgress. St. Paul illustrates his point by referring to a particular precept, less recognized perhaps by the mere moralist than many that he might have named, and therefore all the more suitable to his purpose. "I had not known improper desire," he said, "except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." The acceptance of this precept is represented by him as giving sin a starting-point, a base of operations from which it wrought all manner of concupiscence. The law then failed, in that while it revealed a standard, it did not reveal a power. If there had been a law that should have given life, *then* righteousness would have been by the law; but, inasmuch as the law revealed an obligation, but failed to indicate how that obligation was to be met, it left the sinner at the mercy of his sin. The effects thus produced by the law as actually giving occasion to sin, would seem to be twofold. In the first place, there is a certain instinct of independence and impatience of control which, it seems, naturally belongs to us all, which prompts us to rebel against the imposition of any kind of restraint. So long as no restraint is offered to us, we are scarcely conscious of the presence of this principle of self-

will, but as soon as restraint is applied, this principle of self-assertion rises up in rebellion, and endeavours to defy control. We can detect the operation of this principle in early childhood. Place an arbitrary restriction upon any form of juvenile gratification, and you will at once excite within the mind of the child a disposition to do the very thing which has been interdicted, where, without the precept, the thing might never have suggested itself to its mind.

A curious story which illustrates this point is told of a citizen of some German city,—Strasburg, if my memory serves me right. It was reported to the Elector who ruled the town, that there was within its walls one aged citizen who, for a long life of seventy years, had never on any single occasion strayed beyond the limits of the wall. Interested by this curious fact, the Elector sent for the man, and, after confirming by inquiry the truth of the statement, offered him a pension on condition that he would never during the remainder of his life pass beyond the bulwarks. The old man gladly accepted the pension, and retired in a state of great delight. Strange to say, from that day forward he found himself drawn by an irresistible impulse towards the walls of his city. Day by day he used to patrol the battlements with eager eyes turned towards the country, which now seemed to have an indescribable charm for him. As days and weeks wore on, the sense of his captivity, and the desire to break away from the restraint, became positively intolerable. In the end he presented himself once again to the Elector, requesting that the pension might be withdrawn, in order that he might have the gratification of passing beyond the limits of the city before he died. Life had become scarcely worth having on such terms.

Is it not even thus that the law operates? It imposes a restraint, and thus intensifies desires; only that our figure fails in this respect, that in our case the desires were pre-existent, whereas this venerable citizen seems to have enjoyed an immunity from any such curiosity until the moment that the law was imposed.

But this is surely not all. More than this is expressed by the strong language of the apostle. It is not merely that desire was stimulated, but it is that "the motions of sins which were by the law did work in our members;" for the law revealed something more than a restrictive precept. It was backed by a terrible condemnation, nothing less than the separation of

the sinner, from the moment of his sin, from all spiritual intercourse with his God; and this would seem to be what the sacred writers understand as the first intention of that terrible word "death." Cut off from God, the soul of the sinner finds itself condemned already—dead in trespasses and sins; but this condemnation it owes, not to the original presence of sin, but to the sentence of the law condemning sin. Thus the commandment which was ordained to life, is found by the sinner to be unto death; for sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived, and slew its victim. Such then, according to the apostle's description, is the relation of sin to law, and the effect which both united have upon the human subject.

But now, before proceeding to follow the line of his argument, we must spend a few moments upon the inquiry, are we to regard the Apostle here as describing his own personal experience, or is he simply stating an abstract and hypothetical case? I am fully persuaded that the latter is the correct view of this passage, and I will give my reasons for this conclusion. I cannot imagine that at any period of his career the terms of the ninth verse could have been applicable to the case of Saul of Tarsus: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." When was St. Paul alive without the law? Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee brought up in the very midst of Jewish light and Jewish privilege, not irreligious, but a zealous man, could there have been a time in the Apostle's own experience when he was alive without the law? Was there ever a time when he was without the law, or when that law did not condemn him? I am aware that this argument has been answered by the suggestion that St. Paul, in the phrase here employed, "when the commandment came," refers to the moment when the law, in its fulness of spiritual import, laid such a strong hold upon his conscience as to convict him, for the first time, of his own sinfulness; but to this I answer, how opposite is the effect here described to that which is induced by genuine conviction of sin! What does he describe as the consequence of this advent of the law?—not conviction of sin, driving him to repentance; not such an experience as he may have passed through in those terrible three days when he sat in darkness and the shadow of death, reflecting on the sins of a lifetime, tortured by the agonies of remorse, and haunted by the blood of the martyred Stephen; but, on the

contrary, the revival of sin within his nature. "Sin," he says, "revived, and I died. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."

Surely the moment when the law is brought home with the force and convicting power which only the Holy Spirit of God can impart to it, is not the moment at which sin revives in us, but rather the moment at which sin receives its death-blow. I conclude, therefore, and it seems to me upon substantial and, to my own mind, unanswerable grounds, that St. Paul is here stating a hypothetical case, and not writing a leaf of autobiography; and this fact seems to me of no small importance in deciding the true interpretation of what follows. But whether or not this view be accepted, there is a further and more important question which has to be considered.

What is it that St. Paul is here describing? The subject is one upon which there has been a considerable amount of controversy, but I desire to touch upon it in no controversial spirit. I shall give my reasons for the view which I hold, and leave you to judge whether or not they are conclusive; but before doing so, I must briefly glance at other opinions which have been maintained with respect to the interpretation of this passage. Only one of those opinions do I desire in the strongest possible terms to deprecate, viz., that which would represent the language here employed as containing a description of the normal experience of a true Christian. I can conceive no more fatal perversion of Holy Scripture than such an interpretation, and I cannot but believe this passage, so employed, has been a most effective instrument in the hands of Satan himself (who knows well how to quote Scripture) in his most favourite work of injuring and degrading evangelical piety. Let a man once become persuaded that the seventh of Romans is a faithful picture of the life which God intends him to lead, and there and then one half of the New Testament, one may almost say, is rendered nugatory, Christian experience is stripped of all its most salient features, and Ichabod may be written on his life—the glory is indeed departed. Yet, am I wrong in saying that too many Christians, conscious of their own unfaithfulness and weakness, take refuge in this seventh chapter of Romans, finding a sort of melancholy consolation in the thought that after all their experience is only such as this chapter has led them to expect it would be; nay, such as it must continue to be to the end? I can only say that such

an interpretation of this passage is positively demoralizing, and is a dishonour to the faith which we profess, and to the God who is its Author!

But there are others who would represent this chapter as describing, not indeed the normal experience of a true child of God, but a morbid and unsatisfactory, but at the same time a very common experience, into which the child of God may fall, owing to unfaithfulness to grace given. For such an interpretation there is much to be said, but, as I believe, only because the experience of a true Christian, who is not walking by faith, necessarily and readily assimilates itself to the experience of a carnally but religiously disposed person, who has not yet learned to walk by faith at all. The Christian who is not walking by faith, having begun in the Spirit, is now living in the flesh; hence what wonder that the phenomena of his life should offer no important contrast to those presented in the lives of unspiritual but religiously disposed persons? To my own mind it is clear that the Apostle is here describing the experience of one who, like himself, had known long before his conversion what it was to delight in the law of God after his inward man, and yet had never received the liberating power of the grace of God: it is the experience of a religious moralist, who sees the beauty of holiness, and is conscious of the highest aspirations, and yet finds himself weighted by the tendency of his lower nature, crippled by the burden of sensuality, weighted by the chains of passion, even at the very moment when he most desires to rise. Of no true Christian man can it be said, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Surely if we are true believers, we are bought with a price, not sold at a price; we are the ransomed of the Lord, redeemed, not with corruptible things, but with the blood of Jesus Himself, purchased to be a people of possession to the Lord—His own chosen heritage. This is the very opposite of being sold under sin. The true child of God is not carnal, but spiritual: he knows where to find his resources; there is no occasion to cry out inquiringly, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" nor, if he is dead unto sin, and living unto God, can he be described with any degree of truth as imprisoned within the body of death at all. It will, I know, be objected that the terms of the twenty-second verse are too strong to apply to any but a true child of God; but does the twenty-second verse contain anything more than a stronger expression of what we

meet with in the sixteenth verse? There I read, "I consent unto the law that it is good." Surely this is exactly what the human conscience always must do, unless it has been wilfully corrupted. All that is added to this statement in the twenty-second verse is that the consent thus given to the law of God is a pleasurable consent—that is to say, it is mingled with feelings of admiration and delight at the contemplation of an object in itself so morally perfect and exalted. Observe, it is the *inward man* that is represented as thus delighting in the law of God, not the human subject regarded as a whole, but a certain particular element in his nature: we may call it conscience, or moral instinct, or enlightened reason, it matters not; whatever title we give it, the thing is the same—the higher God-like faculty within the human soul which detects and admires good, even while the soul itself may be the slave of the evil. It is absurd to say that Socrates and Plato and Seneca did not delight in the law of God in their inner man; and not less obvious is it that this was the case with Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, with the pious Cornelius, and the devout Lydia, and no doubt hundreds of other earnest Jews and proselytes of that time. To delight in the law of God is one thing; to fulfil the law is another; and herein lies the real difference between bondage and liberty, between the failure of the law and the success of the gospel.

Now, in examining this passage more closely, I wish you to notice that three distinct laws, having their sphere of operation in the subjective experience of man, are here referred to. The first is named in the twenty-third verse, but referred to again and again throughout the entire passage—*the law of mind.* Now, I want you to notice that this is the only subjective law referred to as operating on the side of the good throughout the whole of this seventh chapter of Romans. This fact in itself seems to me decisive as to the true interpretation of the passage. Christian experience is made up of something very different from the frail and futile efforts of the law of the mind. Observe, the new life, and the power which it brings with it, is not so much as referred to in this chapter; nothing but nature here lies before our view. What is this law of the mind? There still remains within fallen humanity so much of the divine as to enable—nay, to render it necessary for him to regard with admiration the height from which he has fallen. As the eye cannot but be attracted by objects of beauty in art or nature,

as the ear is necessarily pleased by the harmony of sounds, so our inward moral sense is necessarily gratified by the contemplation of moral perfection in the abstract. Observe, this is represented as a law. It is a law! for this faculty of our soul is designed to exercise its own proper functions, just as surely as any of our natural organs; and were it left free and unfettered, its functions would not be limited to mere admiration; it would not only discern, but it would enjoin,—not only discover the good, but demand its acceptance. Why does it not do so? Because of the presence of a second law described in this same verse as *the law of sin resident within the members of the man.*

This second law is represented as engaged in strife—shall we say in rebellion?—against the first. It derives its force from that which is tangible and material—that which is immediately within our reach; while the sanctions of the former law are intangible and remote. Our human frailty predisposes us to give greater consideration to that which more immediately affects us, and to think more lightly of that which is beyond the range of our present experience. The law of the mind may strengthen its authority by appealing to the necessary consequences of sin, and the elevated enjoyments of virtue;—she may well and truly insist that virtue is its own reward, and vice its own scourge. Vainly she reasons with the blind force of passion and the treacherous infirmity of the will! The momentary gratification, the imperious demands of a present desire, silence the dictates of a calmer reason, and the victorious law of sin in our members continues to bring the law of the mind into a condition of subjection. Then come self-reproaches, the torments of remorse, the terrors of despair; and from the prison-house of bondage the self-enslaved soul gazes wistfully round the wide universe of God for a redeeming power, an arm which shall be strong enough to relieve it from its bondage. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How solemn the thought, my dear brethren, that this also is a law! It is not a mere accident, though by many it may be so regarded. The drunkard, whose very body has lost all power of self-control—the sensualist, who has sacrificed his self-respect and even his affections to his lust, will still flatter himself that this is but a passing accident, a freak of fancy, an assertion of independence; but God says it is a law, stern and inexorable in its operation,

because it is based on eternal justice, and here is the expression of it, "Know ye not, that to whomsoever ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" —the obedience has been rendered—the slavery is established! Men would be less disposed to trifle with sin, if this solemn thought were more frequently dwelt upon in our pulpits. You invite Satan to be the minister of your pleasures,—by-and-by you find him enthroned the tyrant of your heart! He approaches you with the offer of liberty; he will be content with nothing but your miserable incarceration within the very body of death!

Returning to St. Paul's argument. It is at this point of complete failure of those natural forces which should elevate and purify human character, that a new power is represented as appearing upon the scene—a power which has not been referred to at all throughout the seventh chapter, but which is expressly described at the beginning of the eighth. Before we pass on to consider it (that our interpretation of this passage may not be regarded as incomplete), let me refer for a moment to the twenty-fifth verse of the seventh chapter.

Here we have first the exultant exclamation of faith as we lift our eyes towards the one object from which deliverance can be derived; but then immediately follow words which have been regarded by many as necessarily autobiographical, and therefore as indicating that the true interpretation of the passage is that which I have most strenuously combated; that is to say, as indicating that St. Paul here asserts that he himself habitually (Christian though he were) served with his mind the law of God, but with his flesh the law of sin. To my mind, to state such an exegesis is to confute it; and yet, it may be admitted, such is the meaning the passage would, at first sight, seem to bear. On closer examination, however, you will notice that the particle employed in the original, rendered in our version "so then," is precisely the word which St. Paul is in the habit of employing when, at the end of an argument, he sums up the conclusion at which he has arrived. This latter part of the twenty-fifth verse is, I take it, such a summing-up of the conclusions obtained by the entire argument up to that point. The emphatic "I myself," which at first sight seems puzzling unless we adopt the view which I have rejected, becomes not only clear, but necessary, when we consider that what St. Paul is here calling attention to is the difference between his

self-life and the new life, in which not he lived, but Christ lived within him. "With the mind," he says, "I myself," that is, as I understand it, I separated from that Divine power to which I am about to refer—I, considered in my own personality, containing within myself these opposite elements of human experience, must continue to lead this double life: were the law of my mind separated from the law of sin, I should serve the Lord God, but as long as the body of sin and death holds me down, I serve the law of sin.

What is wanted?—precisely that which the law of Moses could not supply—not a perfect standard, I have that already, but a new life-power, and lo! here it is. It rises before my vision in all its glory—its Author, divinely commissioned, and anointed to preach deliverance to the captive, has brought it within my reach; that deliverance is precisely what I need. "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." *No condemnation!* Then the barrier between Divine omnipotence and human infirmity is swept away, and it becomes possible for God to do what the law of the mind has failed to accomplish, and this is precisely what is represented as following upon justification. Let me point out to you that the last clause of the first verse does not appear here in the older manuscripts; it has been imported into its present position from the close of the fourth verse, where it is in its right place. Standing here, it is an obstruction to the line of argument, and leads us off from the point of the great discovery to which our attention is now being directed; standing where St. Paul wrote it, in the fourth verse, it is full of meaning, and indicates to us the conditions under which spiritual liberty is to be retained and enjoyed. If you will draw your pen through these words in the first verse, the passage will read thus: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, for *the law of the Spirit of life* in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Here is the long-desired new power which by its mighty energies is to supplant the feeble efforts of the law of the mind, and to bring into subjection and to hold in its own proper position that tyrant force in our lower nature which has arrogated to itself the authority of law. Again, notice that this also is a law, and what a law! It is, so far as we know, wide as the universe in its vastness of comprehension, and infinite as eternity—the law of the Spirit of life! The same law

clothes our fields and forests with green in the early spring; the same law calls into existence, sustains and arms with wondrous energies, the myriad forms of animal and vegetable life; but operating now in the spiritual region, this power, in all its vigour and efficacy, is no less sure than in the natural. This is the law which lifts us from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God—it is the law of the Spirit of life. Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty. He who is the Sovereign of all, can be slave to none; and they who receive Him, alone know what it is to be free indeed.

An illustration of the mutual relations of these three laws to each other may be drawn from the facts of British history, as we used to be taught them in our childhood. Possibly a more accurate acquaintance with the records of those early times may somewhat modify the appropriateness of the figure, but our first impressions of British history, I suppose, were somewhat of this sort. The ancient Britons, after the Romans had retired from these islands, were exposed to the ravages of their barbarian neighbours, the Picts and Scots, in the north. Weakened by Roman aggression, and unfitted for the hardships of warfare, the ancient Britons found themselves in no position to protect themselves from these savage hosts. In their weakness and self-despair they are supposed to have invited the assistance of the leaders of the Saxon race, who, without much trouble, succeeded in overthrowing the barbarian foe, and liberating the southern part of the island from their incursions. But what came next? These potent auxiliaries, having done their work so well, claimed to participate in the enjoyment of the country which they had redeemed, and ultimately they became supreme within the land; amalgamating themselves with the original possessors of the soil, they formed one strong nation, governed on Saxon principles and by Saxon laws. Such a result was no doubt the reverse of pleasant to our ancient British forefathers, but the ultimate effects of this union of the two races in the absorption of the weaker by the superior are to be found in the glorious annals of our country.

The illustration is suggestive, but not complete. The Saxons may have been tyrannical and unscrupulous; but He whose power becomes the law of the human heart proves His interest in our weal by setting up His own sway, for well He knows that in His service alone can we find perfect freedom. Otherwise the parallel is suggestive. We can no more overthrow

the forces of passion, and curb the lower impulses of our nature, than the ancient Britons could overthrow the fierce attack of the northern barbarians. In our helplessness we invited the assistance of a stronger than ourselves—that assistance has been granted, and the enemy is overthrown; but from the moment of our deliverance the Deliverer becomes supreme, not *over us* so much as *within us*, not setting up a separate authority as against our nature, but rather uniting our nature to His—welding our will to His will—communicating His nature to ours, and forming Himself within us—the hope of glory.

Let me, however, point out that He does this, not by annihilating our human personality; the doctrine of absorption in deity, so popular in the East, is entirely abhorrent to the terms of the Christian religion. Our individuality must remain intact for all eternity. Nor, again, (as the writings of some Christians would almost lead us to conclude,) by the addition of His own individuality to ours in such wise that we ourselves continue to represent the old man, while He Himself represents the new; so that one part of our nature is depicted as soaring in the clouds, while another is grovelling in earthliness and sin. This is but the seventh chapter of Romans reproduced under a new terminology, and the error is more perilous because less obvious than the first. Our New Adam identifies Himself with us. He becomes our life; He forms His own nature within ours, and in doing so conforms ours to His. Our life from henceforth is to be the manifestation of His life within us; our members are to be yielded to His control; no portion of our experience is to pass without reference to His will, and from Him all our resources are to be drawn. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

This is the life to which the eighth chapter of Romans leads us up. We are in the habit of illustrating spiritual mysteries by the common objects of nature. I know of nothing that so well illustrates the subject with which I am now dealing as a natural process that we are all familiar with, but which, it must be admitted, is so singular as to suggest the thought that it has been specially designed to illustrate this mystery. I refer to the process of grafting. You take a wild briar from the hedge, and plant it in your garden; upon that briar stem you graft the choicest rose, and the result is—what? not two distinct identities, the briar flourishing as a briar, and the rose

flourishing as a rose; nor, on the other hand, one homogeneous whole, the briar being completely absorbed into the rose; but two distinct natures forming one individuality, of which two natures one represents the original individuality of the briar, while the other represents the imparted nature of the rose. This original individuality is only to be allowed to express itself through the imparted nature. All self-assertion on the part of the original briar stock, as distinct from the new nature engrafted upon it, is to be rigorously repressed. Neglect this process of repression, and the briar may make shoots below the graft; and as these shoots develop themselves, the rose nature begins to lose ground, and suffers in foliage and flower, until, if the process be only allowed to go far enough, the rose is extinguished, the old briar is supreme. Yet observe: the briar itself is not repressed; it is allowed to develop itself in accordance with the laws of its own nature, but only through the rose. It may collect moisture and substance from the earth at will; sap may circulate according to the proper laws of a plant; the various tissues of leaf, of foliage, and flower may find their way though its minute vesicles as heretofore; none of its personal rights or functions are to be interfered with; it is not to be robbed of the enjoyment of full vital vigour; but all this is to go to the production of a flower worthy of your garden, instead of the scanty and quickly fading bloom of the hedge-rose. What is it that produces the standard rose? Not the rose without the briar; not the briar without the rose; but the rose and the briar united in one,—the individuality of the first remaining intact, the nature of the second being superadded. In that standard rose, dear Christian friend, behold a picture of thyself, if Christ is formed in thee! Thy individuality is not to be repressed; no healthy function of thy nature is to be laid aside. We do not preach a futile austerity or a morbid asceticism; but your life is to be hid in the nature of Christ, and revealed and asserted only through that nature. Yet is it necessary, although you, the briar, are dead, and your life is hid in Christ, the rose, that you should be prepared to mortify the deeds of the body, or the old briar may at any time send forth its shoots, and assert the old nature apart from all reference to the new. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Do you ask how? I reply that the same Spirit which has already introduced the new nature, and united Himself, provides the

pruning-knife. Listen to the words of our text: "We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." The Spirit is not only a life, but a fire. He not only imparts purity, but He consumes the impure. Listen to His voice, yield yourselves to His influence, then shall your life ever be hid in Christ, and expressed in the development and manifestation of His nature.

Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, not to the old briar-stock, apart from the rose; for what did that ever bear that was worth gathering? what fruit had we but those things whereof we are now ashamed? the end of those things was death. But we are debtors, not only to that God whose sovereign love has made us what we are; not only to that Saviour who has redeemed us from the slavery of sin, at the cost of His own life's blood; not only to that Spirit who has condescended to make our body His temple; but we owe it to our new selves—that self into which the new Adam has been grafted, and wherein the new Adam claims to have His way; we owe it to that blessed sense of harmony which pervades the once desecrated elements of our nature; we owe it to that calm repose which has taken the place of our former disquietude and unrest; we owe it to that pure unsullied joy which has already furnished us with a foretaste of heaven; we owe it to that sense of liberty which has supervened where once we groaned under the thrall of hell, that we should be true to the instincts of our new life, and to the laws of our renovated nature! To forget this solemn debt is to turn our backs on all that makes life profitable, is to give ourselves over to spiritual bankruptcy; to recognize it, and to pay it with loyal and grateful devotion, is to secure boundless resources of infinite wealth. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die;" and he who dies is stripped of all: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live;" and he who thus lives, lives in the enjoyment of all.

Verily we are debtors! O God, that we may never forget our obligation! that we may never lose sight of the privilege, and the dignity of such a debt! God give us grace that we may enrich ourselves by paying it to the full!

III.

Moral Effects of the Atonement.

"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."—GAL. ii. 17—19.

IT is obviously most important that in these days, when the gospel is so fully and freely preached, we should keep before our eyes the moral aspects of the great doctrine of the atonement, upon which the gospel message depends. Where the great enemy of souls cannot prevent the proclamation of the gospel, his next attempt will be to induce practical Antinomianism, by suppressing co-relative truth, or at any rate by diverting men's minds from the due consideration of it. Our only safety lies in observing, as far as possible, the proportion of faith. The atonement is not only a provision designed to restore the relations with God which were forfeited by the fall; it is also designed to be a source of real practical power in our daily conflict with sin. You will perhaps have noticed that in St. Paul's writings the judicial and the practical aspects of the doctrine of the atonement are by no means so clearly separated from each other as they usually are in modern theology. It is perhaps necessary, for the sake of theological accuracy and precision, that the two aspects of this great truth should be regarded distinctly. At the same time we may learn something from the fact that St. Paul does not, in his writings, insist upon any such distinction. On the contrary, we must confess that in many instances the two views of this truth are blended together in such a way that they almost seem to be confused with each other; and sometimes, when logical sequence seems to demand that which is judicial, we are suddenly confronted by that which is actual; and not unfrequently in

the midst of the most practical directions we are met with some theological statement affecting our judicial position. To give a few familiar illustrations. In the commencement of the eighth chapter of Romans, St. Paul begins by making a strong statement with respect to our judicial position: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." But he has no sooner stated this great theological truth, upon which depends our standing before God, than he proceeds to point out its bearings upon our *experience;* for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death—free, that is to say, practically and morally, from the controlling force of evil within our nature; whereas the logic of the passage might have led us to reflect that the assertion would have been "free from the condemning power of God's law." And he goes on to point out that the end and object of this freedom is "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, *who walk* not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. There has been a good deal of controversy about the import of this latter passage, but I cannot myself regard it as referring to anything else than the practical results of the atonement. The Apostle is not speaking here of the righteousness which is imputed to the believer, otherwise he would not go on directly to refer to the Christian walk. Our salvation is dependent upon the imputation of the Divine righteousness. Our walk in the Spirit is the condition upon which the fulfilment of the law of moral righteousness in our own personal experience must depend. Similarly, in the fifth chapter of 2 Cor. 14, 15, we have a very notable statement of St. Paul's acceptance of his position as justified in virtue of the death of his great Substitute. "We thus judge," he says, "that if one died for all, then all died;" and he proceeds to make the all-important statement that "He died for all;" but instead of drawing from this a strictly judicial inference, he goes on to indicate a most practical result, ensuing as by a certain spiritual necessity from the acceptance of the truth which he has just asserted, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." To take a converse instance: in the sixth chapter of Romans, St. Paul is evidently dealing with the moral results of the atonement. He has met the objection to the scheme of justification which he has just stated in the previous chapter, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" His reply is,

"How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" But immediately afterwards, in the seventh verse, we find him making the statement that "he that is dead is justified from sin." This word can only be employed in a judicial sense. At the very moment when he is speaking of that which is most practical, he turns aside to make a strong statement with respect to our judicial position in virtue of the vicarious work of Christ. The differing opinions which have been entertained with respect to the exegesis of our text afford a remarkable proof of this habit of the Apostle.

Inasmuch as St. Paul goes on immediately in the nineteeth verse to speak of our relation to the law, and as the general subject of the whole passage is the Galatian heresy of legality, it has been plausibly argued that the reconstruction referred to by the Apostle here is the reconstruction of the legal system, whereas the previous verse seems to me to render it obvious that here, as in the sixth chapter of Romans, he is dealing parenthetically with the objection that his gospel is pure Antinomianism, and to silence such an objection points out that we have no claim to the immunity from condemnation offered us by the gospel, while we persistently reassert practically our connection with that from which the gospel delivered us. But the very fact that two opinions can be entertained as to the application of the passage shows how closely the two lines of thought were connected in the Apostle's mind.

What conclusion shall we draw from this apparent confusion? First, that it is not real confusion at all, but that it is a striking though incidental testimony to the unity of this grand doctrine. "Those whom God hath bound together, let not man put asunder." It may be necessary for the sake of theological distinctness to consider these subjects apart; but let us remember, my dear brethren, that the atonement is always one, whatever aspects of it we may fix our attention upon; and we cannot give our exclusive attention to one side of this great truth without the truth itself becoming to some extent a lie to us. For has not all error sprung from *one-sided truth?* Let us reflect for a moment upon the position which we assume towards those who deny altogether the necessity for the atonement, or of anything in the form of an expiatory sacrifice as necessary for the reconciliaton of man with God. What is the common objection raised by Unitarians to the doctrine of our redemption by the vicarious death of Christ?

Surely, they say, God is merciful ; and if so, He will not deny that pardon to His wandering children which we should concede to our own. Our reply to such an objection to the gospel revelation on the ground that it is superfluous, is shortly this : that God occupies other relations to us besides that of a Father. That He is not only a Father, but also Sovereign Governor of the universe, and therefore a Judge ; and while as a Father His love prompts Him to forgive His erring children, as a Judge He must needs exercise the stern prerogative which belongs to His office, and, in doing so, condemn the criminal. We illustrate our position by reference to the prerogative of mercy which is supposed to be vested in the persons of our English sovereigns. Theoretically speaking, our present queen might empty all the gaols in her kingdom, simply by the exercise of her supreme prerogative of mercy. But were she to do so, would she be considered as a universal benefactress? Would she not, on the contrary, be doing her best to produce a state of intolerable anarchy within these realms? And if that sovereign prerogative were thus to be abused, would the electors of Great Britain allow their queen to retain it for a single session? The truth is that our queen represents the majesty of law, and in the exercise of her prerogative of mercy she is morally, though not legally, restricted. Thus we argue that an act of unqualified mercy and universal pardon on the part of the Supreme Governor of the universe would necessarily have a demoralizing effect—would produce a superficial and misleading estimate of sin ; and this would tend to the multiplying of offences. God's mercy, we argue, lies at the bottom of the atonement, but God's mercy would have been a moral bane, instead of a blessing, had it not been communicated through the atonement. The wisdom of God is shown in making a revelation of grace which is at the same time a revelation of judgment—executing a penalty against sin, while offering pardon to the sinner. But an intelligent Unitarian might reply, " How does your theory of the atonement mend matters? We believe that God is merciful to all who repent and turn from their sins. You believe that God is merciful to all who repent and believe in Christ as their atonement. What safeguard against the demoralizing effect of mercy to which you have referred do you find in the fact that that mercy is communicated through the atonement? You tell the anxious soul to trust himself to Christ, and he

will be forgiven. We tell the penitent to repent of his sins, and he will be forgiven. Are you prepared to maintain that the results in the former case are necessarily likely to be more satisfactory than in the latter? Nay, further, does not your theory of the atonement render it possible for the greatest offenders to entertain the hope that, inasmuch as sin has been expiated, the sinner may lightly escape the penalty which sin deserves? This is a thought which our system precludes, inasmuch as we affirm that no such satisfaction can be accepted by a just and a holy God. The objection is as old as the time of St. Paul. He himself supposes the case of an objector to evangelical truth such as this. "Shall we," he asks, "continue in sin that grace may abound?" It is the natural objection which would occur to any intelligent person on first hearing a statement of the gospel. It seems to a superficial observer as though it were the logical conclusion to be drawn from gospel premisses. But how does St. Paul respond? We might expect him to speak of the grateful feelings which the love of God revealed in Christ would excite in the heart of those who believe in it. He might have exclaimed with holy enthusiasm, "How shall we, who have been bought at such a price, and by such heroic self-sacrifice, on the part of our Redeemer, add another to His many pangs, and twine again the thorny crown which pierced His brow on Calvary for us?" Common gratitude precludes us from a life of sin.

But strong though this argument may be to a loving heart, there is more of love than of logic in it—at any rate it is rather an argument that appeals to our moral emotion than a strict logical consequence of the law of atonement. What we need is an atonement which shall necessarily preclude us from the acceptance of the Antinomian position. It needs to be shown that the *modus* of justification is such as to render it impossible for us to continue in a life of conscious sin, while at the same time we flatter ourselves with a hope of impunity in virtue of our acceptance of the benefits of the atonement.

Or yet again, St. Paul might have replied to the objection, "How shall we, who are witnesses of the moral beauty of the character of Christ, and who owe all our hopes of the future to the perfection of that character, after having reaped in our own experience the golden harvest of which He sowed the seed in the tears of Gethsemane and the agonies of Calvary,—how shall

we, I say, turn our backs upon this wonderful manifestation of moral beauty, and pursue a course of life diametrically opposed, not only to all that we have learned to admire, but to that to which we are indebted for our salvation?" This also would be a valid, but not a sufficient reply. Still the possibility of reaping the benefits of the atonement without our seeing ourselves by the atonement shut off from a life of sin, would remain. Neither of these is the reply of the Apostle. "How shall we," he exclaims, "who died to sin, live any longer therein? God has so arranged the terms of our justification that I cannot accept the benefits of the atonement without also recognizing and accepting the new relations to God and to sin into which, by virtue of the atonement, I am introduced. This comes in the form of a privilege rather than of an obligation; but I cannot accept the judicial benefits of Christ's vicarious work without also accepting the moral privileges to which that work entitles me. I am freed from condemnation and wrath, because I am dead to sin; and if I still continue to maintain practically my connection with sin as though I had not died to it at all, my professed faith in the atonement is a mere dead letter, and can produce no real effect upon the nature of my relations towards God. I am still under condemnation. God might have conveyed His pardon to me in a thousand different ways. The Author of mercy has surely an unquestionable right to convey His mercy as He will. But in His supreme wisdom He has elected so to convey it that it shall prove a double blessing, not only relieving me from the condemnation of the past and the terrors of the future, but also severing my connection with that which has been my bane, and breaking the yoke of bondage under which I have ineffectually groaned. Not only am I delivered from the judgment of a righteous God by the sprinkling of the Paschal blood, but I am also delivered from the taskmaster's whip and the dire bondage of Egypt, and the Red Sea flows between me and Pharaoh's hosts. Thus we may say that in one great gift God has, in a certain sense, given us all—all the privileges and blessings of the spiritual life as they were revealed and bound up in the atonement; and it is now my privilege to fall back upon the cross of Christ for strength in each of the various forms of trial to which I am subsequently exposed. And I do so, not with the uncertain feeling that possibly the God who so loved me as to give His Son for me will demonstrate His love still

further by granting me His assistance, but with the inward conviction that in the acceptance of Christ as my representative upon the cross He has already assured me of the practical benefit which I now desire to realize in my experience; so that I am entitled to rest my faith on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of moral power and the cause of moral deliverance, just in the same way as I originally exercised my faith in that same cross as the source of life and pardon."

Now it is interesting to notice that in whatever respect we are open to the assault of outward or inward foes, the cross of Christ is represented in the New Testament Scriptures as standing between us and the danger. In the sixth chapter of Romans we have already seen that it is represented as standing *between us and sin.* Let us consider the passage for a moment. When the grace of God originally finds us, we are represented as being "dead *in* sin," and therefore dead *to* God. Now our relation to these two objects is reversed, and in virtue of the atonement we find ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God. To renew the old relation with sin is to forfeit the new relation to God. But upon that new relation to God depends our justification, for he that is dead to God cannot be reconciled to God. If, therefore, with conscious intent I renew my relation with that to which I have died, I thereby disclaim my new relation to that to which I am now entitled to live. In a word, I can derive no comfort from the thought of the atonement as inducing a state of justification while I cling to that from which the atonement justifies me by death and resurrection. "If I build again the things which I destroyed," to apply the words of our text, "I make myself a transgressor."

Once again, I find the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ standing *between me and the world.* In Gal. vi. 14, the Apostle bursts forth with the exclamation, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." How insidious is the world! how great its power, how subtle its influence! How vainly did we ourselves struggle once to divest ourselves of its control, and yet how despotically did it continue to tyrannize over us! How may I be delivered from the world? Mediæval asceticism would reply, "Retire into the solitude of the desert, or shut yourself up within the walls of a monastery." Stoical philosophy might reply, "Take refuge in your self-

respect. Learn to despise conventional opinion, and to rejoice in making yourself peculiar." But St. Paul replies by pointing to the cross. In the eyes of the world, that cross was a sign of shame. It suggested the death of the felon and the slave, and it is in this that the great Apostle glories. "By this," he exclaims, "the world is crucified to me." There was a time when the world, in the garb of a harlot, with her intoxicating cup in her hand, allured me by her wiles. I loved to win her smile, and to bask in the sunshine of her favour, until my eye was arrested by the vision of the Crucified. There I saw the world, divested of all its meritricious adornments, exhibited in its true character—a rebel against its God—dying the death which it had merited—the death of a felon, of a rebel, of an impostor. The world is crucified to me; for He who hangs on yonder cross has undertaken to be the world's representative, to bear the world's sin; and in Him may we not see the very genius of this world crucified—the god of this world judged? As I contemplate the world now I see "Ichabod" written upon all her fairest shows—the glory has departed. No longer will I claim affinity or boast of my connection with one whom I see exposed to shame and scorn, bearing a rebel's penalty, dying a felon's death. And if this be not enough to sever my connection with her, lo! once again I gaze at the cross, and I find a fresh barrier wall built up between me and her. Not only is she crucified to me, but I am crucified to her. I have passed through the mystic gate of the tomb into a new and a higher, and an unworldly life. By death and resurrection the severance between me and my old man is complete. The blood of the Paschal Lamb is not only sprinkled upon the lintel between me and my God, but it is sprinkled upon the door-post between me and a rebellious world: thus by the cross of Christ I am dead to the world which He has condemned by His death.

Yet once again, I have another foe—a foe that lies nearer me than even the world—a foe that I carry about in my own person. He draws his resources from this very body of mine, converting its natural appetites and faculties into the instruments of sin. *How shall I be delivered from the flesh?* Again the religious ascetic will step forward with his suggestion of physical austerities. By rigorous discipline, by watchings and fastings, by penances and flagellations, the body may at last be brought into obedience to the dictates of the higher nature.

The ethical philosopher will speak of the power of habit. "One swallow does not make a summer," nor does a single virtuous action constitute a high moral character; but with each fresh conquest victory becomes more possible, and the hope may be indulged that habits of self-mastery will ultimately be formed. But what says the Apostle? Once again he points to the cross of Christ. Let me refer you a second time to the Epistle to the Galatians (v. 24), where I read, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." It is upon this great truth that the Apostle's power to control himself rests. He keeps his body under, because he recognizes that his flesh is crucified in the broken body of Christ. To allow that flesh which died on Calvary to re-assert itself, would be to come out from under the benefits of the atonement, and to "build again the things which He had destroyed," and thus to forfeit his dearest joy, his truest pleasure, his brightest hope. The momentary gratification of a passing desire cannot surely be set against such a loss as this. The profit, whatever profit it be, is not worth the price at which it is to be obtained.

But there is a more subtle form which the flesh from time to time assumes. I may be speaking to some in this church who are not to any considerable extent the slaves of their animal propensities, for the lower nature is not equally strong in all. On the other hand, observation teaches us that where these lower instincts are weakest, the higher forms of self-seeking and carnal desire are for the most part proportionately strong. How many a man there is who can by the grace of God affirm that he has been able to lead a pure moral life, who nevertheless is haunted with a shadow of himself, a miserable self-consciousness, which seems to pervade his whole experience, distracting him, and dragging him down in his moments of devotion, profaning the sanctuary within his heart as by the presence of an "image of jealousy provoking to jealousy," and continually degrading the whole tone of his inner life! How many of us discover that even in our religious activities we are pleasing God but little and self much; that we plume ourselves on self-denial until it becomes self-assertion, and serve ourselves in God's service until we can no longer be truly said to serve Him. Who will deliver me from myself, this closest and most intimate of all my enemies? A man may escape from outward sin, may fly from

the tainted breath of the world, may master his own passions, but *how shall a man escape from himself?* One voice alone offers an intelligent answer to the inquiry, and that voice comes from Calvary. It is uttered in a passage to which I have already referred you (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). "We thus judge," says the Apostle, "that if one died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." *Not to ourselves;* for that old rebel "self," that self-asserting "self," for ever setting itself up as God's rival, and defying His control, has died a rebel's death on yonder cross; and our peace is deep and our confidence secure just as we regard that old man as crucified, and ourselves as alive unto God. And now, as all things are from God (2 Cor. v. 18), so all things are to God: the rivers of living water, which flow fresh from the Fountain-head in God Himself, and flood our souls with their healing streams, in a returning tide of pure and holy devotion make their way back again to the Source from which they originally proceeded.

Now you will observe that in each of these cases the moral result is dependent upon and produced by my judicial position and the relation to God and sin upon which this is dependent; and as long as I desire to continue to enjoy the advantages of this latter, I cannot lose sight of the obligations which it entails. Thus it is that the atonement, instead of being to me an instrument of demoralization, is, on the contrary, necessarily exalting and purifying; and the more intelligent my appreciation of all that is contained within the atonement, the more complete will be my deliverance from all that that atonement condemns. But, it may be asked, How shall we avail ourselves of these practical benefits, so that they may be to us, not a mere matter of theory, but a living reality consciously affecting our personal experience? I reply by asking another question: How did you first of all derive personal benefits from the doctrine of the atonement in its judicial aspect? Was there ever a time when you orthodox Christians did not believe that Jesus Christ had made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for your sins? But was there not a time when that conviction induced no conscious effect in your personal experience? It began to do so the moment that you applied your faith to it, and rested on the atoning work of Christ as though it were a reality—claiming the blessed result of pardon and reconciliation which necessarily flow from

it as your own. After the same manner you may be now persuaded that the deliverance of your soul from all that is opposed to God's mind and will is already contained within, and, as it were, guaranteed by, the atoning work of Christ. But this theoretical conviction produces no practical effect upon your conduct until the faith of your heart has consciously rested upon the truth revealed. Not until you appropriate that truth to yourselves, and rest yourselves in conscious self-despair upon it—not until then does it become to you a reality. We understand the difference between head-faith and heart-faith when we speak of conversion. Is there not a similar difference to be noted in our Christian experience? "Likewise also reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." You will find that just as you do so according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you. That which has been scarcely even a theory shall become a blessed reality, and that which is in God's sight already judicially true of you in virtue of Christ's union with you, shall become actually true of you in virtue of your realized union with Him.

And remember, I beseech you, my brethren, that this is no work of supererogation. This is not something that we may do or leave undone as it pleases us. It is a benefit which the terms of the atonement compel us to accept, and if we repudiate the gift let us understand what we are doing. Referring for a moment to our text,—St. Paul is here supposing that after a clear statement of gospel truth he is once again met by the cavil of objectors. "You seek to be justified by Christ, while at the same time you are found a sinner—that is to say, continuing in sin that grace may abound. Christ is therefore a minister of sin." "God forbid," exclaims the Apostle. "If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." If after these things were destroyed, rendered null and void by the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, if I reconstruct that which was thus swept away, if I renew that which God destroyed, "I make myself a transgressor," I lose my peace of conscience, I forfeit my joy, I sacrifice my communion with God, I strip myself of the garb of the son, and I raise once more the standard of rebellion.

I cannot do it! I may not do it! "I through the law"—that is, by the carrying out of the law's sentence—"died to the law," passed beyond the law's power, but only that I

might "live unto God." As long as I am rejoicing in and continuing in "the perfect law of liberty," I am not burdened by the sense of some external obligation. But if I decline to regard myself as dead to my old sin-life, and to live unto God, I am dead unto the law no longer. I have come out from under the blood-stained lintel. I can no longer say, "I have been and still am (for such is the force of the tense used) crucified with Christ," and therefore I can no longer say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" and if Christ live not in me, my life is but a death in life. I have reconstructed the fallen fabric, and once again the guilt of the transgressor, and that which follows in its train, darkens my life and burdens my heart. God forbid that we should ever cast away our privileges! God forbid that we should ever, like Esau, for one morsel of meat sell our birth-right! God forbid that we should be satisfied with one side of His truth, and ignore the other. Oh, fellow-Christians, grasp the revelation of Divine love in its fulness. Apply it to yourselves in your daily life; and as you become more and more conscious of the full provision which Love has made in yonder broken body, in yonder outpoured life, you will be able to say, "I find here all that I need to separate me from all that God hates; and if I die with Him, I shall also live with Him; if I suffer, I shall also reign."

IV.

Led of the Spirit.

"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."—GAL. v. 18.

LED of the Spirit—not driven, much less forced, but led! Let us dwell for a few moments upon the thoughts suggested to us by the term, and the nature of the relations which it indicates as existing between the soul and its inward and invisible Guide.

First, how near it seems to bring God to man; for we can

only be led by personal intercourse and personal influence. We can only be led where there is on the one side the disposition to offer, and on the other side the disposition to accept, actual personal assistance. *Led*—as a little child is led, who has scarcely yet learnt to steady its tottering steps upon the solid ground, but *has learnt* to stay itself and all its weight upon a mother's friendly hand. *Led*—as the blind are led, who place themselves completely at the mercy of the leader, and indicate their confidence in him by every step they take. *Led*—as the sheep are led, who know not where to find the pasture which is to satisfy their most necessary wants, until the shepherd puts them forth, himself going before them, and they listening to his voice and following him. *Led*—as the traveller is led by a trusty guide over perilous mountain steeps and yawning glaciers, facing death and danger without fear, only because he is persuaded that his guide knows the way. *Led*—as the soldier is led, who takes his place on the battle-field with a calm and fearless resolution, because he is persuaded that his commanding officer knows what he is about, and that in following his lead he is being conducted to victory. *Led*—as we see so many led by the influence of a master-mind—a leading spirit in politics, in literature, in art, who seems to have the power of infusing himself into the personality of others, until, without any intentional imitation on their part, their minds, their modes of thought and feeling, their very lines of conduct, become assimilated to his, and they themselves yielded to the strange and fascinating influence which he exercises over his contemporaries. Thus led yet more wisely and more surely than in any of these instances, for a human guide, however skilful, might conduct us to disaster and defeat, but He who offers Himself for our guide knows every inch of our life's journey, is familiar with every snare, appreciates every danger, and, committed to His charge, our feet must be guided in the King's highway of holiness which tends upward and onward, until it reaches the gates of the Golden City.

And thus led, we are not under the law. Strange and startling the assertion seems at first to those of us who have pored over the pages of the Old Testament, and have seen how prominent a position is everywhere assigned there to the law of God,—to those of us who have read the book of Psalms, and noticed with what enthusiasm David speaks of the law of his God. Strange and startling it sounds when we consider

how the same St. Paul has taught us that the great object of the atoning work of Christ, placing us as it does in a position of justification and acceptance, is to render it possible for "the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And yet there the assertion stands. It is not that we have nothing to do with the law—it is not that we have lost our respect for the law—it is not that it is impossible for us to come under the operation of the law, but it is that while we are led of the Spirit we *are not under the law*, but under grace.

We will not endeavour, as some interpreters have done, to escape the force of this assertion by limiting the import of the word "law," as here employed, till we make it signify nothing more than the ceremonial law. The ceremonial element in the law is referred to by the same Apostle under the title of ordinances (Col. ii. 20), but his usage of the term "law," in its natural sense, as referring to the precepts delivered by Moses on Sinai, is so much his habit in his writings, that a very strong proof is required before we can accept any other interpretation of the term. Here, on the contrary, the proof lies on the opposite side; for in this very chapter (14th verse) we find him employing the term in the strictly moral sense: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." So we conclude that it is of the moral, and not of the mere ceremonial law, that St. Paul asserts we are not under it. To understand his assertion clearly, let us begin by inquiring what this law, to which he refers, actually is. You will frequently hear it said that the law is a revelation of the mind and will of God. This is scarcely accurate, for it is not the primary object of the law to reveal the mind and the will of God, but to give directions for human conduct. It is not the object of legislation to reveal the mind and character of the legislative authority, but to control the actions of those for whom the legislation is made. We get at a knowledge of the mind of God inferentially, through the law, by concluding that what He commands He also approves; nay, we are justified in concluding that His commandment, so far as it goes, will express the will of Him who commands. But the law is only in a very limited sense a revelation, and, as a revelation, must continue to be imperfect, just because it is a law. The weakness of law must ever lie in its positive side; law must ever be rather negative and restrictive, than

positive and incitative. The decalogue deals almost exclusively in "Thou shalt not," and it is only here and there throughout the whole of the Levitical writings that strong positive precepts are to be met with. These do not so much take the form of portions of the law; rather they would seem to have been the didactic utterances of the lawgiver. But obedience to negative precepts can never induce positive perfection; hence perfect conformity to the mind and will of God, or even anything approaching to this, can never be obtained under the legal system. Nor is this inherent imperfection of the law a thing to be wondered at when we consider under what circumstances it was given. It was given in the infancy of human history, as our schoolmaster. It is even thus that we too are accustomed to deal with children; we lay down rules for their guidance, we forbid this, we insist upon the other, and we too do more in forbidding than in enjoining. The rules which we lay down for our children are only a very imperfect manifestation of the mind and will of their parents; for some of these rules they may as yet be unable to comprehend, and much of the character and intentions of the parent is not so much as even implied in these earlier regulations. When the infant becomes a boy, we expect him to feel the motions of conscience, and not merely to exercise a mechanical obedience to routine. Even so, as time advanced, the prophetical office, in some measure, supplanted the priesthood—the prophets, rather than the priests, became the leaders of the religious life of the people. Fervid appeals to great moral and religious principles, and impassioned protests against hypocrisy, formalism, and sin, took the place of mere commands, and thus the way was paved for a fuller and higher revelation. When the boy becomes the youth, he begins to think for himself, he endeavours to trace obligation to its source, and to acquaint himself with the causes of things. Even so in human history, while the favoured race, on account of its unfaithfulness to the grace of God, were hidden for a season under a cloud of judgment—at any rate during a period in which we know very little of their religious life—the attention of the historian is arrested by marvellous outbursts of intellectual vigour in Greece. Here a little band of earnest inquirers are endeavouring to discover for themselves a satisfactory basis upon which to construct the fabric of ethical philosophy, and are even making considerable progress in the elaboration of a system of morals, and in the discovery of

moral truth. But a fuller, clearer light was about to dawn. The adult man, if his childhood, his boyhood, his youth, have been what they should be, acts no longer mechanically under the influence of a law imposed from without; nor has he to make a direct appeal to his conscience, or to fall back upon the first principles of moral obligation before deciding on any particular course of action—*he acts from principle!* The discipline of years has formed within him a certain habit of thought and action; he is now a law to himself. And even so it is with those whose happy lot has fallen in the fulness of time. God, who in sundry parts and in divers manners revealed Himself in darker ages to the human race, hath in these last days spoken to us in His Son. In Him at last a full revelation of the mind and will of God has actually been made. That revelation was made, not by a new law, but by the life of a person—by the reflection of the Divine character in the human history of Jesus; and now we are no longer children, content to act in harmony with a code of laws regulating and controlling our daily conduct; we do not require to be stimulated into a life of obedience by the impassioned appeals of inspired prophets; we need not to occupy our minds in endeavouring to discover the first principles of moral obligation; the mind and will of God have at last been revealed. "The Life was manifested," "the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth," and the Divine Spirit, who has Himself communicated the light to our hearts, has, as it were, photographed that revealed mind of God upon our hearts. The law is now within, and not without. The law of our new nature is not an external code of regulations, but an inward condition of existence, and thus the prophecy of Jeremiah is fulfilled in the New Testament dispensation: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers* in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law *in their inward parts*, and *write it in their hearts;* and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

You will observe, my brethren, that there are two senses in which we are in the habit of employing the word "law." We understand by law, in the first instance, a regulation ordained by some recognized authority, and backed by definite sanctions. Such a law as this St. Paul refers to in the words of our text: "Ye are not under the law." There is another sense in which the word is very frequently used, and especially in our own day. You will hear people speaking about the "laws of nature." By this phrase we do not mean that a multitude of statutes and ordinances have been enunciated by the Supreme Creator, to which Nature is constrained, under pain of specific penalties, to conform herself; but that the Creator has Himself impressed a certain physical constitution, so to speak, upon particular objects, so that each of them contains within itself the rule of its own future development or activity. Now this is just the difference between the Christian who is led by the Spirit of God, and the legalist, who endeavours to fulfil the law. In a noteworthy passage St. Paul describes himself as not being without law, but under the law to Christ. The word employed in the original has no English equivalent. We speak of a man being "out-lawed," but not of his being "in-lawed," but such is the exact import of the words which the Apostle employs. It is not that he is under the constraint of a law which is imposed by the authority of Christ, but it is that his relation to Christ itself constitutes a law of conduct which as much belongs to the man's new nature as the vegetable forces which energize within the plant belong to it.

Now, my dear brethren, this is not merely a matter of interesting theory, it is a matter full of the gravest practical interest. How many Christians do we meet with, who, although they have begun by seeing themselves dead to the law, and therefore free from the law, proceed in their spiritual course, or what they fancy to be their spiritual course, by going back to the region of legal obligation! How many Christians do we meet with who seem occupied rather with the inquiry, What is my duty? than with the discovery, This is my privilege; and when they fancy that the lines of duty have been discovered,—that this ought to be done, and the other ought to be left undone,—with many a resolute effort, perhaps at the cost of much pain and self-denial, the duty is undertaken, or the gratification is sacrificed. Yet even so but half the benefit is obtained. Conscience may be, to some extent, satisfied,

but it has been satisfied at the expense of liberty—too often at the expense of life! Where our lives are lived under the sense of legal obligation, to fulfil a positive law imposed from without, and not in loyal and joyful recognition of a life-law existent within, sooner or later there will arise within the human heart a sense of collision of interests between the will of the Governor and the will of the governed; obedience will begin to be offered reluctantly, as under a sense of bondage and restraint, even though the soul may endeavour to persuade itself that God's service is perfect freedom. Love is indeed a *fulfilling of the law*, but love is not under the law, but above it. The adult man is not under the moral restraint of the parental laws to which he bowed in infancy, and yet so far as those laws contained a moral direction, if he be a worthy man, he will fulfil them still, not because he is under them, but because, so to speak, he is above them; he will no longer act from constraint, but from choice—no longer influenced by fear of punishment or hope of reward, but from a conviction that his truest interests are involved in the course which he pursues. Love is the fulfilling of the law; but love does not wait to ask, Is there a law to be fulfilled? The gift a husband offers to his wife, or a father to his child, should surely never be given because the donor feels it to be his duty to offer it, but because love suggests the offer. It may be that under such a circumstance duty justifies love; the husband or the father has perhaps done the thing that he ought to have done. But while duty may justify love, love will never wait for duty; and as many as are led by the Spirit of God are love-led, for God is love; and where the Spirit of God dwells in the human heart, there He kindles His own sacred flame, and man becomes the image of God in the fullest and deepest sense of the word, as he too becomes Love.

Now, observe, there is one class of persons, and one only, who are not under the law. The law (that is to say, the moral law) of God has never been repealed, and never can be; and therefore they who have not died to the law, and risen to new life, must ever continue to be under the law; and because they are under the law, they are subject to its dominion—they are blighted by its curse. One class of persons alone can claim to be no longer under the law, and those are they who are described in the words of our text as "led by the Spirit of God." To such *God is Law, not the Lawgiver;* and because He

can never contradict Himself, they who are led by Him can never be Antinomians ; but they can be sons, and this they are expressly stated to be ; "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14).

Brethren, how does He lead us? I reply, by acting upon and asserting His supremacy within every faculty of our nature. He captivates our imagination, setting before our minds a high and godlike ideal, the very contemplation of which awakes a holy enthusiasm within our souls. He kindles our desire, (for let us remember that the Spirit has its "lusts," as well as the flesh, Gal. v. 17,)—how ardent, how intense do these desires become when we yield ourselves to His sacred influences! He enlightens our understanding, giving us to know more and more of the mystery of His will. He becomes indeed our Zaphnath-paaneah. "Forasmuch as knowledge and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubt are found" in this "excellent Spirit," which takes possession of our nature. He warms our affections by such manifestations of the love of God as must necessarily awaken a response even within our cold hearts. He binds us (and I dare to say it) in the chains of a holy friendship to the eternal God, establishing a blessed intercourse and fellowship between the human soul and its Lord ; and thus, through our imagination, our understanding, our affections, He wields our will as the instrument of His own good pleasure—wields it in happy obedience surrendered to His control.

Led of the Spirit! How does He lead us? Very delicately, very gently, a step at a time ; not laying before us the map of our future lives, but indicating what can be done at the moment ; and as He gives the light, He assures us of the power : "I will guide thee by mine eye." O brethren, if we would be led by Him, how jealous need we to be of anything which in any way interferes with our intercourse with Him! how jealous of any object which draws aside our gaze from Him! Surely it is only as it becomes the habit of our life to look into His face, that we can be guided by His eye! and it is just here that we fail. We let a coldness arise in our intercourse, we grieve that gentle sensitive Spirit by our indifference ; then, as we lose the light of His eye, we begin to look about for some substitute for our heavenly Guide, and by-and-by we put the bit and the bridle of the law into our mouth, and offer our-

selves to be dragged hither and thither, even while we might still hear His voice whisper in our ear, "Be ye not like unto horse and mule, *which have no understanding*, whose mouths must be held with bit and bridle." Oh, my dear brethren, if you desire to grow in grace, yield an eager and ready ear to the slightest suggestion of the Spirit's mind and will; thus shall you understand more and more fully what St. John meant when he said to his disciples, "Ye have an unction from the holy one, and ye know all things."

How does He lead us? Certainly by the "word." As the word is His sword in attacking the human heart, so the word is His lamp in guiding our steps. Without the Spirit, the word is but "the letter that killeth;" but when we put the Bible into His hand, and ask Him to open the sealed book, what treasures do we discover there! Should we not read our Bibles to better purpose if we made it a rule never to open them without first confessing our inability to discover the truth, even where God has revealed it?—casting ourselves in simple faith on the Divine illuminator, that in the study of the word, and by the word thus studied, we may be led of the Spirit of God.

How does He lead us? By witnessing to the character of Christ. He does not speak of Himself, but He takes things of Christ, and shows them to us. We may have a sentimental admiration for Jesus without being the subjects of the Spirit's teaching, but we only know Him personally as the Divine Spirit reveals Him to us. Then it is that the soul, captivated by the beauty of her Lord, breathes forth her earnest desire, "Draw me, I will run after Thee;" and thus it is that, beholding His glory, we are changed into the same image, from glory unto glory, as by the Spirit of God. What wonder that the Holy Spirit should lead us in the steps of Christ, when we consider that it was He who led the Christ Himself! It was by the Spirit that He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and by the same Spirit that He was led in that last fatal journey when He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem; and it was by the eternal Spirit that He offered Himself for human sin. Surely, brethren, He who led Christ so well, may be trusted to lead us where Christ is gone!

How will He lead us? Doubtless by a way that we know not. Not by the way in which we expect to be led—answering our prayers sometimes in a way that we little looked for—

responding to our aspirations for spiritual advancement by giving us to drink deeper than ever heretofore of the Master's cup. Ah! sorrowful, downcast Christian, with the tear in thine eye, and a burden on thy heart! that sad face of thine seems to say, though thy lips are silent, "Surely He leads me strangely! I thought when I undertook His service that my difficulties one after another would disappear, that my circumstances would become more favourable, and that my pleasures would be multiplied, and my cup of joy run over! I pleaded with Him to draw me nearer to Himself. I asked that I might know more of Him, and He whispered in my ear, 'Canst thou drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' I scarcely dared to answer, 'I am able,' but I dared to ask to be made more like unto Him at any cost, and my answer has been that His thorny crown has been pressed upon my brow, His cross has seemed to crush me with its overwhelming weight!" Courage! dear child of God! Hast thou never read that "it pleased Him of whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering"? Dost thou not see that the Spirit is leading thee where He led of old the Father's Son? If His sinless humanity required nevertheless to be perfected through suffering—if it was through such a dark and troublous experience that He rose to the heights of glory, canst thou wonder that a similar loving discipline is necessary for thee? Canst thou not discern in these trials the process of that Father's loving purposes towards thee? As thy steps fall in rugged and slippery places, canst thou not even there discover the blood-stained footprints of Jesus thy forerunner? Cheer up, drooping heart! lay thy griefs aside; this is the way to glory, and He is leading thee on because thou too art a son! See, the glory lies before thee; thou shalt not have to wait for death before thou beginnest to know its blessedness! already there is a light behind the cloud: "sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Even in the night He knows how to give us songs, to turn the shadow of death into the morning; and what shall the morning be? Yes, He is leading us on to glory—safe and faithful Guide—from the cross to the crown!—the cross at one end of our course, the crown at the other; and He, the blessed Spirit, our Guide from cross to crown!

Where is He leading us? Here language fails, and thought

is overwhelmed! We may not know the answer to that question yet, but we shall know it by-and-by; yet this much we do know even now, He is leading us into the land of vision; walking by faith, and not by sight, we follow Him; by-and-by we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. The ancient seer led the blinded hosts of the Syrians into their enemy's capital, and then to their consternation opened their eyes that they might find themselves in the heart of a hostile city. We too are following blindly—we too hear the voice of our Guide, "This is not the way, neither is this the place, neither is this the city," as we pass on from stage to stage of our earthly sojourn; but by-and-by we too shall open our eyes to find ourselves, not in an enemy's capital, but within the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, enfolded for ever amid the glories of our spiritual home! Then will our Guide at last reveal Himself, while our enraptured hearts exclaim, "Lo, this is our God! we have waited for Him, and He has saved us; this is our God! we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

V.

Truth in the Inward Parts.

"Thou desirest truth in the inward parts."—PSALM li. 6.

SOME of us may remember the interesting story with which the apochryphal book of Esdras commences. The inquiry is started, "What is strongest?" and this is submitted to the judgment of three young men of the king's guard. Wine, and the king, and women, are severally mentioned; but the last, who is said to have been Zerubbabel, maintained that of all things "truth is the strongest, and liveth and conquereth for evermore." And having concluded his speech upon this subject, it is said that all who heard him broke forth with the shout, "Great is truth, and mighty above

all things." However little of fact the narrative may contain, there is much in the sentiment, and it would be well if we believed more fully in the power of truth, and realized how invincible it needs must be. To how many a shift are we reduced, and how much detriment to ourselves do we incur, by a distrust of truth! How constantly we need to be reminded that he who sins against truth sins against himself!

Now there are two senses in which the word truth is frequently employed in Holy Scripture. First, it is used to denote objective truth: in this sense truth has been defined as "the agreement of thought with thing." We are then in the possession of truth, when our inward convictions tally with and answer to the actual facts of the Divine character, and of the nature of His dealings with us. The mind of God, discerned in His word and works, then, is objective truth; and this it is our obvious duty, so far as in us lies, to endeavour to become acquainted with. But, secondly, the word is employed of the subjective condition of the human heart, and in this sense it suggests the idea which is usually asssociated in our minds with the word *truthfulness*. This usage of the word is very common, both in the Old and New Testaments; and it is very important in studying the use of the term to bear these two senses in view, and to endeavour to assign the correct meaning to the word in the different connections in which it is employed. These two usages of the word truth are, however, more closely connected with each other than at first sight might appear; for He who is the Truth made the human heart, and made it to be a mirror of His own eternal truth; and the marring of the mirror has ever been to a great extent the cause of the distortion of the image which it has received. In proportion as the heart is true within, it will be ready to receive an impression of the truth without. But how often has the incapacity to receive objective truth to be attributed to a certain moral obliquity in the human character? I do not say that this is always so, but perhaps more frequently so than one might think, even in cases where all such perversity of motive is confidently denied. How much has pride, for instance, to do with blinding our understandings, and rendering us indisposed to receive a revelation which we cannot wholly understand! How often is the rebellion of the intellect the result rather than the cause of the rebellion of the will! We will not deny ourselves, and thus we are precluded from con-

fessing Christ. The two things are bound together in one well-known text, which is the most memorable utterance on this subject: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." But it is this second sense of the term that our subject invites us to consider to-day. God desires "truth in the inward parts"—truth, evidently, not in the sense of mental illumination," but rather in the sense of moral honesty and sincerity of purpose. As it is this that God desires, so it is the presence of this that gives the greatest joy to the spiritual father who watches with tender solicitude the progress of the souls to whom his ministry has been made a blessing. Those of us who are engaged in evangelizing work can understand the joy of the angels when they rejoice over "one sinner that repenteth," and can in some measure share their joy. Yet we find no difficulty in entering into the feelings of that venerable servant of God, St. John, who at the close of a long career, in which he had been singularly blessed as an evangelistic labourer, was constrained to say, "I have no greater joy than to see my children *walk in the truth.*" This, if possible, is even a greater joy than that which fills our hearts when first we hear the cry of new-born souls, and join our praises with theirs.

Now let me point out to you the importance of this subject. We need to have our attention emphatically called to it, because, in the first place, we have hearts which the prophet describes as "deceitful above all things," and we each of us possess the strange and terrible faculty of deceiving ourselves. God we cannot deceive. Our neighbours in the long run are sure to find us out. But ourselves it is only too possible to deceive; and when we allow ourselves to fall into the habit of self-deception, the most dangerous feature of this habit is that it becomes almost unconscious. We scarcely know when we are true and when we are false. The border-line between truth and honesty, and falsehood and self-deceit, comes to be obliterated, and we are in danger of calling evil good and good evil. You have heard it said that people can prove anything by the Bible. It is not because the Bible is elastic that this is so, but because it is possible for human ingenuity to play tricks even with Divine revelation. And if so, surely it is not less possible for us to hoodwink our own conscience, and to "cover our transgressions as Adam" (Job xxxi. 33), when otherwise the very consciousness of them might haply bring us

in humility and penitence to the feet of Christ. Or, again, the importance of this subject may be gathered from its position. May we not say that truthfulness seems to lie at the root of everything else in Christian experience? If we have this, we are in a fair way to possess all; but without this all must necessarily be lost. It would almost seem as though God demanded this, even of the unconverted sinner, before His grace can take permanent hold of the heart, as though it were impossible for a man who is not true to himself to be in any way true to God. After all, what is the work of the Holy Spirit of God in convicting us of sin but a winning of our hearts to inward truthfulness? Long have we walked in a lying shadow, and deluded ourselves with the cry of "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. Self-complacency has blinded us to our real position. We have weighed our character in the scale of conventional opinion rather than by the inexorable standard of God's word. When the Holy Spirit awakens our heart, we suddenly become conscious of our true character, and are ready to cry out, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" God shows us ourselves. The sight may shock and pain us—it certainly will,—but blessed are they who prefer the shock and the pain to a relapse into their former insensibility; who bare their breasts to the friendly gaze of a God who judges but to save; and who are ready to cast away everything that stands between them and an eternal salvation. No less than this seems to be taught by the Parable of the Sower, where you observe that the only case in which the sowing of the seed is productive of thoroughly satisfactory consequences is that in which the seed of the word is represented as falling into an honest and good heart. In one sense we may say, What heart is honest and good? Yet careful observation leads us to see that some, in spite of their sins, are honestly, eagerly desirous to be different from what they are, and are crying out for deliverance, while others seem deliberately to ignore their own wants, and to avoid going beneath the surface in their experience: their whole life is an outside conventional unreality, and on such the gospel itself seems to have no power.

But if this truthfulness and honesty of heart is required at the very commencement of our spiritual career, before even the grace of God can fully take possession and find a free entrance into our nature, it is not less requisite at every fresh stage of Christian progress. I desire to-day to call your

special attention to the connection between truthfulness of heart—or, as the Psalmist calls it, "truth in the inward parts" —and the life of faith. Let me say in passing that I thank God with a full heart that recently so much attention has been given to the importance of the great truth that, as we are justified, not by our own works, but by faith in the Son of God, so we are to be sanctified, not by the struggling efforts of our own will, but equally by our acceptance through faith of all that the power and love of God have brought within our reach. This truth required to be prominently brought forward and emphatically stated; and to how many believers has the message been one of liberation from bondage, from fruitless toil, from inward tumult! But in order that this sort of teaching may be of the service to us that it should, it is most important that we should bear in mind the relation of faith to moral truthfulness and honesty of purpose. Faith is not a charm. It is not by making the assertion "I trust," or even by endeavouring to persuade ourselves that we do trust, that a conscious power over sin and the world without us is to be acquired. Faith by which we overcome has to do not with a mere law of nature, or even of the kingdom of grace, but with a living Person on whose relations with us all spiritual victory must necessarily depend. This living Person we well know is fully acquainted with all our inmost experience, understands our motives, detects our most hidden desires. To grant us power to escape from that which we are really clinging to, would be to fix a premium on sin, and to reward self-deceit. Our consciences tell us this much, and hence we find it actually impossible to trust where we are not, to the best of our knowledge, personally true to Him whom we do trust. In a word, we cannot trust the Lord Jesus to deliver us from that which we know He hates, while all the time we are secretly clinging to it, or endeavouring to discover some cunningly devised compromise between our allegiance to Him and our indulgence in that which we know to be opposed to His will.

Let me now point out some of the different ways in which this subtle form of evil may creep into our experience, and the different forms of truthfulness which we require sedulously to cultivate. Let us consider, *first, truthfulness in the aim and purpose of life.* This from first to last was the characteristic of our blessed Lord and Master. To deflect from this line of conduct—to close His eyes for a moment to this supreme

object, was the temptation suggested to His mind by the enemy in the wilderness. One thought of self,—of self-interest, of self-glorification,—and Christ had turned His back upon the path of suffering and humiliation to grasp the gaudy heritage pressed upon His acceptance as the reward of one moment's homage to the tempter. But the Son was true to the Father's purpose. One thing He did; and blessed are they who, following the great Apostle as he followed Christ, can also say in their degree, "One thing I do." Now how many of us are dragged down from our high places by side-aims and by-purposes? It is not that we desire to turn our backs upon allegiance to Christ, or to relinquish all claims to relationship with Him, but it is that we desire Christ, and something else which has no direct bearing upon this great object of life, and a very direct bearing upon our own mistaken notions of self-interest. Contrast with that characteristic of Christ to which I have just referred the little we know of the history of Balaam, and we shall have our lesson. Balaam was a man not without religious earnestness, not without great boldness and much spiritual power, but the sin which cursed him and ultimately led him to destruction was latent dishonesty of heart, and he is described as "Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." What was it that marred and darkened the life of the great king Solomon? With all his wondrous wisdom, his piety, his devotion, his career proved ultimately a failure, because there mingled as the years rolled on with that great purpose with which he started on his career—the glorification of his God—lower motives of personal display, of luxury and self-indulgence; the inordinate gratification of his appetites, the erection of a magnificent palace which had taken thirteen years to build, while the house of God was built in seven; the aggrandizement and glorification of his own dynasty;—these side-aims seem to have become all but engrossing to the once earnest and devoted king, and his history ends under a shadow.

Oh, Christian brethren, we know that we are bought with a price; we profess to be living for a definite object. Are we really living for it? or is there something else that we put side by side with the "one thing needful"? Do we desire to be good Christians, *and* to make our fortunes? To do the service of Christ, *and* to enjoy as much as possible the pleasures of the world? To "fight the good fight," *and* to win the good

opinion of our fellow-men? To work for the Lord, *and* to rise to a position of distinction in the religious world? God will not have it so. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." If God gives us fortune, pleasure, rank, influence, success, the good opinion of our fellows, we are not called to reject what He throws in our way, but we are called to desist from making these even a side-aim in life: we are called to subordinate all to the one great end, and to live as those who have heard the Master's call, "Deny thyself: take up thy cross, and follow me."

Next let me point out to you the necessity of truthfulness in the adoption of means towards the end. It is possible for us to have a strong, clear perception of the fact that we are called to live for a definite purpose, and we may be preserved from any conscious acceptance of a lower end, and yet we may fail in our lives because we shrink from employing those means towards the attainment of the end which God has placed within our reach, and which we know to be of the utmost importance to us. We may pray to be delivered from temptation, and flatter ourselves that it is our sincere desire to be delivered, and yet be overcome by temptation because we wantonly expose ourselves to dangers which we might avoid. I am not speaking now of those temptations which assail us from without, and for the attack of which we are in no way personally responsible, but of those for which we have, to some extent, to thank ourselves. It is thoroughly dishonest to offer such a prayer as we do every day—"Lead us not into temptation"—while we place ourselves in a position where we know that our special weakness will be needlessly exposed to the foe. Here, for instance, is a man whose snare before his conversion was an inordinate love of money, and a disposition to be greedy of wealth. For such a man to indulge in the habits of speculation which are so common in commercial communities, would be to court defeat by exposing himself to peril in his weakest point. Or to take a still more common example: for a man who has once been a slave to intemperance to stimulate within himself an appetite which has so frequently overcome him by the use of even a small quantity of intoxicating liquor, is simply to court a moral overthrow. The grace of God can raise him above the temptation, but it will not do so if he wantonly encourages temptation for the sake of unnecessary gratification. Or again, vainly do we pray

for purity of heart and thought, and cry to be delivered from our lower appetites, if we still allow our senses to be exposed to sights and sounds which may act as incentives to the very appetite which we profess our desire to curb. To take a pathetic illustration from Old Testament history. Eli the high priest seems to have been really anxious to curb the iniquities of his sons. He sincerely deplored the excesses which made the worship of the Lord's house an abomination in the eyes of the people, and he reproved the delinquents in the very strongest terms. It would be difficult to imagine words more serious than those which he employed: "Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?" Was the old man to blame then for the guilt which brought such fearful judgment upon his head? He certainly was: but how so? Not because he did not desire a reformation, but because he failed to avail himself of means which were certainly within his power to that end. As supreme ruler of his people it was his duty to employ the strong arm of the law to curb and to punish the transgressors. The sins of his sons were such as might well have merited the punishment of death, but we do not find that even a less terrible penalty was inflicted upon them. The father's affection paralysed the judicial powers of the judge, and thus he displayed a certain latent untruthfulness which ultimately brought down upon him and his house so dread a punishment.

Once again let me speak of the necessity of *truthfulness in our judgment upon ourselves.* How little disposed we are to pass a severe sentence upon our own conduct! how particularly disposed to discover extenuating circumstances even in that in which we are most to blame! Where we can do nothing else, we comfort ourselves by a comparison of ourselves with others whose faults, though perhaps more glaring, may not be more serious. Saul had already returned a verdict in his own favour before the prophet Samuel met him. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," he exclaims, even before the prophet had made any accusation against him; "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." Had he really fulfilled it? His conscience was uneasy. There had already been a mock trial, so to speak, within Saul's own heart, and the verdict was one of acquittal passed by a too favourable jury. Thus he was little

disposed to bear a reversal of the verdict by a higher court, and seems only to have been driven by the force of circumstances ultimately to accept it. Perhaps a more startling illustration still is to be found in the conduct of the prophet Jonah, who, even after his most miraculous escape from the perils of the deep, ventured to justify himself before God—nay, to impeach God Himself for the course of conduct which He had pursued. "I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was in my own country," he exclaimed, when the tidings of the salvation of Nineveh reached his ears. "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." One would have thought that self-extenuation must have come to an end after that terrible lesson; but he goes even farther than this. After the destruction of his gourd, the voice of God is heard once more enquiring, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" and answering God Himself, this strangely self-blinded man dares to reply, "*I do well to be angry*," one of the most unique and paradoxical expressions to be met with in the Bible. Here was a man who had so far succeeded in blinding his own conscience that he dares to assert, not only to himself, but even to God, that he did well to be angry, and that for such a cause!

Oh, brethren, self-extenuation is dangerous work. You are in the hands of a loving God who knows whereof we are made. If extenuations can justly be made, He is certain to make them. We act foolishly when we endeavour to find them for ourselves. We are not called upon to manufacture vices, or to plead guilty to sins which we have never committed. There is no room for anything like mock-modesty in true christian experience; but if we will deal honestly with ourselves, I fear most of us will find plenty to confess; and even where actual sins are not upon our conscience, we may well exclaim with the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults." This untruthfulness in our estimate of ourselves may frequently be discovered by us, even when we are insensible of it, by the feelings created in our mind when we chance to overhear an unfavourable report of our character or conduct. We who have been but a moment before profuse in our acknowledgments of our own unworthiness, how hotly do we resent anything like a charge made against our character or conduct, though at times the charge is not altogether un-

founded. I sometimes think it might be better for us if we Christians all agreed to express to the person concerned any unfavourable opinion we might have formed as to his character or conduct. One thing I am sure of: this would be both kinder, and likely to be more useful, than repeating the same thing behind the person's back, which is the course only too frequently adopted. On the other hand, I am afraid that such sincerity would too frequently provoke anger rather than suggest improvement, and this just because we are so unwilling to part company with our good opinion of ourselves.

But God requires "truth in the inward parts," and we are doing ourselves a deadly and incalculable injury when we refuse Him the desire of His heart in this respect.

These are solemn words, beloved brethren, and on some they may possibly exercise a depressing effect. Lest this should be so, for it is never well to be depressed, let me point out to you that as soon as we take our true place, and, looking up to God for help, peremptorily discard all that savours of falsehood and self-deceit, we are in a position there and then to cast ourselves upon God for all the power that we need in sure and calm spiritual confidence, and to enter in full self-surrender upon the conscious enjoyment of a life of faith. Let me remind you, too, that this discovery of our moral obliquity—of our latent self-deceit—is in itself an indication of the presence of the powerful operation of the Spirit of Truth within our hearts. "He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness." Art thou ashamed of thyself? Thou art already on the way to deny thyself, and, denying thyself, to embrace the Christ. Art thou abased at thine own untruthfulness? Thou art already in the school of Him who is the Truth itself. Only shrink not from His gentle discipline, and thou shalt find that His loving correction shall make thee great. And by-and-by thou shalt prove the truth of the promise, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body is full of light."

Oh, Thou who art the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life, print this upon our hearts. Burn up and consume all the dross and scum which prevents the silver Thou art refining from reflecting Thine own image, and enable us in our turn to exclaim, with holy confidence, "Blessed be the God of Truth."

VI.

Jesus in the Midst.*

"Jesus in the midst."—ST. JOHN xix. 18.

IN the midst between two thieves, dying a malefactor's death, exposed, in addition to His other sufferings, to the shame of being associated with the vilest of mankind. Thus it was that earth showed her estimate of her greatest Benefactor; thus it was that she honoured the claims of her true King. When next we hear of Him, how strangely changed is His position. His humiliation has passed away, and the shadows of Gethsemane and the horrors of Calvary are no more; but Jesus is still "*in the midst.*" Now He is "*in the midst*" of the throne, surrounded by all the glories of His Father's kingdom—the central object of heaven's worship—the centre of heaven's authority—the manifestation of the Father's majesty—the recognized and "express image of His person." And yet they unwittingly assigned Him His proper position—those rebel Jews and ignorant soldiers—for Jesus must ever be "*in the midst.*" As in so many other instances, they testified to the character and position of Him whom they hated by the very form of their insults. Either in the economy of grace, on the one hand, as the point of connection between God and ourselves, whom sin has severed from Him; or as the centre of universal attraction and the source of universal law; or, on the other hand, in the economy of judgment, as the point of discrimination, dividing into distinct classes all intelligences with which He has to do in virtue of their relation to Himself, Jesus must still be "*in the midst.*" He is "*in the midst,*" gathering around Himself the world of the saved and of the glorified. He is "*in the midst,*" separating from these, as by the intervention of His own person, those who lie under the sentence of His condemnation. It is to the position expressed

* The text and some of the leading thoughts in this sermon were suggested to me by my dear friend, the Rev. S. A. WALKER, of Clifton. I gratefully acknowledge my obligations.

in this phrase that our blessed Lord owes His glorious title of Mediator. He is the Days-man who stands between the perfection of a holy Creator and the imperfections of His creatures. And it is in virtue of this office—which constitutes Him a point of contact between God and fallen man—that He is entitled to His position as the central object in the economy of grace on the one hand, and in the economy of judgment on the other, both in this world and the next. "In the midst" is the position He has a right to; and as we recognize His right, and assign Him His proper place, we come under the happy influence of the law of the kingdom of His grace, and find that this is indeed the perfect law of liberty; while, on the other hand, as we defraud Him of His true position—as we set Him on one side, following our own wayward propensities, and recognizing the supremacy of some "other Lord besides Him"—we necessarily bring ourselves under the operation of the economy of judgment, exclude ourselves from the enjoyment of our own highest privileges, and bring down upon ourselves the doom which is but the harvest of the seeds of godlessness which we have ourselves sown. Jesus is in the midst still, but He stands now between us and those who have fallen into their own proper orbit, as it were, because they have accepted their proper relation to Him, while we are "wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

Very interesting and instructive it is to notice how frequently this position—"in the midst"—is assigned to our blessed Lord in Holy Scripture. He is represented as "*in the midst*" of heaven. Twice He is directly spoken of as "*in the midst*" of the throne. "And I beheld, and, lo, *in the midst of the throne* and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev. v. 6). "For the Lamb which is *in the midst of the throne* shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters" (Rev. vii. 17). Twice the expression is employed of the mystical tree of life—the type of the Lord Jesus Christ. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is *in the midst* of the paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7). "*In the midst* of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life" (Rev. xxii. 2).

His maintenance in this position is the secret of heaven's harmony. All fall into their own proper positions, fill their various spheres, and occupy a just and happy relation to each

other at the moment when Jesus is recognized as holding His proper position "in the midst." It is this great fact that binds heaven together. He is "in the midst" of the throne as the centre of universal authority, representing God Himself in His relation to created intelligences. He is "in the midst" of the living creatures, or cherubim; for angels and principalities and powers recognize His supreme control, and to this they owe their perfection and harmony. He is "in the midst" of the four-and-twenty elders who would seem to be the representatives of the Church triumphant; and it is this common relation to both that binds the mysterious intelligences of glory who have never fallen at all to the members of the Church triumphant whom He has redeemed from their fall. The blessed angels cannot feel strange towards us who are so closely bound to Him.

Thus His position "in the midst" upon the throne makes all heaven one. How little we might be able to understand each other, we who are so familiar with sin, they so far removed from the slightest taint of it, were it not that we can both understand and be understood by Him upon whom the eyes of all are fixed. This sympathy which we need during life, is not only possible, but necessary, in heaven. Just as in the solar system the planets each and all observe a recognized and fixed relation to each other because they all have a common relation to the sun, just as their motions are the very embodiment of order and harmony because of this common relationship, so the countless intelligences of heaven all fall into their own proper relationships to each other because of their common relation to the central object, "Jesus in the midst." Eliminate the sun from the solar system, and the relations of the planets cease at once to be harmonious, chaos supervenes on God's appointed order, and the material universe rushes on to ruin. Remove the Christ from heaven, and not the walls and bulwarks of strength which surround the holy city, not the might of angels or archangels, not the purity of saint or martyr, can maintain the order, the harmony, and therefore the peace and happiness, of that blessed abode. Heaven must become scarcely preferable to hell were once Christ removed from His place.

With this thought present to our mind, it is instructive to observe that at the first creation of man the tree of life was planted in the midst of Eden, as though God would teach us

that His original design was that human life on earth should be modelled after the heavenly ideal, and that man's relation with God, and man's relation with his fellow-man, should be, as it were, a transcript of the perfect harmony of heaven. And even in our fallen condition, amidst the confusion and the disorder which sin has wrought, the prayer has still been suggested to His Church by its great Head, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." He who suggested the prayer has not lost sight of the original design, and, in spite of apparent obstructions, that design shall at last prevail.

Again, as Jesus is "in the midst" of heaven and of the glorified Church, so His proper position is "in the midst" of the Church on earth. He was "in the midst" of that embryo Church which He Himself formed of the simple peasants of Galilee whom He gathered around His person. "I am among you as He that serveth" (Luke xxii. 27); and His promise to His Church is, that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He "in the midst." Here we have a description of the first component elements of the Christian Church—two or three faithful souls gathered together, and the Lord Jesus occupying His proper position amongst them, in the midst. In keeping with this, we notice that He takes His rightful place at the moment when He greets His Church after His resurrection. "Jesus Himself stood in the midst." By that wondrous fact which had just transpired, His Church had been lifted up to a higher level of spiritual apprehension and faith. Those ignorant and carnal-minded followers of Jesus were beginning to be the children of the resurrection. Their dream of carnal ambition had been dissipated, and already they were conscious of the spiritualizing influence of the Cross. The Church had passed through the birth-throes of Golgotha to a new and higher life, and our Blessed Lord at once proceeds to take His true place within the Church of the Resurrection.

Once again we are permitted to gaze upon the risen Lord, now no longer visibly present on earth, yet, it is worthy of remark, still keeping up the closest relationship to the militant Church, and His position is still "in the midst." He is "*in the midst* of the seven golden candlesticks," in the midst of the Church as she exercises her office of light-bearer. "Ye are the light of the world." She shines by reflecting the light shed upon her by the Master, just as the moon reflects the

light of the sun, and Jesus walks "in the midst" of the golden candlesticks still (Rev. i. 13). Or, once again, He is represented as in the midst of the Church in her worship, "inhabiting the praises of Israel," and rendering them thus acceptable to God. Thus in her worship on earth the Church is privileged to anticipate in some measure the law of the worship of heaven, and there is no true worship where this law is not recognized. "*In the midst* of the congregation will I sing praises unto Thee" (Heb. ii. 12).

But, alas, although this is by right His position, the great sin of the outward Church has ever been to deny it to Him. Christ has been put on one side, and when He is put on one side it will not be long before He is practically forgotten. He must be either "in the midst," or He will be nowhere. Christ cannot accept a subordinate position. How often has the Church placed a hierarchy, or a system, or a party, or a man-made creed, or a grovelling superstition, or a cold intellectualism, or the friendship of the world, or the idolatry of man, in the place that belongs to Him. Hence our unhappy and disastrous divisions, and we are now often so taken up with our wretched heart-burnings and jealousies, that we scarcely notice that the Christ has retired from a desecrated temple, and marvel greatly when the ruin of the temple follows. Tacitus records how, before the destruction of Jerusalem, a voice greater than human was heard in the inner shrine of the temple, exclaiming that the God of Israel had departed; and then the destruction ensued. How often might a similarly portentous voice have been heard, had men's ears not been deafened by the tumult of ecclesiastical strife or the din of worldly pomp; and how many a dire catastrophe has darkened in consequence the pages of the history of the Christian Church. Amongst ourselves, in our own day, if true Christians are to draw nearer to each other, if our divisions are to be healed even in any measure, it must be by a determined attempt on the part of all who really desire unity to restore the Lord Jesus to His proper position. Let anything else be subordinated to the Christ. Put Him first, and the dearest system, the most favourite theory, the most treasured associations, in a position of subordination. Then we shall find it possible to make some progress towards the enjoyment of that harmony in our relations with each other which ought to characterize the sons of God on earth, and which must bind all together in heaven.

But as with the Christian Church at large, so with the individual heart. Here again the Lord Jesus claims to be "in the midst." "Know ye not that Christ is within you, except ye be reprobate?" But He is within us, not as a distinct part of our being, but as a power pervading and seeking to be supreme over all: a central authority acting within our nature as He personally acts in heaven itself, imprinting His own perfect will on everything there. As the outward Church ought to be—and had it been faithful would have been—the very reflection of the harmony of heaven, so each individual Christian is designed to be a miniature of heaven, Christ seated in "the midst of the throne" of our human will, exercising His supreme authority over all our faculties, and every part of our nature falling into its own proper position, and the relation of each to each being arranged and preserved by their common relation to Him whom all recognize as supreme. This is what St. Paul meant when he exclaimed, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It is not that our Lord Jesus Christ enters our nature as a relentless Conqueror that tramples down our natural faculties, and reduces our whole nature to a state of practical slavery. It is that our nature, whether we admit it or not, needs a Head. A supreme Ruler of infinite goodness is required in that little commonwealth which we call self. They who willingly recognize the only Ruler who has a claim to the throne of the human heart, find that His sway produces harmony within their nature, and therefore is perfect freedom. Those who reject His authority have to reap their own reward in the restless war, the intestine strife which rages within their members—the conflict of reason with passion, of conscience with desire. It becomes their lot to see their higher aspirations for ever ungratified, their moral development retarded, their whole nature disorganized and unfitted for the practical duties and the moral enjoyments which belong to life in this world, and themselves rendered incapable of entertaining any reasonable hope with respect to the future in the world to come. Now, my brethren, is Christ "in the midst" of our hearts? Let us not think of assigning Him, as it were, a corner in the palace, a single apartment in some remote position where His influence shall not be considerably felt. Christ will not accept such a subordinate position; and if it be assigned Him, He silently passes by; and since the heart refuses Him His proper place, He takes His stand at

the door, and knocks. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock."

But further, when Christ is "in the midst" of the human heart, He will also be "in the midst" of our home, and "in the midst" of our domestic and social relations. Of how many of us may it be said, as it was said of Martha, "A certain woman named Martha received Him into her house"? How many of us can fill in our name where the word *Martha* stands? Do let us remember, dear Christian brethren, that the position of Christ is "in the midst" of the house. He sits at the head of the table, as it were. If we would really have Him abiding with us, it must not be so much as a mere guest, "a wayfaring man turning aside to tarry for a night." Rather He must be recognized as the true though invisible Head of the house, just as He should be recognized as the true though invisible Head of the Church. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." In our domestic arrangements, it is His will that must be consulted; it is His glory that we must put before us. We cannot keep Him in our closet, and deny Him the right of access to our scenes of social intercourse and pleasure. We cannot place Him at the head of our family on Sunday, and bid Him go into retirement for the remainder of the week. Oh, how many Christian households there are where the Master's footsteps are seldom heard, and where the Master's voice is seldom known to speak, and where the sweet savour of His presence is seldom realized, just because He is not allowed to be "in the midst."

Or again, how apt we are to defraud Him of His rights with respect to our social relations! Is He "in the midst" of the circle of our friendships, deciding the nature of our relations with those with whom we have to do? Or do we choose our friends and adopt our companions without reference to His supremacy? Surely a Christless friendship, or a friendship which is based upon a repudiation of Christ's claims, can only be a curse to the Christian, and must end in the withering-up of those very affections which at the time it seems to foster.

Is Jesus *in the midst* of our worldly business? Or have we learnt to draw a distinction between the sacred and the secular in our lives, and welcome Him to our closet, while we exclude Him from our workshop?

Ah, this fatal distinction! how much it has done to drive religion out of our lives, and therefore out of the world! Surely everything becomes sacred that is done with Jesus in the midst. Our offices are consecrated, as actually as our churches; holiness to the Lord is written upon the very "bells of the horses;" it is written upon our ledgers and cash-books. Ah, my brethren, how many a questionable transaction would Christian men of business be saved from, and how much anxiety they would escape, if, instead of mammon (as is too often the case), Jesus were in the midst of their business life! How much less of worry and friction in our dealings with others, both at home and abroad, if only we recognized His supremacy, and referred everything to Him!

Or yet again,—and we Christians need constantly to be reminded of this,—Christ's claim to be "in the midst" of all our labour. "They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming their words with signs following." How possible it is to work for Christ, and yet in our very work to deny Christ His proper place in relation to the work; to be guilty of self-seeking even while we seem to be endeavouring to further His cause! You will remember the searching question which the Spirit of God addressed to that apparently faithful and even heroic worker Baruch, "Seekest thou great things *for thyself?* Seek them not" (Jer. xlv. 5). How possible it is to serve self much while we serve God a little; nay, further, how possible to place the work with all its thronging interests—it may be with all its excitements—in the place which belongs to the Lord of the work; and thus our very labours become Christless, because they are substitutes for Christ; and even success fails to compensate for the personal loss which falls upon our own souls when He ceases to fill His proper place. And under such circumstances our work will be, in the true sense of the word, unsuccessful. To the eye it may appear otherwise, but who shall say how much of wood and hay and straw and stubble is built by Christian labourers against whose orthodoxy and zeal no accusation is breathed; and this, just because Jesus is not in the midst of the work.

It is when we see *Jesus in the midst* that self loses its tyrant power, and worldly motives cease to influence us. Our work becomes powerful because He enters into all, and successful because all is kept under His direction and control. And if

Jesus is in the midst of our homes, and in the midst of our labours, will He not also be in the midst of our sufferings? "Behold, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Oh, child of God, as thou passest through the fires, what joy is there to know that they can do no real harm when Jesus is in the midst, as one has beautifully said, "the High Priest in the great temple of sorrow." Only keep Him in His right place in the midst of all, presiding over thy sorrows as over thy joys, modifying and ordering all so that all things shall work together for thy good, so shall He turn the shadow of death into the morning.

But the question has to be faced, How are we to ensure the presence of Jesus in the midst of our hearts, and therefore in the midst of our lives? The answer to this brings before our minds yet another great truth suggested by the words of our text, and one which is of the greatest moment, for on this all the other relations in which Jesus Himself stands to us depend, and to this they are attributable. It is in virtue of His position and work as Mediator between God and man that our blessed Lord has a right to the position of central and supreme authority, both in heaven and on earth, both in the Church and in the heart of the individual, of which I have said so much. And it is not until we see Him standing between us and God, and find in Him the point of contact between ourselves and God, that we shall be disposed to assign Him the seat upon the throne of our hearts which is His due. Nor would it be just and righteous in Him to accept the place, and to enter a heart which sin has once polluted, but for the efficacy of that mediatorial work which He has Himself accomplished. Let us put it thus: imagine on the one side the tale of earth's guilt, the sounds of violence and wrong, the note of human defiance, the outcry of rebellion ascending through the long ages towards the ears of the supreme Judge of all; imagine on the other side the wrath of God against sin flowing forth like a mighty flood of destruction towards a guilty and therefore a doomed race. No obstacle appears to oppose its course as it threatens to sweep a guilty world down to the depths of ruin which it has deserved to sound. Now, between these two manifestations of sin on the part of man, and wrath against sin on the part of God, there stands the manifested Son of God—the representative of man to God, the express image of God revealed to

man; and as the story of our guilt, of our rebellion and waywardness, rises from this sin-stained earth, midway, so to speak, on its passage to the throne of judgment, it is met by the person of the Mediator, and in His person is transmuted into the record of His stainless life, of His perfect obedience, even unto the death of the cross, and thus ascends into the presence of God as a thing that God Himself can find delight in: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" while on the other side the righteous indignation of a holy God against sin, flowing down in a tide of judgment towards a guilty world, is also met in its mid-course by the person of the Mediator, and finds in Him its proper object, expends its full fury upon His guiltless head, who condescended to represent our guilt; and having done its dread work, and fulfilled its judicial mission on Him, transmuted now into streams of blessing, it descends in showers of life and healing on a death-stricken world, and, reaching our once alienated hearts, brings us into new and close relationship with the God from whom we have been estranged. Thus Christ is the point of contact between God and the sinner, and God and His guilty creatures are brought together again in the person of the Mediator; and a holy God can smile on us without compromising His attitude towards sin, while we can draw near to God, not as criminals, but as sons accepted in the Beloved. But that we may derive any benefit from His mediatorial work, it is necessary that we should accept it, and trust ourselves to Him who is the Mediator. Till our faith is directed towards it, so that we see God in Christ, reconciling the world, and therefore us, unto Himself, and ourselves crucified with Christ, so that the obstacles to the reconciliation might be done away, what profit is it to know that Jesus is in this sense in the midst?

Brethren, has our faith rested upon this? Do we see Jesus "in the midst" between us and God, and approach with boldness because we know Him to be "in the midst"? Have we committed our case into the hands of the Mediator? To see God out of Christ is to discover that He is a consuming fire, and to shrink back conscience-stricken. To see God through Christ is to discover that He is our reconciled Father, and to draw near spell-bound by his wondrous love.

But, alas! all do not thankfully avail themselves of the Mediator; all do not fix the eye of believing gratitude upon this wonderful revelation; and hence it comes to pass that He

who is the point of contact between the believing sinner and His reconciled God, is also the point of separation between the Church of the redeemed and the world of the condemned. Lo, He hangs on yonder cross, and there is a felon on either side. In those two men humanity is represented in its two great divisions, the accepting and the rejecting world. Both are sentenced to death, and both are suffering the due reward of their deeds. But the one is dying with a smile of peace upon his face, and a calm and holy confidence resting on his heart, while the other is sinking into the darkness of despair. What is it makes the difference? Both are sinners—nay, both are grievous sinners, but the one has put His case into the hands of the Mediator, and the other has not. To Him the penitent robber has turned his languid eyes; with Him he has pleaded, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom;" and from the dying lips of Him who had but then ascended His mediatorial throne, the cross, and who already was in a position to exercise the right of His mediatorial kingdom, there has fallen the prompt answer of pardon and peace, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The dying robber, thrust out from a world that his sins have disgraced, is the firstfruit of the Mediator's work, and is privileged to see between him and all that he might reasonably fear the sheltering form of "Jesus in the midst." So is it at this moment. All have sinned, and as sinners have merited the penalty which sin brings along with it. Some continue sullenly insensible to the love which brings eternal life within their reach. The cross of Christ is still "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness"—still an object of hate and scorn to the rebellious heart is the barrier that walls them off from life and from God. This it is that enhances their condemnation, because they decline to accept the remedy brought within their reach. This is the condemnation—men "love darkness rather than light." "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God." On the other hand, thank God, there are some who lift the gaze of faith to the form of the dying Mediator, and plead with heartfelt penitence, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." To such an appeal the ear of the Son of Man can never be deaf, and His heart can never be callous. From such the dark shadows of death and condemnation are withdrawn, and the light of God's love rests full and clear upon them.

First they discover Christ "in the midst" as between them and God, and by-and-by they make a further discovery. He is "in the midst" of their own being, occupying their whole nature—saturating it as with the dews of spiritual blessing. Then, as they make progress in the knowledge of Him, they discover that He who reigneth in their hearts is also supreme within their lives; and by-and-by, as their journey draws towards its close, like dying Stephen they are privileged to look up into the glory, and behold Him "in the midst" of the throne, where it is now their blessed privilege to gaze upon the wondrous vision, and to find in that supreme revelation joy, harmony, rest, heaven.

I may not close this sermon without pressing home upon you the solemn thought that as it is now, so will it be at the last great day—Jesus the Attractor will also be Jesus the Divider. His own will as surely be drawn to meet their revealed Lord, as the material objects of this world gravitate towards their proper centre, and not less surely will those who have rejected Him be repelled from His presence as by an inevitable law of their nature. "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, and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall *separate* them one from the other, as a shepherd *divideth* his sheep from the goats." "And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man that had not on a wedding garment. And he saith to him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the King unto the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and *take him away!*"

I have said that the blessedness of heaven is dependent upon the position of Jesus in the midst. But this thought suggests another. The law of existence in hell, whatever that existence may be, must surely be Jesus is *not* in the midst. Man reaps the harvest of the seed which he himself has sown. Before, he would not have Jesus in the midst, and now he cannot. He lived without God on earth, and now he is without God, and therefore without hope, for ever.

On which side of the cross are we? On the side where the shadow of death is cast, or on the side where the light of redemption is resting? Oh, blessed Jesus, shine forth upon the vision of our faith. Whisper in our ears, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me."

VII.

The Little City and the Poor Wise Man.

"There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of the wise are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroyeth much good."—ECCLES. ix. 14—18.

IT would be perhaps too much to affirm that Solomon was deliberately and consciously uttering anything like a prophecy when he penned these remarkable words. Rather was he calling attention to a certain phase of a common social evil; but it so happened that of this particular form of social evil our Blessed Lord has Himself subsequently been the most distinguished victim, and hence the words of the description; and the figures employed in the parable or narrative, as the case may be, are marvellously applicable to the history of our Blessed Lord Himself. So much so is this the case, that had our Lord, instead of Solomon, used these words, we should not have regarded the parable as out of place in His lips, but rather, on the contrary, should we have deemed it strikingly appropriate. This being so, we are justified in endeavouring to obtain any lesson we can, of a spiritual nature, from the illustration provided.

We have brought before us here three objects; let us proceed at once to consider them; first, the little city; second, the great king; and third, the poor and wise man.

The little city, as first introduced to our notice, is in sore straits. We are left in complete ignorance as to its situation and resources; all we know is, that it was sadly overmatched and incapable of defending itself, so that its position had become one of extreme peril. No doubt the citizens had done their best, had manned the walls, and had fought bravely, and

had endeavoured to protect themselves against their mighty foe. No doubt they had endured hardships, and some of them may have even laid down their lives for their country's liberty; but the end of all the effort and conflict was that the great king had drawn the toils so closely round them that escape was impossible, and their case was daily becoming more and more hopeless. These grim bulwarks frown around the doomed city, and the walls tremble at each stroke of the engines of war, and the shout of onset is heard as the besiegers prepare to storm the breach. Every resource has been tried, and all have failed. The legions of the foe seem innumerable, while the garrison is reduced to a mere handful. They are fast being brought to extremities, and in a few short hours the unfortunate little city will be, in all human probability, subjected to all the horrors of capture by storm, and will be ultimately razed to the ground.

At first sight it may seem rather paradoxical to compare this great world of ours, with its almost innumerable inhabitants, its vast area, its enormous resources, to the little city with few men within it. But do we not, comparatively speaking, take too exalted a view of this little world? For relatively little it is, after all,—but an insignificant fraction of God's great universe. In a physical point of view, and regarded from the outside, it is simply a satellite of one great solar orb, and that central orb itself but one among hundreds and thousands, as we know. No man can say how far the stellar system extends, nor how many millions of planets may hover invisible in the heavens around those starry orbs that we do see. So the world is but a little thing after all, although to us it seems so vast. Or again, consider how small and frail is man as compared with those invisible powers with which we are surrounded. St. Paul speaks of principalities and powers in spiritual places as the forces with which we have to do battle, and of other whose relation to us would seem to be friendly. As to the powers of darkness, we know by experience something of their power. How often have our strongest resolutions and our most vigorous efforts been defeated by their assault, until we have learnt to feel like an infant struggling with giants! Nay, are there not many of us who have almost formed a habit of despair? We scarcely expect ever to be different from what we are. We have almost begun to endeavour to feel contented with our bondage. In this congregation, who has not reason to know from his own personal experience that Satan is no

imaginary being, no poetic creation, but a stern and terrible reality,—a force with which he is constantly being brought into collision,—before which he is most frequently overthrown? But further, inasmuch as the city spoken of here is represented as being ultimately delivered from its peril, we are hardly justified in applying the figure to humanity at large, for whom indeed deliverance has been provided, but has not by it been accepted. The little city joyfully accepting the benefit of deliverance is a much fitter type of the spiritual Church of Christ, viewed in the foreknowledge of God as a complete whole, redeemed and delivered by the wisdom and love of the poor Wise Man who has cast in His lot with her: and this is indeed "a little city, and few men within her." So that the parallelism thus limited is by no means strained or unintelligible.

Now, we know nothing of the circumstances to which the little city owed its danger,—it may or may not have been its own fault; but we do know the cause of the peril in which the human family has been involved, and that the blame rests entirely with ourselves. Man has rebelled against the sovereign will of God; the defiant cry of humanity through the long dark ages has still been, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." The result of all has been that we have forced God into the position of a foe, although He is in His heart our best and truest friend. God would be false to His own position in the universe were He to permit rebellion against His authority: He would be practically abdicating His throne, and this He will never do.

This suggests the answer to the question, Whom are we to see represented by the great king?—an angry God about to inflict judgment, or a malignant spirit of evil assailing the human heart with his temptations? The sad and terrible truth is that we need not be at any pains to answer this question; for in one point—and in one only, so far as we know—God and Satan are at one, and that is in the recognition of the demands of justice against the sinner. Satan, from this point of view, is but the executioner of the Divine decree, and obtains his power over us in virtue of the sanctions of the broken law. Thus Satan is the author of spiritual death within our nature, but he only obtained the right to introduce it because of the sentence of the Divine law, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Satan is the cause of human sin, and yet "the strength of sin is the law;" that

is to say, the sentence of the law cutting us off from all connection with the resources of spiritual power, treasured for us in God, has left us an easy prey to the enemy, who, "not without the Lord's authority," in some sense (like Sennacherib of old) has come up against the little city to destroy it. Similarly, Satan may probably be the executioner of the final doom, but in accusing the criminals he has deceived he is only successful because he is backed up by the law; and in the ultimate destruction of the human soul he is only able to fulfil his character of the destroyer (Apollyon) because the law of God has pronounced the doom of destruction against the impenitent. So that we may say broadly, Satan is only to be feared when his assaults are backed by the law of God: we need only then dread his captivity when we are his lawful captives. But the sore straits to which our little city is reduced arises from the fact that we are assailed by an implacable foe backed by triumphant justice. The bulwarks of a holy law surround us on every side, while the dread artillery of temptation is permitted to occupy a vantage-ground, and to assault us with all the more terrible force, just because the law has already paralysed our powers of resistance by weighting our conscience with a sense of guilt and condemnation, and giving us over into the lawful captivity of death, shutting us off from the only auxiliary force that could meet the exigencies of our case, and bring us deliverance. And behind the attacks of temptation and the encroachments of sin lies the last dread assault of judgment, and when that has once taken place the little city must be given over to irretrievable ruin.

We, too, know what it is to struggle with vain resolutions, with impotent vows, with tears, with remorseful self-upbraidings, yes, with prayers: like the citizens of the beleaguered town, we have tried to do our best, and our best has been failure, until in our despair we cry, "O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from the body of this death?"

Brethren, do you know what it is to have reached the point of self-despair? have you found yourself surrounded by the mighty bulwarks? have you felt what it is to have *no escape?* Not until then, believe me, will you be disposed to value the deliverance procured by "the poor wise man."

To him we will now turn our attention. Who was he? What was his connection with the city? How came he to be thought of? How did he achieve his end? All these are questions

that naturally suggest themselves, but seek in vain for an answer. All that we know about him was that he was in the city, though occupying no prominent position. He was *found* in it, as though his very existence there had been previously unknown, and that he was occupying a very humble position. He was but a poor man; but he had a patriot's heart and a wise man's head; and, moved doubtless by love for his compatriots, by some extraordinary and unlooked-for effort of wisdom, he delivered the city. How did he do it? Here again we have no information, but it is suggestive to notice that an incident very similar to the one described here actually took place in the time of Solomon's father, and must in all probability have made so deep an impression on his own mind that it is scarcely possible that his mind did not recur to it as he wrote these words, though in this case the humble deliverer was a woman, not a man. Refer for a moment to 2 Samuel xx. 15: "And they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down. Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee. And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel of Abel: and so they ended the matter. I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord? And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy. The matter is not so: but a man of Mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king."

If this incident was not present to Solomon's mind, it at any rate suggests an explanation of the way in which the deliverance may have been effected; but more than this, this narrative of an historical fact fills up in a most interesting and instructive way the illustration suggested by our text.

The guilt of one man here had involved the whole town in peril, because his guilt was imputed to them; but at the suggestion of the wise woman, the guilt was laid on the head of one, himself the guilty party, and one man died for the people, and the whole city perished not. But our Wise Man, Himself the Innocent, offered Himself, with a wisdom which was the child of love, that the guilt of our city might first be imputed to Him the Innocent (just as the guilt of Sheba the son of Bichri had been imputed to the innocent city), and, that further His innocence might be imputed to our city, so that by His own voluntary self-sacrifice one man might die for the city, and the city itself might be safe. The wise woman saved the city at the cost of another's life; but our poor Wise Man has saved His Church at the cost of His own; and in the moment of our despair we see the hostile bulwark withdrawn, the engines of war removed. We too are saved by the interposition of One who, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." He too was found in the city with no outward distinction of rank or title. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." Born in a remote province, in an obscure town, brought up in retirement as a peasant's son, what was He to the Cæsars and Herods of His day? An obscure impostor who had died a servile death, this was what He appeared to the intelligent man of that period; and yet the angels knew Him, and sung their anthems round His cradle; the very devils knew Him, and cried out in terror at His presence; and the everlasting God testified His knowledge of Him, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And these were not the only beings to find Him out,—the earnest seekers after truth, the penitent sinner, the broken-hearted mourner, these were they who found the poor Wise Man eighteen centuries ago, and such have been finding Him as their deliverer ever since. And it is by wisdom, not by omnipotent power, that the deliverance was wrought,—wisdom revealed equally in the character of the atonement and in the nature of its applica-

tion; and it is of this wisdom that St. Paul boasts in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, where he speaks of Christ crucified as being the manifestation of the wisdom of God. And still more striking is his language in the eleventh of Romans, where he crowns his whole argument on the atonement and its consequences, with that wondrous outburst of inspired rhetoric, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

But now I hasten on to the sequel, for I am speaking to the delivered ones to-day. What became of the poor wise man? Did they make him king or governor? Did he continue to be the most prominent figure in the little commonwealth which he had saved? Nay, but he disappears again into his old obscurity, he retires to the back street—to his cellar or his garret. "No man remembered that same poor man." Ah, blood-bought souls, ye ransomed from ruin by the death of the Deliverer, is this true of any of us? Having been delivered from impending ruin by the Christ, have we learned to forget the Deliverer, and to live very much as if we had delivered ourselves? This was the sin of the Galatians of old; it is the sin of how many Christians still. Have we made Christ King of the city that He has delivered? Have we come to the reasonable conclusion that He who alone could save the city is the only one who can be trusted to keep it safe? Or, having begun in the Spirit, are we going on to be perfected in the flesh? We began by finding we could do nothing, and so put our helpless case into the hands of the poor Wise Man with the obedience of faith. Have we now gone on to find out that we can do something, and only require His assistance when great emergencies arise? We learnt by experience that wisdom was better than strength, for all our strength expended itself in fruitless efforts to escape from a power that was to us irresistible until the Poor Man's wisdom delivered us. Is it so now that the Poor Man's wisdom is despised and His words not heard? What, have we got back into the seventh of Romans again? Is it once again the law of the mind struggling and striving with the too strong law of sin? What has become of that omnipotent force that the Poor Wise Man but lately introduced to set us free? Has the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus ceased to be a supreme and recognized power, a source of confidence, a secret of calm within our hearts? Are we back at the old point, "Strength is better

than wisdom; therefore let the Wise Man go His way while we man the walls once more"?

Where is the poor Wise Man? Is He trusted still, and with everything? and is there abiding peace within the city, because all is submitted to and rendered secure by Him? or is His wisdom despised and His words not heard?

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you . . . before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" And what then? when we turn away from a life in the Spirit, a life of constant faith in the Son of God, what is there left for us? Well, there is nothing left but, instead of the quiet whisper of the still small voice, the eloquent glance of a guiding Eye—instead of this settled inner law of liberty and love—"the cry of him that ruleth amongst fools." Observe, it is not the cry of fools, but of him that ruleth amongst fools. Don't you know who that is? Hear the thunders of Sinai, look at the terror of the people, listen to Moses with his Thou shalt and Thou shalt not. It was in the childish period of human development that Moses took up his rod and began to play the schoolmaster; but if we will insist on being children, still Moses must lift up his voice with strength, and even so we shall scarcely hear him, for there is not much to be learnt even from Moses in the commonwealth of fools.

But I am speaking to many, I hope, who are not forgetting the poor Wise Man: your one only desire is to hear His voice more clearly, and to be more completely under His control. To such let me say, Here is the condition of hearing His voice. The words of the wise are heard *in quiet*. It is not by rushing about from one scene of religious excitement to another, from conference to conference, from one great preacher to another, that the words of the wise are to be heard. Oh for inward silence, stillness of soul before God! Oh for a circumcised ear to hearken what God the Lord will say unto us! When the tumult of passion, and the din of business, and the sigh of care are all hushed, and we lie, like Samuel, all alone in the dread presence of God, whispering, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!"—oh, then it is that the words of the wise are heard, and sink deeper into the heart than the voice of Moses can ever reach.

One thought more. If you hear His voice once, let that make you all the more keen to hear it again. Do not think that because you have been clearly guided and kept in the calm confidence of spiritual power to-day, you can afford to do without similar intercourse with the poor Wise Man to-morrow. He must be recognized as Supreme Ruler of the city, if the city would be kept free and prosperous, and nothing can be undertaken without Him. Joshua captured Jericho by directions specially given by the "captain of the Lord's host," but there surely was no need to apply for instructions about so insignificant a place as Ai, and we know the sequel. And let us remember, too, that He cannot be supreme over what we call our spiritual experiences and employments, unless we are prepared to have Him equally supreme over that part of our life that we call secular. What! are we too busy to recognize His presence in our business? Must He be contented with a few minutes assigned Him in the morning and a few at night, when our bodies are so wearied with money-making that we can scarcely keep our eyes open for a few words of hurried and heartless devotion? Ah, my friend, thy business has sent the poor Wise Man back to the back street and the garret, and do not be surprised that thou canst no longer hear His voice.

Our text closes with one of the most solemn sentences in the Bible, if viewed in the light of this connection: "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, *but one sinner destroyeth much good.*" We have seen the truth of the first part of the sentence: what all our efforts could not do, Divine wisdom has done; it has wrought out a complete deliverance at the most stupendous cost; but in spite of all that Divine wisdom, love, and power have effected, the awful truth remains, that, so far as He is concerned, *one sinner can neutralize the atonement.* The good wrought out by the agonies of Gethsemane and the pains of Calvary, the fruit of the amazing love of God the Father to a guilty world, the good brought within reach of all by the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit,—one sinner can, so far as he himself is concerned, destroy it all, and in doing so destroy himself!

The good that cancelled the handwriting that was against you,—that brought heaven within your reach, and might have removed hell beyond your fears,—you—one sinner—have destroyed it all!

The good that would have developed itself in the deliverance

of your soul from the power of sin, in the breaking of the chains of habit, in your elevation in the moral scale, in your transformation into the image of Christ, you—one sinner—have destroyed it all!

Oh, the infinite agony of remorse that such a thought contains! How it must scourge and lacerate the writhing conscience of the lost in a world of doom! All that Omnipotence, prompted by love and guided by wisdom, could righteously accomplish without interfering with my human freedom, has been accomplished, and that at the most stupendous cost; and I in my mad perversity, my dogged unbelief, have defeated the counsels of God on my behalf; and I—one sinner—have destroyed and rendered void the boundless goodness of God!

O Christ, this day let Thy love prevail! let Thy wisdom win another victory! May we who know Thee crown Thee afresh Lord of all, and may those who have hitherto despised Thy wisdom put their forlorn case in Thy hands this day, and live from henceforth Thy faithful subjects and liege-men, O Thou poor Wise Man!

VIII.

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

"King of kings, and Lord of lords."—REV. xix. 16.

THE resurrection of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is represented as the outward demonstration to all intelligence, of the respect in which His Father and our Father, His God and our God, holds Him; and of the position which He designs Him, as the God-Man, to occupy for time and for eternity. This glorious position is represented as being the definite result of that voluntary humiliation which our blessed Lord underwent for our sake. He is represented as having emptied Himself of the glories of the Godhead, and put on Himself the garb of humanity, in order that, being in fashion

as a man, He might be obedient to death, even the death of the cross; "and *therefore*," because He was content to sink so low, "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

When our blessed Lord stood amongst His disciples after His resurrection, He was bold to make the most astonishing statement which ever proceeded from the mouth of one who bore the form of man. He dared to say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." In time—sooner or later—the truth of that assertion will be triumphantly demonstrated; meanwhile, it is being more and more clearly indicated by each fresh and successive triumph over the malignity of Satan and the perversity of men.

From first to last, our blessed Lord's career was the career of a conqueror, and yet never was conquest so strangely won. It might have seemed to the casual observer more like a constant defeat. He might have seemed to have been gradually driven from point to point by the inimical forces by which He was surrounded. He turned His back on human greatness; He repudiated the forces by which men push their way to eminence; He declined political distinctions; He was content to be in the world, unknown by the world. As He proceeded on His career, His humiliations multiplied. One might have expected that His outward dignity would have increased with the progress of His triumphant course, but it was far otherwise: His appearance became more and more that of humiliation as He drew nearer and nearer to the supreme conflict, and at last He died in the form of a malefactor, and He died in weakness, so that at the moment when He bowed His head in death, it seemed as if everything were lost, and the forces of hell had wrested the triumph from the hand of the Son of God; and yet truly, to all appearances, in the midst of all this course of humiliation and apparent loss, this stripping Himself of all man most glories in, throughout the whole course of His human life there was one continual triumph visible to the eye of God, though the eye of man could not detect it.

Yet even now, as we look back on that wonderful event of the past,—the life of Christ incarnate, in the light of subsequent history, or as we contemplate it in the light of the revealed purposes of God, with reference to which our blessed Lord

modelled His whole career,—even we, I say, are able to detect victory where a contemporary observer might have seen what appeared to be defeat.

The first great victory which our blessed Lord obtained is perhaps the most difficult to gain of all: "Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." Men for the most part do not think so; but he was a wise man who uttered those words, though there be few to endorse them. The first great victory of our blessed Lord was gained *over Himself*—over a nature pure and immaculate, but as little disposed to be indifferent to considerations of pain and pleasure as our own. As the Son of man, He had a human will, which had to learn obedience and to be made perfect by suffering. It was no more natural to Jesus Christ to choose the path of suffering and humiliation than it is to us; but throughout the whole course of His human life He was continually bringing that human will into complete subjection to the Divine will, and thus gaining a continual victory over that power through which Satan inflicts on us his severest moral defeats at the very moment when He flatters us with the semblance of victory; for the man who allows his own will to carry the day in opposition to the Divine will, fights really against his own interest, whether recognized or otherwise, and sins against his own soul.

Yet again. Our blessed Lord's life was one continual victory over the world. The prince of this world was continually coming to Him, and finding nothing in Him which he could make his base of operations. When the prince of this world comes to us, I am afraid he finds much that is akin to himself in our nature—a disposition to assert our supposed self-interest without reference to the Divine will; and this disposition he can make the base of his operations, and from this he can proceed to further aggression; but when the prince of this world came to our blessed Lord and Master, he found in Him no congenial element to appeal to in order to press his temptation, and thus he was repulsed in his attacks with defeat and disaster.

Thus we are led on to the third consideration. As our blessed Lord's life was a continual victory over Himself and the world, so it was a constant victory over Satan. Satan spread before Him the prospect of success, lured Him with the dream of power; but because our blessed Lord's heart was surrendered in the full confidence of faith to the Divine will, Satan, as I have said, had no fulcrum, as it were, on which to

rest his lever. The heart of Christ rested in full unwavering confidence as a Son on the perfection and real benevolence of His Father's will. Hence Satan's arguments to apparent self-interest were powerless with Him. He was thoroughly satisfied that in the lines of His Father's will His true happiness lay; and this being so, no wonder that Satan was hurled back defeated in each fresh assault, until towards the end of His course the obedient Son was able to make the triumphant assertion, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."

There was one power, one grim and terrible force, with which our blessed Lord had yet to be brought into contact—a force which had been called into existence as the lawful scourge of sin: "The wages of sin is death." Here at last the Son of man must surely be vanquished! here at last He must yield a reluctant homage to him who has mowed down his myriads in every age, against whom no human skill has proved available! to him who exacts his tribute alike from prince and peasant, from philosopher and from fool; to him, at any rate, our blessed Lord must yield the palm! So it seemed; for on the cross of Calvary death was permitted to assert his power against our blessed Lord's bodily weakness and spiritual distress: the shadow of death closes Him all around; and yet, of all His victories, this is the most wonderful, the most complete, and the most sublime!

Coming under and submitting for the moment to the power of that grim foe, that tyrant whom we all so instinctively dread, He found Himself in a position to plant His foot on the tyrant's head, and by death He overcame death itself, so that an inspired apostle is able to say that He hath *abolished* death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him;" for death can never maintain his sway over the man whose mind and will are in harmony with the mind and will of God. The man who is one with God in heart and will, must necessarily be one with God in his conditions of existence; and thus the temporary assertion of a momentary supremacy on the part of this grim foe of humanity simply led to the final revelation of the fact that it was impossible for Christ to be holden of him. Death had, in one sense, exceeded his rights, and thus was constrained to release his hold, and own Him conqueror—raised supreme over the tyrant's power; and from that hour the spell is broken,

and death itself has become the servant and the friend of man.

With these thoughts before our minds, dear friends, let us proceed to consider the title which the everlasting God gives Him whose victory we celebrate to-day. The title has been won by the career of triumph of which I have been speaking, and it expresses the character of that career, and the definite acquisitions which have resulted from it.

We have seen already how He was successful in the strife over some of the most terrible forces with which we have to come into collision. Let us observe further, that in virtue of this success, just as a conqueror annexes the territory of the conquered, so our Blessed Lord, having been victorious, is now in a position to assert His authority over those various powers with which He came into collision.

Let us consider over what the Christ is king—how many kings He holds in submission to Himself. We read of one ancient warrior, you will remember, in the book of Judges, who kept threescore and ten kings under his table, barbarously mutilated, to attest his own greatness; then there came a turn of fortune, and he himself was a prisoner suffering from similar mutilations; but when our Champion conquers, He conquers for ever, and He conquers not that He may make a display of His own superiority, but that He may liberate those whom the most ruthless of tyrants have held in bondage. His trophies are not mutilated foes, but ransomed slaves, sitting at His table, and rejoicing in the fulness of His love. Yet those powers that He has conquered He has the right to hold as conquered; those over whom He exerted His superior power must remain subject to His power still. This earth has been tyrannized over by usurping kings, under whose grievous yoke humanity has had to groan. It is a sad history, that of *these kings of the earth.* The ancient Romans had one dark page in their history,—*it was the annals of the kings.* The story began very well, but it ended very terribly; and so deep and indelible was the impression left on the national feelings by the record of the history of the kings, that even when in later years the Commonwealth and Republic gradually developed into an Autocracy, not even Julius Cæsar, not even Augustus, dared to assume the title of king. Cæsar became an emperor,—a king he dared not become. But there is a still darker page in the history of the world, *the annals of its kings.* Would to God

that mankind at large would equally resent their tyranny! Ah, my brethren, well may we exclaim with the prophet, "O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us" (Isa. xxvi. 13); and we may well hide our faces with shame to think how human history has been desecrated, human character blighted, human interests scattered to the wind by the ruthless tyranny of the kings whom we have allowed to rule over us. Where is the man whose breast sin has not entered? *And what a tyrant power Sin is!* not an abstract idea, not a mere name given to a phase of experience, but an actual power exciting within us base desires, stimulating our neutral desires till they become base, *perverting our reason*, silencing our conscience, degrading our whole manhood, *destroying our souls.* What a fearful tyrant Sin is! and how many in every age have lived under his tyranny! and how impossible it is for us to hurl the king down from his seat of power, and to reinstate our moral commonwealth in the enjoyment of its liberty! The dagger of a Brutus might save a Roman commonwealth from the imposition of imperial despotism, but where is the dagger which will relieve the human soul from the tyranny of sin? what spasmodic effort can break the chains that bind us, or can release us from the lash of the taskmaster's whip? We have indeed suffered many things from this king's tyranny; but to-night, as I survey the wondrous work of the Conqueror who has risen from His tomb, I rejoice to recognize Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, and first and foremost as King over this fearful tyrant. The rod of the oppressor is broken, and the staff of the shoulder the Lord Himself has undertaken for the human family. He who of old heard the voice of the Israelites groaning in the captivity of Egypt, and who brought them out with a high hand and an outstretched arm from the house of bondage, overthrowing the oppressor in the depths of the avenging waters,—He has heard the cry of a ruined world, and He has sent us a Champion to fight our battle for us—a Champion who has broken the chains which once bound humanity, who has set the prison doors open, with a message of liberty to every one of us. "As for thee also, by the blood of that covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." Thank God, we need slave under the grim tyrant Sin no longer: the chains are broken, the spell is at an end; and we, if we claim the results of the victory, if we lay hold of Him who is victorious, and trust

our case to His hand, we too are privileged to divide the spoil.

"*Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" O glorious message for those of us who have found all our strugglings and toilings and efforts futile! Glorious message of liberation for those of us who have tried it, may be, by force of resolution, or by ascetic austerity, or by religious formalism, or in other ways, to ameliorate our condition and elevate our nature, or to break our chain. Glorious news for those of us who have, it may be, given up all thought of further effort, yet cannot feel contented with our bondage. Hear it, ye captives of hell, Sin shall *not* have dominion over you. Now, dear friends, when a king has asserted his supremacy over any conquered power, it is to the credit of that king that he should maintain that supremacy; and the practical thought I want to press home on your minds is this: If the Lord Jesus Christ has gained the right to be supreme over the powers of evil, within and without; if this is one of the royal crowns placed upon His brow; dear friends, let us glorify Him by believing in His power, and let us with unwavering faith call upon Him to exercise His sovereign prerogative on our behalf. Conscious of our own infirmity, let us put our case into His hands, claiming that He shall assert that supremacy which belongs to Him. Don't let us regret the fact that temptation assails us; temptation is but an opportunity for Him to manifest His glorious power, to assert His rights. We are in the midst of evil. But hostile circumstances are just so many occasions for calling in the aid of our King, and giving Him a fair field on which to display His royal omnipotence. If He has really put His foot upon the head of the tyrant, then sin is no longer supreme over the ransomed, because he has been utterly and finally defeated by their Lord. Don't you see what honour you put on Jesus when you claim that in virtue of His resurrection power you shall be enabled to do as He has done—put your foot on the neck of that which has previously tyrannized over you? When you approach sin, let there be no wavering, no holding back. Let us not approach the powers of darkness as uncertain of the issue of the conflict. Was Joshua uncertain when he fought the seven kings? when, in the greatness of his strength, he cried aloud, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gideon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon"? Was he uncertain, did his heart quail, did it sink within him, when he heard of

that mighty combination formed to crush him? No; on the contrary, he regarded the fact of that coalition as an indication that God was going to put forth His power, and seemed to rejoice in the strength of the foe because He knew the strength of his Lord. That is the way we are to meet temptation. Oh, children of God, when you are called to go into the midst of temptation, do you advance with palpitating heart, with inward misgiving? Very well; then thanks to yourself if you do fall, and fall again and again before the foe,—if disaster follows disaster, and defeat, defeat.

What! shall we rob Jesus of His rights by conquest? Is it a fact that He wears the royal crown upon His brow, which He has snatched from the head of the fallen dragon? Is it true that "as sin reigned unto death, even so grace reigns by righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord"? (Rom. v. 21.) Is it a fact that He holds this royal crown upon His brow? is He King of kings and Lord of lords? Is it true that He has trampled down transgression, and made an end of sin? Has this been the glorious result of His passion? Then you are not merely privileged to ask Him to help you, but to claim that sin shall not have dominion over you, and to look the enemy in the face with holy calm. "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied."

That is the way to fight our battle. There is no boasting about this, because side by side with our consciousness of the prowess of our King is the consciousness of our own infirmity, and we are only in a position to claim the power belonging to the King of kings and Lord of lords, just as we realize how weak we are, and how incapable of standing by ourselves.

Once again. Our blessed Lord before His passion makes this statement: "Be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world.*" Here is another dethroned monarch—and a very powerful one. Very few of us have not felt something of his sway. Very few of us have not bowed down before his throne, and yet, thank God, he too is conquered! A monarch, but a dethroned monarch. He has no longer the right to lord it over those whom Christ has made free. Just, as I have said, as the fact of our blessed Lord's triumph over sin puts us in a position to overcome sin, so, applying the same principle in this case, the fact of our blessed Lord having overcome the

world puts us in a position to overcome the world. "This," says St. John, "is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" That is to say, he who owns by faith the rights of Christ, disowns the spurious claims of the usurping spirit of the world. The man who is living in fellowship with Christ will survey the power of this world with the eye of holy jealousy, just as a loyal subject of Great Britain would be jealous of any person setting up his throne in any part of the dominions of Queen Victoria. But how much stronger would be such feelings in the heart of the Queen's own son, partaker as he himself is of her rank and greatness! How his jealousy would burn against any pretender or usurper who should set himself up as a rival of the royal authority! Nor would he rest without doing all in his power to overthrow the obnoxious sway. Are we not sons of God, and heirs with Christ Himself of the glory of God the Father? Ah, my brethren, if we claim our true position as thus connected with Him, it will no longer be possible for us to be indifferent to His rights, or to regard with any degree of toleration the supremacy of him who claims to be the prince and god of this world. We shall regard it as a personal wrong to ourselves that a tyrant and a usurper should occupy Immanuel's throne. As the widow in the parable who cried out continually to the unjust Judge, "Avenge me of mine adversary," so shall we feel that a foul wrong is being done to us, because it is being done to Christ. If He is being dishonoured and rejected and cast out by the world, even so are we, for our case is bound up in His: as He is, so are we in this present world. In this spirit of holy jealousy we shall give ourselves over to join in that aggressive spiritual war which by-and-by shall be concluded in victory, when the King shall reign on earth, and sway His sceptre over a renewed creation. Meanwhile, dear child of God, understand this: every attempt at compromise on your part, every act which savours of worldly conformity, every cord with which thou lettest thyself be bound by the god of this world—what is it? *An act of infidelity on thy part to Him who claims the allegiance of thy heart!* Thou canst not trim thy way to make love to the world without turning thy back on Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Shall we contribute to dim the lustre of His triumph? Shall we rob Him of a province of His dominions?

—it may be only a small province, only our own nature; but how precious even that is. He cannot afford to lose complete control of one of us. We all belong to Him. Shall we take that which belongs to Him, and prostitute it to the god of this world? Shall we offer it at the shrine of our own pleasure or lust—that which has been purchased by dying Immanuel's sorrow? No, no; if we witness with joy and holy gratitude the triumph He hath wrought for us,—if we entertain the hope of ultimate blessedness because He has fought our battle and won our victory,—let us not be so dastardly as, on the one hand, to comfort ourselves with the hope of heaven because Christ has triumphed for us, while on the other hand we rob Him of the rights which that triumph has obtained, and join hands with that which by His passion He judged and condemned. "Now is the judgment of this world," said the Christ as He approached His passion: "Now is the prince of this world judged." Let us believe in this judgment, and claim the results of it ourselves. So shall we find that St. Paul's experience is also ours: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Once again. He is supreme over *that regal force within our nature which we call self.* Yes, He has a rightful supremacy over every one of us. He conquered Himself, as the Son of man, that He might teach us how to conquer ourselves; but, further, our wilful self has been crucified in Him, that we might be in a position to learn the lesson of self-mastery.

He conquered for us, that He may conquer in us; He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again. Self-assertion, self-seeking, this was the root-sin of man which led man to turn his back on God. That sin is represented on Calvary as crucified; and now in that I live, I live to self no longer, but unto God. I may claim then that He should assert this right also, and vindicate in my personal history His title to this crown which I have been only too ready to dispute.

How will He respond to the claim? I answer by asking, How did He Himself conquer self? He conquered self by love. So far as I know, this is the one moral force equal to the tremendous task. We know what natural love can do when it draws us away from self-seeking and self-consciousness. Men have been ready to lay down their life under the influence

of natural affection. When our blessed Lord undertakes to liberate us from she bondage of self, He does it by exhibiting to us the Father's love. You may set before me a law of commandment, and tell me to be unselfish, but that will not make me unselfish. How does He enable me to conquer myself? I dare to say it, He conquers self in me by having conquered Himself: blind to His own apparent interests, closing His eyes upon all that nature demanded, draining to the dregs the cup of trembling placed in His hands,—and all for me! He is in a position now to draw me by His own love to follow Him in the steps of self-renunciation in which He has trod. He, having turned His back on Himself because He loved me, is able to inspire me with the will to turn my back on myself because I love Him.

Dear friends, do you want to lead a happy, do you want to lead a powerful, a successful, a God-like life? The greatest of all obstacles to this you find to be the power of self. How are you to resist that power? Fix your eyes on the King of kings and the Lord of lords, as St. John did: "I turned to see the voice that spake with me; and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. i. 13—18). It is as we gaze at Him, dear friends, and behold His glory, as one after another His perfections shine out on us, that we begin to abhor ourselves, to hate our selfishness, to find out that His will is better than self-will, His character is nobler than ours, and that to yield ourselves up to His control is better than to fight our own way, and thus He who once triumphed over Himself will triumph over us, King of kings, and Lord of lords!

Then when He has asserted His royal rights as King over

Sin, King over the *World*, and King over *Self*, there is another force that now we may trust Him to do battle with—nay, He has done battle with already; and because of His victory, blessed be God, we need not fear to face the foe.

There is one who has often been called King of terrors, and he merits the title, not as a matter of poetry, but of fact. How regal, how absolute is the sway of death! Where is the man can bid that inexorable power defiance? Where is the man can break the chain by which we are drawn nearer and nearer to the tomb? As I stand amongst you this resurrection day, are there not several faces missing in this congregation, who were with us last Easter-time?—dear fellow-pilgrims on the journey of life, who have been called home in the interval, as we trust, to rest in God! Each of these has had to pass through the gate of death to the glories of a better land. Dear friends, over this terrible tyrant, this grim foe of humanity, our blessed Lord is king; for He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

It may be, some of us, who think we know something of the grace of God, are not a little afraid of death; perhaps the fear is physical. There is something about the article of death that seems so humiliating. Nature desires not to be unclothed, though we do not shrink from the prospect of being clothed upon. Here is a thought for us—*Death is conquered!* he is only now a tributary of Jesus, only the door-keeper who stands at the palace gate; and it is his duty to open the door whenever the Master sends the summons. There is a kindly look on his face now, and it is a friendly hand that he stretches out.

If we have proved the power of Jesus Christ to raise us above sin, death has lost all its terror: the dying saint may stretch out his hand to welcome that dread janitor, who once seemed so stern, but is now become so kind; who smiles as one after another he gathers the children of God into the heavenly houses. Blessed be God, we have nothing left to fear: the victory of to-day has settled all; it has swept away the power of sin; it has broken the iron chariots of our Sisera; it has snapped the chains of bondage which have so long bound us to a corrupt and cursed world! Blessed be God! it shows us

> "How we may rise on stepping-stones
> Of our dead selves to higher things."

It opens the way home to the bosom of our God, and robs

Death of his sting—strips him of his unfriendly aspect, and makes him a door-keeper in our Father's house; so I may say again, Blessed be God! we have nothing to fear. This is the Easter victory, and this is the Easter joy. To-night the King of kings and Lord of lords is passing through our midst. We see Him not, and yet He is here. We hear not His voice, and yet how near He is—"King of kings and Lord of lords." Oh, do let us, brethren, beloved in the Lord, recognize Him as our King. You remember what David says, "I will extol Thee, my God, *O King!*" That is how to extol God. First he calls Him God, and then he recognizes His royal supremacy, and cries out "O King." Even so would we extol Him to-night. Do you recognize Him as your King? What! shall we make a convenience of the King of kings and Lord of lords? Shall we make Him a sort of stepping-stone to bridge over the gulf between us and heaven, so that, by virtue of His goodness and mercy, we may hope to escape the terrors of hell? and shall we then turn our backs on His allegiance, and live in the service of His rival? God forbid! And yet, dear friends, in order that we may avoid it, there must be a complete and sincere and honest surrender of ourselves to His control.

Again I ask the question, "Is Jesus King?" He cannot be King and self too. The new King and the old will not reign together. You say, "Surely it is a matter of a lifelong progress." It will be so; for self is a very subtle foe, and soon reasserts a supremacy which he seems to have resigned. Yet let us see to it that there is no conscious admission of the lordship of another, no conscious hesitation in according Him His rights. As we grow in grace we shall be more skilful in detecting the various forms of lower and rival sovereignty which still exist within us, just as, after the great War of the Roses, English history was fruitful in the production of impostors; there was ever and again some Perkin Warbeck or similar pretender turning up and claiming to be king. Even so in our heart's experience; after a great struggle and a great victory, after having, as we think, made a full surrender of ourselves to Him, there may be frequent discoveries of unlooked-for intruders—fresh claimants of the throne which has been surrendered to Him. We thought we had fully yielded up ourselves yesterday. There is more to be yielded to-day. Things which you had thought little of before, you begin to think seriously of now; things which once seemed scarcely

disloyal to Jesus, you now see in a clearer light, and willingly sacrifice. The question is not, "Is it right or wrong?" the question with me is, "Does it interfere with the supremacy of Jesus?" The one absorbing desire of our souls is to be altogether His. The cry of the heart is,

> "Is there a thing beneath the sun
> That strives with Thee my heart to share?
> O tear it thence, and reign alone,
> The Lord of every motion there.
> Then shall my heart from earth be free,
> When it hath found repose in Thee."

This is the cry of a loving heart, and I want to point out to you that all turns on this. As the Holy Spirit of God leads you to make the discovery of the latent treachery of your own soul, don't stop there. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar. If you let that little tyrant self pass and escape from your hand—if you allow him to assert himself and set himself up in one of the corners of your heart, you will soon find the peace of the whole realm interfered with: there will be inward discord, and loss of peace and power; and where there was once calm and security, now there will be disaster and misgiving. If you would escape all this, there is only one way—put the crown on the brow that claims it. "Blessed Lord, on Thy head are many crowns; may I put one more crown there? I don't want to wear it myself; I don't want to be king over my own soul. I have made up my mind that in my littleness I am incapable of governing myself. Wilt Thou put this crown on Thy brow, wear it in regal fashion, and when Thou numberest up the little and the great kings over whom Thou art King, wilt Thou put my name on the roll, for I make over my all to Thee?"

One thought more ere I draw towards a close. Coming amongst you after a long interval, I have felt my heart drawn out to the Lord's people, and I have spoken all day exclusively to them. I dare not close my evening sermon without applying this glorious text to those who are not yet His subjects. You remember the solemn words in the book of the prophet Isaiah, "The word hath gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear."

He is already in God's sight King of kings and Lord of lords. In your sight He may be like a dethroned king: "He

was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," and He is despised and rejected of men still. The world sees no beauty in Him, that it should desire Him ; it can detect no glory in that marred countenance, no dignity in that bruised form. The day will come when they who have despised Him will look on Him whom they have pierced, and wail because of Him. To-night, dear friends, the King of kings and Lord of lords stands in our midst. Will you have Him be your friend, or must He take the place of an adversary? Will you put your case into His hands? Spread it out before Him thus : "O Son of God, I am a slave; I cannot break my chain, nor escape from the house of bondage; but I am informed that Thou art King of kings and Lord of lords ; I understand that there is no power in the universe can prevent Thee carrying out Thine own beneficent will ; I want that will to be exercised on my behalf; as I look round, I see myself environed by all kinds of tremendous powers : there is the force of sin, of the world, of my own perfidious heart—all these forces I feel myself unequal to match; but, O Son of God, since I break down in utter helplessness, may I not look up in Thy face, and claim that Thou shouldst exercise Thy kingly power? Is anything too hard for Thee? Looked at from the point of human probability, it seems too much to ask that my chain should be broken, my soul should be lifted up into newness of life. Looked at from the point of Divine power, tell me, O Thou blessed Son of God, is there a thing too hard for Thee? What! is all power Thine? Then that all power can reach even my case; it can lift the beggar from the dust; it can lift the poor from the mire, and set him among the princes, and make him inherit a crown of glory. O Son of God, Thou canst do what I cannot do. There is but one hope for me : rescue and redeem myself I never can; the one thing I can do is to place my case in the hands of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and, great God, I do place myself there!"

Is not that very simple? But are you ready to yield yourselves to His kingly power to-night? What, are ye rebels still? Listen to a word of advice from the sacred volume : "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings ; be instructed, ye judges of the earth." To you who have a certain regal power in your own nature which we call the human will, to you the advice is addressed. What shall you do? "Kiss the Son." Let an

act of homage be performed just now. Blessed be His holy name, He, the Son of God, draws near to the rebel, and offers you His hand to kiss: it is a pierced hand, it bled for thee. Kiss the Son. Drop in submission at His feet, and grasp that outstretched hand, and give Him the kiss of allegiance. He won't say "Get thee hence, thou foul traitor, thou poor devil-ridden slave." To-night the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who by that sovereign power could blast thee into the darkness of despair with one single effort of His will, is content to pass from heart to heart, and to plead that those whom He has redeemed with His precious blood should recognize His royal sway. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry." It takes a great deal to move His anger, but when once that anger is moved, *when once that anger is moved!*—I find that in that last terrible hour, when the quaking world shall sink into nothingness, I find a crowd of guilty, terror-stricken men and women will be heard—doing what?—addressing to staggering rocks and dissolving mountains the frantic plea of human despair. And what is it they will seek for? It will be, "Rocks, fall on us! mountains, hide us!" "From what? *From the wrath of the Lamb.*"

It has been a long time in coming. He has borne perseveringly, year after year, our insults and our contumely; but at last His wrath is kindled,—"yea, but a little;" but even a moment of His wrath is enough to wreck a world, and the guilty, trembling sinner sinks into darkness before the wrath of the Lamb! "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry."

He stands before you to-night in His royal majesty; He holds out grace, mercy, acceptance for every guilty sinner in this church! Don't turn your back on it! As you value your eternal well-being, don't turn your back on it! Listen: "What king going to make war against another king"—that is your position; you are a king; that is to say, you are a centre of moral power; you have complete control over your actions in one sense; you are going to make war against another king —"sitteth not down first and considereth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him who cometh against him with twenty thousand?" Are you able? have you considered the problem? are you able? Sit down and consider, before you do another stroke of business, before you do another act of pleasure, before you lay your head on your pillow this night—sit down and consider whether you are able with ten thousand

to meet him that cometh against you with twenty thousand. Or else, if the conclusion is "I am not able, I dare not risk it," whilst the other is yet a great way off,—and thank God He is a great way off still, we don't know how far (and yet He may be nearer than you think—how near He may be to some to-night!) but with some of us in judgment He is yet far off, though in mercy He is nigh,—whilst the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth to him an embassage." Will you send an embassage to Him to-night? One earnest prayer, one fervent desire, one sigh of contrition, and demand, the *conditions of peace.*" That is just what I want you to do—to look up into the face of the King of kings and Lords and lords, and say, "Mighty King, Thou who holdest the heavens in Thy hands, in whose hand is the breath of life, Thou the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords, tell me what are the conditions of peace."

What do you think they are? What do they deserve to be? When France made peace with Germany, she had to ask what were the conditions of peace. I think I have heard some such calculation as this,—that if you were to fill carts with gold, and extend them one behind another all the way from Liverpool to Leeds, that would only just represent the amount of the indemnity the French nation had to pay the conqueror. Those were the conditions of peace. Besides which, they had to surrender Alsace and Lorraine, and who shall say what that cost the French nation? Such were the conditions of peace. Yet France was not half as much to blame in that unhappy war as you and I in our war against the King of kings and Lord of lords. The King of kings has given us no provocation, and yet we have made war against Him; it is not He that has made war against us. Well, now, send Him an embassy, and ask the conditions of peace. Let there be one fervent word of inquiry,—"Great King of kings, on what terms must I come to peace with Thee? Must I lie on the cold stone, and wet it with my tears? Must I go through a life of labour and penance? Must I part with my substance, and buy my salvation with the loss of all I possess? Are these Thy conditions of peace? Oh, wondrous love! from that broken tomb I seem to hear an answer this evening, and that answer is, "Ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money;" and *these are God's conditions of peace.*

Cast yourself down before the Conqueror; give yourself over to His hand. "Oh, conquering Jesus! from the broken

tomb draw near; from the glory of Thy Father's presence, draw near. Oh, conquering Jesus! in the fulness of Thy changeless love, draw near; let the power of Thy passion be felt in our midst to-night; let that constraining force which emanates from Thy cross make itself felt in every heart to-night; and may we bend the knee and cast ourselves prostrate at Thy feet, and hail Thee King of kings and Lord of lords!"

IX.

The Consecrated Body.*

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."—ROMANS xii. i.

LET me begin by reading to you a few verses from the tenth chapter of the book of Exodus, "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither." That is a bargain that the great enemy of God is always very eager to strike with God's people: "I will not object to let you go out of bondage, provided the deliverance is to be only partial. Your souls shall be emancipated, your desires shall be set free, your aspirations shall be allowed to rise heavenward, but these 'earthy vestures of decay' which belong to you—you surely won't grudge me at least some authority, some control, over these;" and the true child of God is bound to reply now as Moses replied then, "There shall not a hoof be left behind." We must give ourselves altogether, or give ourselves not at all.

In the passage of Scripture on which I am addressing you

* This address was delivered at the Mildmay Park Conference, 1877.

this morning (Rom. xii. 1), our attention is called first of all to the motive of the sacrifice: "I beseech you, by the mercies of God"—the most cogent motive, as we shall all admit, that can possibly influence a Christian soul. Then the Apostle goes on to indicate the method of the sacrifice. It is to be an act of presentation. "Here am I; send me." Make what use of me Thou canst and wilt. And then we have the subject of the sacrifice—"our bodies." And then we have the object of the sacrifice—"acceptable to God." Now these four points are ranged in proper logical sequence, and, I may also say, in proper historical sequence, for this is the order in which events develop themselves, so to speak, in the history of the soul; first, the motive, then the method, then the thing presented, leading up to the great object to whom the presentation is made.

But in order that we may have an intelligent apprehension of the exhortation which is addressed to us, it is most necessary that we should pay special attention to one in particular of these four points. First, therefore, let us endeavour to obtain a clear understanding as to what the nature of the subject of the sacrifice is. Others in their addresses, I dare say, will speak to you on other points, but in a few words it will be my desire to say something with respect to this particular point. Is it not remarkable, brethren, that we are called upon to present our bodies? St. Paul is so spiritual—his whole writings, we may say, are one long commentary upon that grand utterance of our blessed Lord Himself, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him"—that we are almost startled at first sight by the fact that he calls attention to here, viz., the necessity of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice; and yet, if we will but reflect, we shall see how necessary, how all-important, is compliance on our part with the exhortation thus given. He takes it for granted that our hearts have been surrendered to God already. If not, we are in no sense of the word Christians; but there is a danger of Pharaoh's laying his hand upon the cattle, and saying, "Leave these behind;" and therefore, after having set before us the grand and glorious provision for our spiritual liberation, the justification of the human soul from guilt, its freedom from condemnation and the power of sin, he goes on to address to us these words of urgent entreaty, imploring us to present our bodies living sacrifices unto God.

Let us ask, What is the place of the body in the Divine economy? And we reply most emphatically that the body is designed by God to be the obedient servant of our inward nature; and so long as God and man were at one, before the fell ruin of the fall, the body occupied its own proper position. As long as the creature found its direct satisfaction in the Creator, so long the body occupied its own subordinate position, and justly performed its own subordinate functions; but as soon as there came a collision between the creature and the Creator, and the human will set itself up against the will of God, that moment, inasmuch as man was cut off in his inner being from connection with God, it became necessary that he should seek for satisfaction elsewhere, and he sought it in the material world. Cut off from God, he naturally looked to the things seen for the satisfaction and gratification which he had lost. Now, between the human soul and the material world the body is the medium of communication. The creature had previously received its joy and power and life from God, but it is now receiving its joy and power and life from the creature, and in enabling it to do so the body at once assumes a place which originally did not belong to it—steps into a position of importance—assumes and arrogates to itself airs, so to speak, which previously were altogether unknown to it, because of the subordinate position which it occupied. Inasmuch as the human being cannot come into contact with that material world from which it is now to derive its satisfaction otherwise than through the body, the body, so to speak, is able to dictate its own terms to the soul. Hence the interruption of inward and spiritual communion between God and the human soul is followed by nothing less than a moral revolution within man's nature, and those elements in us which were designed to be subordinate become suddenly supreme, and thus our fallen nature comes to present the appearance of an ochlocracy of the worst and lowest type. Nay, it is something worse than an ochlocracy, for the rule of the vilest tyrant mob that ever dominated over a land is a merciful rule as compared with the sway which the body exercises over the human heart, when once the body ceases to be subordinate and becomes supreme. Now we want a second revolution—a revolution back from the state of moral anarchy into a state of moral order, and how is this to be accomplished? In every age man has endeavoured to accomplish it by appealing to his own higher sense

of right. The law of the mind has condemned the law of the body.

Our own consciousness of something superior and nobler than our own experience has led to a struggle resembling nothing so much as a forlorn hope, an attempt to storm this citadel of corruption, and to wrest from the command of the body, so to speak, the sceptre which, properly speaking, belongs to the inner man. And in every age the struggle has been a failure, until at last honest and earnest men have been constrained to cry out, under their woful sense of captivity, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Here it is, dear friends, that the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ comes to our aid. Now, observe how it affects us. It effects, in the first place, a restoration of communication between fallen man and God. It opens up the way back to the Father's heart, and for the flowing forth of Omnipotent power into our fallen nature. It re-establishes communication between my inner being and the eternal nature of the Supreme. These communications being re-established, I find myself once again in a position to draw my satisfaction from the spiritual as opposed to the material. The body no longer occupies a position of inestimable importance to me; but, on the contrary, the gratification which I desire from above being purer, deeper, holier —worthier of myself in every respect—the body is no longer in a position to dictate its own terms; but as the power of the Omnipotent Jehovah flows into my soul, I am in a position through Him to dictate my terms to it.

Thus it comes to pass that when the Holy Spirit of God effects a junction with the human spirit, so to speak—when this wonderful alliance is formed, or something more than an alliance (for is it not spoken of as a union?)—when Christ comes to dwell in our hearts by the Divine Spirit, we find ourselves possessed of a power which is able to keep the body in its own proper place, and turn it from an imperious ruler into an obedient servant, so that we are saved from the old Manichean notion that the body and the material system as a whole is the great source and centre of evil. We discover that the evil does not lie in our bodies, but in the fact that our bodies have been allowed to assume a false position, and arrogate to themselves undue influence. We discover that the body is a necessary and wondrous implement which God can employ for His own purpose. Instead of allowing ourselves to fall

back upon a theory of dualism—the soul on the side of God and the body on the side of the devil—we find that the entrance of a new life into our nature has not only restored union between God and us, but has also introduced peace between one element of our nature and another; so that instead of presenting the aspect of a commonwealth divided against itself, destroyed by jarring feud and internecine slaughter—instead of all that, the soul which has been taken possession of by the Spirit of God is now in a position to reduce its body into harmony with itself, so that soul and body may unite in presenting to God a sacrifice in which He Himself can be well pleased.

This is necessary, dear friends, in order to the fulfilment of our probation here on earth. What is its great aim and object? That we should glorify God in a material world and through a material body. Even when our Lord Jesus Christ undertook to vindicate the Divine character and exhibit the Divine perfection, and to show the way home to glory to all His brethren, you remember how in the Psalms attention is called to the fact that a body was prepared Him. It was only through the assumption of a material body such as ours that the Lord Jesus Christ was able to fulfil the mission assigned to Him. What dignity attaches then to these poor perishable bodies of ours, when we grasp this idea! We need no longer talk of them as vile bodies. They are not vile in the moral sense in which we use the word, nor are they thus spoken of anywhere in Scripture. St. Paul speaks of our bodies of humiliation, not of our bodies as being the centres of moral corruption—nothing of the kind. When, I say, we look at our bodies from this point of view, what a dignity rests upon them, and what a solemn responsibility devolves upon us in the thought that once, and only once, although we are to live for an eternity,—once, and only once, have we the opportunity of serving God in a material body and in a material world, affecting matter through the Divine Spirit's exercise of His own blessed functions in this material form which we put at His disposal.

Then the question stares us in the face, What is to be our attitude towards our bodies, so to speak? How are we to put our bodies in the right place, and "present" them, to use the word of the passage? In the first place, most necessary it is that we ourselves should be surely possessed of the superior power, otherwise there is no such thing as offering the sacrifice.

The sacrifice can only be offered when the fire descends; and unless the Divine Spirit has taken possession of our nature, there is no such thing as offering our bodies a living sacrifice unto God. And the sacrifice is to be a lifelong sacrifice; hence, it is only as we walk in the Spirit that this harmony can be maintained, and that, as the result of it, we can continuously offer a sacrifice to God with which God shall be well pleased.

Some may say, "We find St. Paul stating that he *smote down* (as the word is in the original) the body, and brought it into subjection. In what sense," they ask, "are we to understand that?" "The Flaggellants" understood it in a literal sense, and they entertained the hope that by scourging the body they might make it the willing agent of the dictates of the mind. Well, how did Paul keep his body under, and bring it into subjection? Surely he lets us into the secret in various passages in his writings, but especially in one in which he says, "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." As the result of the fall, the body set up on its own account, so to speak; the body claimed to be actually independent of the soul, and went so far as to claim authority over the soul; and now that we have passed from death unto life, the body is still ready to assert its own claim. Habits have been formed of indolence, sensuality, and self-indulgence; all these endeavour to assert themselves, even in the body of those who are possessed by the Holy Spirit of God. Well, how is it to be brought into subjection? Evidently Paul speaks of a conflict, for the figure he uses is that of a conflict as between two pugilists. He represents the body as one pugilist, and himself as the other. He says, "I knock it down." How is that to be done? "If ye, *through the Spirit*, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." If ye keep the body under by the Holy Spirit, then ye shall find that the current of your life will be strong and deep, for it will be sustained from above.

Just let me briefly glance at the functions of the body, and endeavour to show how the Holy Spirit affects them. In the first place, the body is the seat of our animal propensities. Now these are not necessarily criminal. We cannot make a greater mistake than to suppose this, and in an age when attempts are being made to revive mediæval asceticism, it is most important that this declaration should be made in the clearest possible terms. Our natural propensities are only criminal when they

cease to be subordinate to the mind and will of God. When the Holy Spirit takes possession of our hearts, and we are living in His power, the question will not be, Is this self-indulgence right, or the other one wrong? but, Does this or does it not interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit within me, and the fulfilment of the mind of God in my life? Thus by the presence of a higher power I am lifted up to a region of higher and purer enioyment; and if I find that the lower sensual enjoyment interferes in any way with that higher, deeper, purer joy which is my privilege as one who has been admitted into fellowship with God, then and there I find the very strongest possible inducement to turn my back upon the lower because the higher is so much better. "No man having drunk the old wine straightway desireth the new." But in order to have this power we must walk in the Spirit.

Once again, our bodies are the seat of our sensuous experiences as distinguished from the sensual. Let me point out how closely these are allied to each other. We look down upon the sensual, and applaud the sensuous. We think it a very desirable thing indeed to be almost the slaves of the sensuous, while we despise the man who is the slave of the sensual. The two are quite as closely connected as the sound of the words indicates, and perhaps more so. Questions are continually cropping up in the experience of the children of God as to how far we ought to indulge in sensuous pleasures. Is the love of music to be indulged, or may we take long journeys for the pleasure of gazing on the snowy ranges of Switzerland? Surely the obvious answer is that none of these things are wrong in themselves, but with the child of God higher considerations predominate in his experience, and the question is not, How shall I most gratify my sensuous propensity? but, How most please God? God may throw sensuous enjoyment in our way, and we may enter into it within proper bounds. But how many of us talk after this fashion, "I am passionately fond of music;" "I am devoted to painting." Surely Christians have no right speak thus. It is all very well to enjoy what God gives us to enjoy, but we have no right to be the slaves of any pleasure which is dependent simply upon the vibration of a nerve within our physical system.

Once again, our bodies are the seat of our physical sensibilities—those physical sensibilities, for instance, which are acted upon by the sense of pain, of pleasure, of fatigue, of

lassitude, and so forth. How many of us are, more or less, in bondage to our bodies in this respect! A duty has to be done, a work has to be performed, but we happen to feel languid. It is a hot day, and we have some approach to a headache, and we do not feel disposed to do it. What is it will enable us to rise above that sort of lethargy—that physical stupor? Why, to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God; and then the body will present itself to God's service joyfully and willingly, not as a reluctant slave, but as a willing servant. But it is only as we are filled with the Holy Spirit that we shall be able to overcome the claims of our body which represent self-indulgence, and ease, and the avoidance of pain. How few of us are there who are so filled with the Spirit as to discard all these lower considerations!

Once again, the body is our medium of communication with the physical world. Now, it is not a bad thing that we should have to do with the physical world; but let us ask ourselves what is the effect that our bodies are producing upon this physical world? What is the stamp we are leaving behind us wherever we go? In that very remarkable book, "The Unseen Universe," the writer endeavours to indicate the possibility that every thought may be stereotyped, so to speak, on the outer universe, and carried up through infinite regions of space into the very presence of the Almighty by a physical process; that the mere vibration of one of the chords of our brain in thought is in itself stereotyped by a certain removal of the atmosphere by which we are surrounded; and that the motion of the mind is thus printed on matter and passed up to the throne of God. Whether this is correct or not, what a stupendous consideration it is that we are constantly leaving footprints on the sands of time in our daily walk, in our pursuits, and in the way we perform our duties! Let us ask ourselves the question, Is the world the better for us? Is God's mind and will more and more completely reflected upon the natural world because of our contact with it? Do we so fully live in fellowship with the Father, that we stamp and print His mind on all that we have to do with? Is "Holiness to the Lord" written upon the very vessels of our households? These are solemn considerations; but if we are filled with the Spirit of God, our bodies will be the medium through which this world will be continually affected by Him.

Once again, our bodies are the medium through which we

hold intercourse with mankind. This is the most solemn consideration of all. Through these lips, and eyes, and so on, we are continually exercising an influence on all with whom we come in contact. Now, the question is, what is the nature of that influence? Dear friends, if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be a revelation of Christ. Our lives will be a constant Epiphany. In these bodies we should carry about the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tone of our voice, the line of our conduct, the look of our eye, everything about us, will speak of Christ. I do not think it is a light thing, dear friends, that so many who name the name of Christ adopt a light, rattling, worldly manner, so as to emulate the manners of this world. Do not let us put on anything like cant or a sanctimonius air. Yet I am bound to say that if we are filled by the Spirit, there will be a certain cheerful recollectedness about us, there will be a grave serenity in the very expression of our countenance, a genial sobriety in our intercourse with others, which will impress those whom we meet, and reveal the indwelling God.

One point more: these bodies of ours are the veil which conceals the things unseen, the things of the spiritual world, from our present sensible experience. Strip off these bodies, and in a moment we are landed in the presence of invisible realities. How solemn a thing it is to think that there is only this between me and eternity, between me and God, between me and all the glories of the invisible world! Now, dear friends, that is something for which to be thankful. If it were not for this veil which for a time overshadows us, it would be impossible for me to fulfil the work of my probation. At the same time, however, it will be the great effort of the foe of God and man to employ this bodily organism as a means of deadening our spiritual sensibilities. When the Holy Spirit of God has free course within our being, when we throw ourselves open to His sacred influences, then, may I not say, the veil will become almost transparent. The body has no longer power to conceal the things behind the veil. There are times when God draws so near to us, and when we draw so near to Him, that it seems more like seeing than thinking, more like touching and handling than simply contemplating and reflecting. Blessed be God, the more that we advance in the power of the Holy Spirit, the less will these bodies of ours be able to interfere with our blessed inward intercourse with the things behind the veil.

Now in all these respects St. Paul calls upon us to present our bodies, present them so that everything may fall into its own proper place, and that God taking possession of them may work out His own blessed purpose in them. This appeal is backed by the mercies of God, backed by the Father's love, backed by the tender influences of the Holy Spirit, and backed by the precious blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel. The Christ who presented His body to the Father's will, Himself claims our bodies. He lays hold of our members, and says, "Give Me that hand, I want to use it; give Me those eyes, I want my grace to shine through them; give Me that mouth, I want to speak by it; give Me that brain so fertile in invention,—give it Me that I may employ it for my own blessed purposes and make it the obedient servant and minister of my will;" and thus, as we yield ourselves, our whole nature falls into a divine harmony, and here on earth we are privileged in some sort to anticipate the blessed life of heaven; where His servants serve Him day and night, do His will, and have His Name visibly written upon their foreheads.

X.

Self-Mastery.*

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."
—1 Cor. ix. 27.

ON a previous occasion we have considered the very important subject of Christian self-denial—a subject, as I have remarked, which specially needs to be prominently brought before our minds in a luxurious and self-indulgent age.

You will remember that I pointed out two spurious forms of self-denial, based upon erroneous opinions with respect to its true character—the first, the propitiatory theory, that self-

* This sermon was preached as a sequel to a sermon on Self-Denial which appears in the second series of Mission Sermons, No. 9, p. 121.

denial is designed to be a kind of expiation of sin. To accept this theory, I pointed out, is to deny the sufficiency of the atoning work of Christ. If that satisfaction is complete, any further attempts to offer satisfaction to God's justice are not only unnecessary, but may be described as an insult to Him who has provided a satisfaction for human guilt at such a cost.

The second false theory of self-denial I may describe as the stoical. It is based upon the hypothesis that there is something radically evil in pleasure;—pleasure is to be avoided because it is pleasurable. This, I pointed out, is simply a new form of the old temptation suggested to our first parents. Has God indeed said, "Ye shall not eat of the trees of the garden." God does not grudge us enjoyment; He is not envious of human happiness. Pleasure is not to be shunned because it pleases; it is only to be rejected when it seeks to divert from higher considerations.

In pursuing the subject, we endeavoured to derive our light in contemplating the example of the Master Himself. He was no ascetic. John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, but Jesus Christ came both eating and drinking. When He fasted, it was for a purpose, and in direct obedience to an inward leading of the Holy Spirit; not to expiate His sin, for He had none to expiate; nor to extinguish His natural propensities, for these had no evil in them; but to brace Himself up for some special work which lay before Him; to arm Himself for the conflict of life. But it may be argued, and it not unfrequently is, that our blessed Lord can scarcely be regarded as an example that it will be safe for us to follow in this respect, because His humanity was pure and sinless, whereas ours is infected by the principle of evil. That carnal mind which, our Article tells us, continues to exist, even in the regenerate, was wholly absent from Him, and therefore it might be necessary for us to adopt means, in dealing with temptations which have their source in this principle of evil present within our nature, such as were wholly unnecessary in His case. To this I reply, Our blessed Lord in His human life is expressly set before us as an example. He lived to show us how we are to live. We have no right to believe that that example was in any respect defective. When once we begin to draw our conclusions from the consideration of the inherent disparity between His character and ours, we there and then lose all

power of gaining practical lessons from His example, the life of Christ becomes an object which we may admire, but can no longer think of imitating, and this is surely to sacrifice one of the great results of the incarnation. We may be sure that He who submitted to baptism for the sake of fulfilling all righteousness, not because He required it, but in order that He might be an example to us, would also have submitted to self-inflicted austerities, if these had been necessary for us. Possibly this difficulty, arising from the sinless character of Christ, may be more apparent than real; for while it is true that He had no taint of sin, we have to set against this consideration the fact that no human subject was ever so set upon by Satan, so exposed to all the malice of hell, as was our blessed Lord. Against Him were concentrated all those forces which are only in part brought to bear upon us; and if He was possessed of exceptional purity, He was also exposed to exceptional temptation. Take as an illustration the first temptation to which our blessed Lord was exposed in the wilderness. It is quite true that our blessed Lord could never have known, in His own person, the force of unholy passion, or have been swayed by the mighty tide of uncontrolled lust; but who shall say that the physical cravings induced by forty days of abstinence may not have been stronger, as a natural force acting in the way of temptation, than any morbid craving of a confirmed sensualist can ever have been, in the whole course of human history? In each case we contemplate a human subject affected by a physical appetite. In the one case, the appetite is natural and lawful; in the orther case, self-created or, at any rate, self-developed and impure; but in both cases the appetite finds itself opposed to the Divine will. Was it less of a victory in the Son of man to rise above the agonies of a forty days' hunger, than it is in a reformed sensualist to rise above the demands of an appetite to which he has allowed himself to become the slave? But to-day we will further illustrate our subject by referring to the experience of one who certainly was of like passions with ourselves. St. Paul, along with us, inherited a sinful nature, and was exposed to all those forms of temptation with which we are ourselves familiar; yet he also stands before us as a model of self-denial, and is able to call upon us to be imitators of him, as he was of Christ. No one can question the self-denial of the Apostle's life—it is certainly one of its most prominent features. You are all of you familiar

with the wonderful description which he gives of his own sufferings in the eleventh chapter of second Corinthians: "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,"—here was indeed a life of self-denial, and, observe, self-denial voluntarily undergone. He must have escaped all this, had he been content to lead the easy, quiet, sluggish life which so many Christians of our own day do lead. Had he kept his religion to himself, he might probably have lived in comfort, if not in luxury, in his own land, enjoying the good things of this life, and solacing himself with the hope of immortality; but he preferred to endure hardship, as a good soldier. And yet this very man speaks disparagingly of mere bodily austerities. Bodily austerities, he tells us, (and the word which he employs in the original is that from which we derive the term "asceticism,") profiteth little. In the Epistle to the Colossians he speaks of those who neglected or were unsparing of their bodies as missing the mark of Christian experience; and yet here we find himself asserting that he kept under his body, and brought it into subjection.

On looking more closely at this remarkable phrase which we have selected for our text, I would point out, first, that the word he employs has been rendered, "I beat my body black and blue." A fanatical sect, in mediæval times, known as "Flagellants," interpreting the term literally, followed, as they supposed, the Apostle's example by scourging their bodies until the blood gushed from their self-made wounds; and others, who have not carried their extravagances so far, have none the less found in this passage a basis for a system of asceticism. But these perverted theories of self-denial arise from a total misapprehension of the figure. A more literal rendering of the phrase would have set these misguided men upon the right line of interpretation. The simple etymological sense of the term is, "I strike under the eye." The figure

present to the Apostle's mind is that of a pugilistic encounter between two athletes. He imagines to himself his body as rising up against his higher nature as a powerful antagonist; and against this foe, strengthened by the light of the indwelling Spirit, the Apostle directs his well-aimed blows, smiting down his antagonist to the ground, and subduing him, not for purposes of destruction, or even mutilation, but in order to render him what he always ought to be—the obedient slave of the inner nature; and this is exactly the meaning of the second phrase employed, "I smite down my body, and lead it about as a slave."

But, again, it may be asked, Does the Apostle mean to teach us by this expression that the body, being a material substance, and therefore closely connected with the material world, is the source of all inward evil? In a word, did the Apostle anticipate gnostic speculations? and does his attitude towards the material part of his nature open abstruse conclusions with respect to the necessary evils of matter? Nothing of the kind! On the contrary, no man exalts the human body more. He represents it as the temple of the Holy Ghost. "Your bodies," he says, "are the members of Christ." He prays that our body, as well as our spirit and soul, may be preserved faultless; he speaks of our bodies being presented as a living sacrifice; he tells us that he bears in his own body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ; he expresses his confidence that Christ shall be magnified in his body, and calls upon us to glorify God in our bodies, as well as in our spirits, which are His. It could not have been because of any theory of the necessary and natural impurity of the body he employed this language, or assumed the attitude towards his body which his language represents. How then are we to understand the phrase?—whence this mysterious collision between the renewed will of the Apostle and the organism within which it was contained? We shall find our explanation in the context. Turning to the chapter which lies open before us, we notice that St. Paul is here speaking of his life's work, and of the way in which he has conducted it. He is pointing out the motives which had influenced him in adopting a certain course of action, and in doing it he employs the figure suggested by the Grecian arena. He represents himself as a runner for the prize, or as an athlete striving for the mastery; but in thus pursuing his life's work

he makes a discovery which all of us will necessarily make sooner or later—that the war with the powers of evil without must ever be accompanied by a corresponding and co-existent struggle within, in our own personal experience. He who would conquer a world must be ready to conquer himself, and he will find that the grace and power of God will only be triumphant without as they are triumphant within. Here lies the explanation of the rapid transition, in this closing verse, from the description of his extraordinary conflicts to a reference to his personal experiences.

On referring to the details of this chapter, the whole subject explains itself. In the fourth, fifth, and six verses, St. Paul indicates three special respects in which he had turned aside from, and deafened his ear against, the reasonable demands of nature, for his work's sake. "Have we not power to eat and to drink?"—that is to say, he might have secured for himself a regular and sure supply of the necessaries of life. By a little contrivance and forecast, by exercising the authority to which he had perfect right within the Church, he might have assured himself of a comfortable competence.

Once again: he asks, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas?" He might have surrounded himself with all the pleasures of domestic life; and to a warm and sympathetic nature, such as his, the sacrifice of this must have been no small matter. The generous and affectionate nature will ever seek human affection, and surely this cannot be wrong! Once again: he asks, "Have not Barnabas and I power to forbear working?" It certainly did seem reasonable that one who worked so hard for the souls of men should be saved from the additional weariness of physical toil. Now in each of these cases you will observe how plausible the argument by which a self-indulgent course might have been defended. In the first place, once and for all, it may be laid down clearly and emphatically that the Apostle would have been morally justified in adopting any or all of these courses. Neither of them contained anything wrong in itself—all of them might have been amply justified by recognized precedents. There was even more than this to be pleaded on the side of adopting a course that would have administered to the gratification of the body; and let me say in passing, that when we desire to indulge ourselves, plausible reasons

for self-indulgence will never be wanting. How easy it would have been for St. Paul to argue that a person in his position ought to be properly supported by the Churches which he had founded; that justice to the cause in which he was engaged demanded that a life so precious as his should be properly cared for; that it was important that his mind should be left free and unembarrassed from worldly cares, in order that he might the better pursue the great work to which he was devoted,—nay, he might have argued that he would be doing his converts a positive injustice if he failed to enforce upon their minds their obligations in this respect; he would be training them to selfishness and inconsiderateness, and rendering the ultimate establishment of the Church more difficult than it otherwise need be. He might well have pleaded, amidst his exhausting labours, and the persecutions to which he was exposed, that the soothing influence of domestic affection was almost essential—that his work would be better done, and his body better cared for, and thus his usefulness extended, if he were to adopt the course which others had pursued—to establish for a season, in each of the localities which he had visited, the pleasure and the comforts of home. Not less forcibly he might have urged that there were better things for him to do than to waste his time in making tents. Just think, my brethren, what this tent-making must have been! Imagine the Apostle returning to his humble home worn with the toil of his laborious ministry, after having testified publicly, and from house to house, repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Imagine him engaged, early and late, in his great and all-important work of saving souls, and then, already weary, laying down his copy of the Scriptures, to take up the needle and the awl, and to toil for long hours at a manual occupation which any common mechanic might have performed as well as he! How plausibly he might have argued, Surely this cannot be the intention of God! In my intervals of rest from spiritual labour, I require time for study, and for prayer; and now my life is one long toil—when I am not preaching, I am tent-making; when I am not tent-making, I am preaching. Have I not a divine ordinance at my back, if I adopt an opposite course? Has not the Lord Himself ordained that they who preach the gospel should live on the gospel? Does not Moses himself teach that the ox which treads out the corn is

not to be muzzled? Why should I lead any longer this life of hardships and of toil? So he might have reasoned; and what had he to say against all these specious arguments, backed as they were by the natural and reasonable demands of a body such as our own—a body that rebelled against hardship and suffering, and that naturally loved ease and repose, as much as do our own? All that he had to set against it was his work, and the will of God in that work. He was engaged in a great warfare, and his feeling was, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Against the demands of his body—against the plausible arguments which might be heard on the side of innocent self-indulgence, was to be set his jealousy for the Master's glory, his fixed determination that the cause of Christ should never suffer by any course of conduct that he might pursue. To accept the subsidies which would have been offered by the churches, to surround himself with the comforts of home, might give occasion to those who looked with suspicion upon the nascent faith to regard it as a monetary enterprise set on foot by the cunning and cupidity of unprincipled Jews. So far as lay in him, there should never be any cause for such a reproach; and when he found his own body rising up against the course of hardships which he voluntarily preferred for himself; when nature urged, as nature will, her demands for some degree of consideration; just as our blessed Lord discovered Satan in the person of His favourite disciple, when that disciple dissuaded Him from the cross, so the Apostle discovered a foe in his own flesh, when that flesh shrank from the path of self-denial and suffering; and, gathering all the mighty powers of his spiritual life into the blow, he smote his antagonist down, and consigned it to its own proper place; from henceforth thou art to dictate thy terms no longer; thou art slave, and not master! fulfil thy work, but dare not to assert thy authority!

And now for our practical lesson. We, too, are striving for the mastery—fighting the battle of the good, in a world which has been invaded and devastated by the evil. Do we not also find (how frequently!) that our bodies rise up and resist the claims made on them, by the circumstances by which we are surrounded, and the work which has to be done? It may be perhaps, with us, rather in little things that the conflict has to

be waged. Shall I give a few homely examples? You know that there are sick and poor to be visited in your district, and that you ought to be at your work. Love for souls, and for God, would prompt you to set forth; but it is a cold wintry day, everything outside looks cheerless and uncomfortable—you are sitting at a blazing fire in your easy-chair, deeply engrossed in an interesting biography. How the body pleads, Sit still, don't disturb yourself; another day will do as well as to-day. Fifty reasons suggest themselves in a few moments to your mind why you should defer your work to another occasion; and when once you begin to confer with flesh and blood, how soon these carry the day! Or perhaps it is so small a matter as rising from your bed in the morning sufficiently early to give yourself time for prayer and the study of God's word. We have almost left off singing that old-fashioned hymn of Heber's,

> "Shake off dull sloth, and early rise
> To pay thy morning sacrifice;"

is it because dull sloth has ceased to be a power? or because too many of us have ceased to think of shaking him off? Or perhaps it is your time for prayer in the evening, after the busy day of toil;—how heavy and drowsy you feel! and the body suggests that you should lounge at ease, in such an attitude that in a few minutes stupor and something like torpor may not unnaturally be expected to supervene, and by-and-by you will flatter yourself you have prayed, when you have really slept. Or perhaps it is—if you have a call to visit the haunts of wretchedness and misery, where everything is repulsive—the close and fetid odour of those miserable hovels, the sights and sounds of those filthy back streets: how nature shrinks from them all, and pleads with you to discover some less obnoxious task! These are occasions on which we too have to arm our right hand with spiritual power, and to smite our body down, forcibly reminding it of its true position. Or perhaps the body asserts itself after another phase, not so much forbidding the painful as suggesting the pleasant—now appealing to our lower appetites with suggestions of indulgences, possibly innocent in themselves, but perilous to our souls, just because they have been suggested; for this, as it seems to me, is what the Apostle means when he calls upon us to make no provision for the flesh. The mind that is taken up, in any degree, with the thought, What shall

we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? is making provision for the flesh, and in doing so is unconsciously resigning its true supremacy; the body is dictating to the soul, instead of the soul controlling the body; and as it is with these, so is it with other animal propensities.

The same thing is true of those higher forms of gratification which none the less have the body as their subject. There is no harm in enjoying the pleasures of the eye, or of the ear, yet the Christian who lays himself out to obtain such enjoyment, who looks forward, for example, with passionate longing to a concert, or any similar treat affecting his senses, will find that in thus making provision for the flesh he is really checking the flow of the higher life within his soul, and interfering with the full enjoyment of spiritual experience. The thing in itself may be perfectly innocent, but as soon as we give ourselves over to it, as it were, it becomes guilty, because it intrudes itself between us and God, and occupies an amount of attention which has to be withdrawn from higher considerations. If God throws an innocent pleasure in our way, we are not called upon to suspect the gift, because it is a pleasure; but when we go out of our way to pursue the pleasurable—whatever form it may assume—the higher part of our nature is already yielding itself as the slave of the lower, the body already is becoming the tyrant of the mind, and by-and-by we shall prove how little real pleasure is to be found by those who live to please themselves.

And now let me ask, in conclusion, how did St. Paul smite his body down, and reduce it into the condition of a slave? This much surely is obvious—a man is no match for himself! The body, with its strong desires, its liabilty to be acted upon by material influences, can scarcely be mastered by the mere effort of human volition. At any rate, it was not so that the great Apostle mastered his. He lets us into the secret by giving us a practical direction: "If ye," he says, "through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Oh, my dear brethren, all turns upon this! The profane person will ever be ready to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage; the man who is living in nature, whatever his bygone experience may be, will find himself the slave of nature; the man who is walking in the Spirit will find that what the Apostle says is true, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." Side by side with the demands of the body, there will

be heard within our souls the gentle pleadings of the Divine Spirit; side by side with the thought of pleasing ourselves, there will arise the thought of pleasing Christ. Let not that Divine voice have to speak twice! A prompt surrender to the call of the Spirit ensures the victory over the body; a moment's hesitation, and the still small voice becomes almost inaudible, whilst the tumults of the flesh seek to drown every other sound! Then comes the struggle of the will. Like the wild and ill-directed blows of a pugilist already half stunned and blinded, we run as uncertainly—we fight as one that beateth the air; and then, when the body has gained the mastery, and the mind has yielded the day, there follow the anguish and the fear, as we find ourselves standing face to face with the dire possibility that unless the tide of battle turn, and we learn to overcome, we who have preached to others, may ourselves be cast away! Let us leave this church this morning, not with new resolutions necessarily as futile as those which have preceded them, but with a consciousness of our inability to fight the battle, and a calm, restful faith in the power of Him who has never lost the day. Let us make ourselves over unreservedly to His control. He has brought us life—let us trust Him to maintain victorious the life which He has imparted. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Thus shall we find the body will sink to its own proper position, and our members will be yielded the instruments of righteousness unto holiness, and the end shall be everlasting life.

XI.

Fellowship in the Sufferings of Christ.*

"The fellowship of His sufferings."—PHIL. iii. 10.

IT seems to me, my dear friends, that in Christianity that which is positive comes before that which is negative. At first sight we might expect it to be otherwise, remembering how the Law begins by thundering in our ears, "Thou shalt not;" but under the Gospel, the first thing we have to do

* This address, or rather part of it, was delivered at the Mildmay Park Conference, 1876.

is *to accept* the new life, and, along with that, a new life-power, and then, as the result of the acquisition of this new power, there comes the call to turn our backs to everything earthly, and to give ourselves entirely over to Him who has called us. Our blessed Lord first of all was recognized by His disciples as the Messiah, and afterwards came the call addressed to them to forsake all and follow Him. The first connection of the disciples with the Lord is, "We have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write;" and then, when the great discovery has been made, our blessed Lord subsequently turns on them, who had already recognized Him, with the call, "Forsake all, and follow Me;" and, we read, they forsook all and followed Him, but they would not have done so if they had not already reposed their heart's confidence on Him. Similarly the Lord says, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me;" but you will observe that these words come directly after Simon Peter's confession of the Lord; the two events appear to have been very closely connected with each other, as they appear together in each of the evangelists. We read, "Simon Peter said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" and then Jesus began to open up to him the prospects of suffering which lay before Himself, and to invite him into fellowship with His sufferings. Peter for a moment repudiates the call, but our blessed Lord, so far from deflecting from His purpose, owing to the antagonism of His apostle, goes on to press the truth upon all. "If any man"—not only you, my favoured ones, my disciples whom I have chosen from the world as a sort of body-guard to myself, and who might naturally be supposed to excel in Christian chivalry, but all men —"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

And historically the disciples found themselves incapable of entering into the fellowship and sufferings of Jesus till touched by the power of His resurrection. They gathered with Him round the supper table, and gazed into His sorrowful countenance, but could not understand the mystery of His sufferings. There was a veil upon their heart, and a strange indescribable barrier between them and Him. "They were amazed," we read, "as Jesus went before them to Jerusalem, and as they followed they were afraid." No wonder, for they had not yet possessed themselves of that power which was afterwards to make them spiritual heroes. They stood beside Him bravely

for a moment in the garden of Gethsemane, but when they saw Him as a sheep before her shearers, "dumb, and not opening His mouth;" when they saw this exhibition of human weakness where they had expected miraculous power, they all forsook Him and fled. They could have no fellowship with the sufferings, because they did not know the power of His resurrection. They stood, some of them, beside His cross, and they saw Him die; they heard those words of love and power which one after another fell from His dying lips; and yet, though their hearts were broken, and though the tears were gushing out from the fountain of their souls, they had no fellowship with His suffering. They could sympathize with Him as a man sympathizes with his friend, but still they were merely worshipping outside the porch, while the great High Priest was entering into the very holy of holies in the great temple of sorrow. How different it was when once the resurrection light had rested upon these very men, when they saw things as in the light of the glory that burst from that broken tomb; then they began to understand the lesson that our Lord was now in a position to enforce upon them; then they began to understand all that Moses and the prophets had spoken, and their hearts burned within them as they began for the first time to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. A little further on in their history, and that power which the risen Christ ascended into glory to claim for His ransomed Church, has come down in the flood-tide of Pentecost, and oh what a change is wrought in these men! They who shrank back from suffering—that Peter who was ready to say, "That be far from Thee, Lord"—the man who shrank from the very shadow of the cross, and when it came to be something more than a shadow, in his human frailty denied his Master—that man gathers his fellows round him, and they lift up, not a wail of sorrow, but the voice of praise, rejoicing that they are accounted worthy to suffer persecution for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as it was with them historically, so it seems to be doctrinally in the writings of St. Paul and in the arrangement of this passage, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Oh, my friends, do we desire that the Lord may nerve us to participate in His sufferings, and keep us from shrinking back. Let us remember that it is in proportion as the tide of new resurrec-

tion life is strong within us, that we shall be swept on towards fellowship in His self-sacrifice and devotion, and dare to stretch out our trembling hand to grasp His cup, and to offer our bodies to be baptized with His baptism.

I would venture to say that Christian experience and Christian doctrine—at least, so it seems to me—lie, as it were, in a sort of Divine circle; not the flat and vicious circle of continuous failure and repentance—there are too many of us that live in such a circle as this, passing from failure to repentance, from repentance to resolution, and from resolution to failure again, and so round and round and round in an ever-dreary route of disappointment and spiritual discomfiture—not in such a circle as this, but, shall I say, in God's own grand spiral, a wondrous circle in which, as with an eagle's flight, we rise higher and higher towards the Sun of Righteousness. He is Himself the centre of our orbit, but the measure of our revolution, we may say, is from His cross to His open grave, and from His open grave back to His cross again. The two experiences act and react upon each other; each fresh communication that I have of resurrection power drives me to the cross of the Lord Jesus, and each further revelation that I have of my fellowship with Him in suffering sends me back again to the open tomb; and thus, if faithful to grace given, I am rising continually a little higher and a little higher; each fresh revelation of resurrection power is a deeper and fuller revelation, and each revelation of fellowship with Him in His sufferings lifts me higher and gives more vital spiritual insight into them than the revelation which went before.

The great Apostle of the Gentiles, in his Epistle to the Galatians, uses language which might at first sight be thought much stronger, and indicative of a more fully developed experience than that which occurs in this Epistle to the Philippians. In the concluding chapter of the Galatians we read, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Well, we might say that perhaps, after all, this was only a strong and clear view which burst upon his mind of his union with the Lord Jesus Christ in the work which was achieved by Him for us—in the vicarious work of Jesus. But let me request you to observe that at the sixteenth verse, as if to correct this impression, we have the words, "As many as *walk* according to this rule" (a phrase which takes us at once to *experience*),

"peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Should we not have been disposed to say to the Apostle, "Thou understandest and knowest already in holy experience the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ; there is no need for thee to entertain or express the panting, longing desire for participation in them." But yet some seven or ten long years afterwards the same Apostle, in writing to the Philippians, uses the words on which we are meditating; so that you perceive, years after he has already realized what it is to be crucified to the world, and to bear in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus—years after he had learnt to regard this fellowship in the Lord's sufferings as a kind of panoply surrounding him and protecting him from the hostile attacks of an alien world ("Let no man trouble me, *for*——")—we find him still aspiring, still longing, still consumed with ardent desire, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

From which I conclude, then, dear friends, that our Christian life is not merely one grand discovery, but a continued series of fresh revelations. It is as though the veil between us and the glory of the crucified and the risen Jesus were ever becoming thinner, as one fold after another is taken away, and thus we make progress in the spiritual life, and in the knowledge of the glory of Him whom our heart loves. We behold as in a mirror His glory, getting fresh revelations of it from the open tomb and from the cross, and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of God.

With these thoughts on our minds, let us endeavour, by God's help, to say a few words directly with regard to the great subject before us—the fellowship of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. And first let us dwell for a few moments on the term. The word which is translated "fellowship" occurs not only in the case of the partnership which existed between the fishermen of Galilee, it is the same word which is employed by the historian of the Apostle's doings when he speaks of the community of goods which existed amongst the early Christians, when, as it is said, "they had all things common." A wonderful thought, it seems to me, that we are not only permitted to sympathize with the Lord Jesus Christ as the Man of sorrows, but that, if I may so put it, just as two partners in a firm are both joint possessors of the capital which belongs to the firm, so that

wondrous wealth of sorrow, shall I call it, which belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ, so far as it is a source of wealth, belongs in our measure to us, who are partners with Him. As the wealth of the disciples was thrown into one fund, and distributed amongst all, so that all had what they required, so the wealth of sorrow which belonged to our great Head is thrown into one fund with all the sorrows of those who are His members, and we are partakers with Him of that which is no longer to us a source of loss, but, on the contrary, a mine of wealth, a perennial source of gain. And to this common fund we are each of us permitted in our measure to contribute. No less than this is implied in that strange statement of St. Paul, "I fill up that which is wanting of the sufferings of Christ, for His body's sake, which is the Church." Just as a certain amount of heat in the furnace is required to produce certain definite effects upon the metal, so it would seem as though a certain definite amount of suffering, recognized by the infinite wisdom of God, were necessary to work out the perfection of that body of which Christ is the Head. As we each cheerfully and thankfully bear our share, what a joy to think that, along with the Head, we are contributing in our measure to the perfecting of the whole.

We shall never receive that view of suffering and sorrow from the teaching of nature; we want something more than nature's light to give us this view of the subject; for the possession of sorrow implies the crossing of our own will and inclination, and this will always be regarded by the men of this world as loss, and not gain. But it is the peculiar privilege of the Christian to regard it as so much gain, and for this reason—that it is nothing less than the furnace of affliction in which we are being refined for our ultimate glory and blessedness, the furnace of affliction into which our great Head was called, and through which He passed. "It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings*." It was necessary, in some mysterious way, that He as a son should learn obedience by the things He suffered; necessary that He should pass through the furnace,—I dare not say, in order that the fine gold might be refined, for there was no impurity in Him,—but still necessary, it may be, in order that the fine gold might be so fused and melted as that it might at last be moulded and modelled into the precise

shape which it was the Father's will it should ultimately assume. And so is it with us. We, too, are called in the furnace of affliction, that, being partakers of His sorrow, we may be also partakers of the blessed results of His sorrow in increasing conformity to His own nature. "*We glory in tribulation*, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope."

What a glorious thing it is to be able to look at suffering and sorrow from this point of view! None of us can escape it in this world, but the sorrow of this world worketh death. What a withering-up effect sorrow has on the worldly! Their hope is gone, their joy lost; and in a very large proportion of instances they become, under its influence, poor, hopeless misanthropes, mourning after and brooding over the losses of the past, incapable of being cheered with any prospect in the future, and scarcely fit for the duties of the present. With us it is just the reverse. Does the Lord call us into the furnace? We are privileged to realize, if we are living in the power of His resurrection, that the wealth of sorrow which belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ is being, as it were, handed over to us, and we are being enriched, as He was, by that refining process which to us means gain, while to the child of this world it means the loss of all things.

So that the very fellowship of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the means of acquisition; and in giving up all, in surrendering ourselves, in turning our back on our own inclination, we find the secret of gaining all that which our nature most requires; because we gain *His will, and in His will, Himself.*

Let me just give you three thoughts on the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. First, I would speak of fellowship with the Person, and the moral character of the Sufferer; then a few words about fellowship in the sufferings; and then of fellowship in the results of the sufferings.

Fellowship with the Sufferer. Everything hinges upon this. It is not enough that we should suffer; mere suffering will do nothing for any of us. We may torture ourselves if we will, but shall continue just as ungodlike as we were before. What the Christian wants is to suffer in the right way. And how is this to be accomplished? Only by entering into fellowship with the Divine Sufferer, and suffering after a similar fashion. How did the Lord Jesus suffer? Not by entailing

suffering upon Himself, or courting it for its own sake. We never find our blessed Lord going out of His way to court suffering. We do not find one single instance in His whole life that will bear such an interpretation. Yet from the beginning we find that He was a Man of sorrows. How was this? Because it was His meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent Him. Considerations of pleasure and pain were altogether subordinate; such considerations did not constitute a prime motive with the Lord Jesus Christ. He felt pleasure; He was conscious of pain, as we are; but it was not to gain the pleasurable, nor to avoid the painful, that our Lord lived. It is to gain the pleasurable, and avoid the painful, that too many of us live; and it is just that distinction between His life and ours that so often takes us out of fellowship with the Sufferer.

In order to enter into fellowship with the Sufferer, it is necessary for us to recognize and to yield ourselves to the motives which actuated Him in His sufferings. In Psalm cxviii. we meet with the words, which I believe we may regard as prophetic of the passion of our Lord, "God is the Lord which hath showed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, yea, even unto the horns of the altar." God's light—the light of the Divine purpose resting upon the problem of human life—it was this that indicated the way that led to Calvary. It was this ray of light that led the Son into the darkness; yet it was not the less precious to the heart of the Son for that. And we too, if we would have real fellowship with Jesus, must see to it that our fellowship is intelligent fellowship. Some of the broken-hearted followers of Christ gathered round His cross, and certainly suffered while He suffered. Every pang that passed through His quivering body, every cry of agony that left His lips, must have induced a corresponding affection in their nature; yet had they no real fellowship in His sufferings, because they had not risen to the discovery of His design. The ray of light which had illumined Him, had left them blind to the Divine purpose. Is it not too often so even with us? We have our sorrows, we have our disappointments; the cross is even laid upon our shoulders; but the ray of light has not yet entered our souls, and the result is that we have no fellowship with Christ in our sufferings; and this, not so much because God is unwilling to give us the light that we need, as because we shrink, like Peter, from the illumination which reveals the cross; and thus His light becomes obscured, and

we lose the secret of moral power which should have raised us into fellowship with His sufferings.

Now observe what immediately follows: "God is the Lord which showed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

How strong are the cords with which Christ was bound to the horns of the altar! It was not the brute force of the Roman soldiers that bound Him there; not the tumultuous hostility of the bloodthirsty multitude; not the mandate of the Roman governor; not even the iron nails that fastened His hands and feet to the shameful tree. From these it would have been possible for Him at any moment to break away; but there were other cords, invisible, but oh how strong, that bound Him there. There was the cord of obedience. The Father's will had revealed itself, and that was law to Him. Heaven could have no joy to the heart of the Son, were it obtained by turning His back on the Father's will and the work which the Father had assigned to Him. There must have been a deep joy present to His heart—even in the midst of His most cruel anguish—as He felt it was the will of the Father which bound Him to that world-altar—the cross.

Another cord that bound Him was love—love that glowed with furnace heat towards God and man; love that many waters could not quench; love that proved itself stronger than death. Blessed are they whose love grows with sorrow—who can forget themselves even in the very midst of the sharpest distresses and disappointments of life. It is only thus that we rise to true fellowship with the sufferings of Christ.

Once again, He was bound by the cord of faith. His very enemies bore witness that He trusted in God. His last words upon the cross testified that His trust remained unshaken, even though appearances might be all against His faith. If we would rise into fellowship with His sufferings, it must be by stepping forward in the spirit of faith, even though it should be into a burning fiery furnace. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." Suffering ceases to be sanctified when it is infected by mistrust. "The fear that hath torment" can never be an element in the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

Read the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah in the light of this thought, and you will find it full of instruction. There our blessed Lord first describes His own conflict as a conflict of faith. "The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be

confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." And then He passes on to call upon us, who, like Himself, are called upon to pass through darkness, to exercise a similar confidence—to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God."

A word about the sufferings, and respecting *our privilege of fellowship in them.* Is it possible for us to have fellowship with the actual sufferings of Jesus? Well, it stands to reason that much of that suffering has been borne in order that we might not have to bear it; and yet I believe there is a perfectly true and legitimate sense of the word in which we may be partakers of the sufferings which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself bore. As I gaze at Him on yonder cross, I interpret the nature of our fellowship in His sufferings in the light of the concluding words of this passage—"Being conformed unto the image of His death." I look at that dying Jesus, and I learn how to die to myself. I look at His sorrows, and I learn what my sorrows may become if I am indeed in fellowship with the Saviour's sufferings.

Take the voices which sound from the dying Son of man; and in each of them you shall have a lesson as to what our sorrows may be. "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!" Can I have fellowship in that? I believe there is not one of us that follows our Lord fully, but we shall be more or less misunderstood, misinterpreted. Hard things will be said of us—sometimes, perhaps, by brethren, sometimes by the outer world. It may be that our character will be traduced, possibly our very persons trampled on; or we may have troubles in our own family. Dear friends, it is not the design of Christ that we shall become—I do not know any word in the language which expresses my meaning so well as *thick-skinned.* No! God does not desire that we should lose all that sensitiveness which is so lovely an element in humanity. None was ever so sensitive, so delicately sensitive, as the Lord Jesus. But He so completely saw things from God's point of view, that He was incapable of feeling wrath even with the man that drove the nails into His hands. Do not let us cultivate this thickness of skin, but do let us endeavour to enter into sympathy with the heart and mind of the Lord Jesus Christ; and then, if a rough word is spoken, or a brother does not seem to understand us, a prayer will rise to our lips, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

I think, too, we may enter into fellowship with the sufferings

of Christ, as we hear Him say, "I thirst." Thank God, our thirst shall never be what His was. He bore a thirst for us which in our case would have been absolutely intolerable; the very thirst of hell. Yet, I am reminded, "Blessed are they that thirst, for they shall be filled;" and if I speak to any Christian soul here this morning, who is longing, and ardently longing, for more of God, who is saying with David, "Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God. When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" If any of us have these feelings, let us remember that Jesus said, "I thirst." And do not be discouraged or cast down that the supply has not as yet reached your burning lips, and that you have not as yet received that fulness of delight, that consciousness of blessing, which you would like to obtain. Remember that even in that hungering and thirsting after righteousness, you may be in a certain sense partaker of the sufferings of Jesus; at any rate, there may be a close resemblance in thy experience to His.

I hear Him say to His disciple, and to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son! son, behold thy mother!" And in that revelation of the mind and heart of Jesus I see something that I may have fellowship with. In the midst of all His personal sufferings, the torture of His body, the agony of His soul, He found time to think upon the sorrows of His broken-hearted mother and His lonely disciple, and to mingle their griefs with His own. How is human sorrow sanctified by such a revelation as this! I have heard it said, somewhat hardly I think, that unless our sufferings are directly caused by witnessing for the Lord, we cannot be said to be partakers of His sufferings. I hold no such doctrine. I cannot find that such is the teaching of the New Testament. If pain is sent me, it is my privilege as a Christian—it would not be as a worldling—to see in that, a measure of the pains belonging to the great body of Christ, and summed up, as it were, in the person of that body's Head; and thus in my very natural pain I am a partaker in the sufferings of Jesus. Does bereavement come? The same pangs that shot through my Saviour's heart are become mine, and I am a partaker with Him. Sorrow will be a curse to us inevitably, unless in our sorrow we are raised into the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

I hear him cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

We might say at first sight, "Surely this is a cry with which we have nothing to do," and in its full and deep sense certainly it is so. He was forsaken in order that you and I might not be forsaken. And yet, let us consider for a moment what it was that caused Him to utter that cry: it was the dark shadow of imputed sin coming between His soul and God. And as we enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus, our views of sin will become more keen and clear, and also bring along with them a more painful emotion than could otherwise be ours, so long as we are unconscious of the true character of sin. Let me enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus, that will make me hate sin. Have I been betrayed into a fault? Oh, how keenly shall I feel that sin while living in the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ! "This viper, that I have been harbouring in my bosom, has fixed its poisoned fangs in Thee, my Lord; and Thou wast wounded by this hateful thing that I have been making compromises with;" and thus, when the burden rests upon our own heart, it is so intolerable that we are driven straightway to Him. But even so, in our hatred and antipathy to sin, we understand something of the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

I see Him turning round and fixing His dying eye upon that malefactor upon the cross, and hear Him say, "To-day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." Oh, blessed fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus! when I in the midst of all the trials of life can have "a mind at leisure from myself to cheer and sympathize." They are most truly in fellowship with Him in His sufferings, who are so completely surrendered to the Divine will, that, in the very midst of suffering, it is the Divine will they are thinking about, and not the suffering. Oh, the love of that Saviour's heart! Parched are His lips, and His heart breaking; yet when that dying malefactor's cry reaches His ear, His eye is turned upon that poor dying man, and the word of peace and pardon is spoken; and the suffering Son of man takes on Himself the burden of the dying sufferer at His side. Oh for a heart to sorrow in all the sorrows of humanity! Oh for an unselfish readiness to submit as Ezekiel did—himself a true son of man—to "eat the roll," even though it be "written within and without with lamentations and mourning and woe!"

And as with the other voices, so with the last, I hear Him say as He breathes out His soul, "It is finished." Oh, to be

partakers with Christ in the glory of that last cry, which is the triumphant issue of suffering. When the will has been so fully yielded that God has been able to work out His own purpose in us, and to reveal His Son in us, then may it one day come to our turn to exclaim with St. Paul, "I have finished my course," and in a certain limited sense to say of our life's work, "it is finished;" and then the blessed repose—it may be in a dying hour, or it may be in a glorious advent morn—of looking up into His face, and committing ourselves into His hands in the firm persuasion that as we have been partakers with Him in His sufferings, so now we shall be partakers with Him in His glory. Oh the blessed rest of launching out into those stretched-out everlasting arms, and of leaving ourselves for ever in His keeping! "Father, into Thy hand I commend my spirit." May God take us into fellowship with His sufferings!

And now a few words about our third point—fellowship in the result of His sufferings. I am speaking here of course of the personal results of the sufferings of Jesus, not of those great results which flow forth to humanity from them. Yet let me say that as our blessed Lord obtained power over others through His sufferings, such as in His Human Nature He did not possess before, so those of us who have risen to fellowship with the sufferings of Christ will find ourselves possessed of the fullest spiritual power as the result of this blessed fellowship. But to pass on. It has been revealed in words none of us would have dared to employ, had they not been sanctioned by the apostolic writer, that He, the Captain of our salvation, was "made perfect through suffering." Not that He was ever actually imperfect. Perfection itself must be always relative to the circumstances of the subject perfected. The child may be perfect as a child, and yet that puerile perfection would be imperfection in the man. Even so, while there never was a time that the will of the Man Christ Jesus was opposed to the will of the Father, yet there was a time when its obedience was not completed, and thus He learnt obedience by the things which He suffered. The great result of the sufferings of Christ, so far as He Himself was concerned, was the complete identification of His Human Will with the Divine. It had yielded itself into the hands of God, and now it reflected perfectly the image of God. What a strange charm there is in the record of our blessed Lord's brief sojourn on earth after His resurrection! Beautiful as His character had ever been,

it never seemed so beautiful as when breathing peace into the troubled hearts of His disciples—restoring the faith of Peter, reproving the sceptical Thomas, opening the Scripture to their wondering minds, and preparing them for the mission which lay before them by the assurance of power committed to Him. "The beauty of the Lord His God rested upon Him." And will it not be even so with us? If we learn what it is to be conformed to the image of His death, as our wilfulness and waywardness learn to submit themselves to the gentle discipline of suffering, and if in each fresh cross we find a fresh revelation of the loving will of the Father, how calm, how resurrection-like our lives must needs become! More and more will it be possible for us to see that all power is given unto us also, because we are one with Him, as in the fellowship of His sufferings, so in the glories of His resurrection life. All power is ours because it is His. There will be an end of the frettings and misgivings, and the anxieties and petulances that so often have marred our spiritual experiences. There will be a beginning of that sabbatic calm—that repose of the soul in Omnipotent Love—that life of adequate resources which anticipates on earth the blessedness of heaven. "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus;" and the hope that blooms with immortality waxes clearer and stronger that it shall be ours one day to attain unto the glories of the first resurrection.

XII.

Christian Accuracy.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise."—EPHESIANS v. 15.

IN addressing these words to us, Paul is acting according to his usual method of coupling privilege with obligation. He has been speaking of the glorious and marvellous change which had taken place in these Christians at Ephesus, and which takes place in every one who is brought to accept the

salvation offered by God. I scarcely know a more startling description of the state of an unconverted man than is to be found in this chapter, in these words, "For ye *were* sometimes darkness." How terrible it is to think that a man may not only be *in* darkness, but may be darkness itself! that he should not only fail to see the light, but that he should carry about with him a power of darkness, which shall be as it were constantly warring against the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and endeavouring to produce an eclipse of His glory in the hearts of others!

Possibly I may be speaking to some this morning who have not yet yielded themselves to God. If any consideration will make you yield now, it should be this, that you are at this moment *darkness;* that you are exerting a bewildering, blinding, misleading influence on your fellow-men; and that, however you may flatter yourself that you do no one any harm, yet you are actually a chosen emissary of hell!

After this St. Paul makes an equally strong statement on the other side: "Now are ye *light* in the Lord." Again observe, he does not say, Ye *have* light; or, Ye are enlightened; but, "Ye are light."

It is true, and it is a glorious thing to know that we are enlightened, that we are basking in the light of the Divine smile; but that is not all. *We are light.* Just as the moon reflects the rays of the sun which rest upon her, so the Church and the individual members of the Church, who were once emissaries of darkness, become "*light in the Lord,*" reflecting and irradiating the light which they have received. "Now are ye light in the Lord;" and the Spirit adds, "Walk as children of the light."

Then we have two consequences indicated, which must follow upon our being light, and walking as children of the light. The first is suggested by the direction, "*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.*" There is no such thing taught or sanctioned in the word of God as a half-and-half religion, partly of the flesh and partly of God—partly of sin and partly of holiness;—it is not to any such life that we are called. Such a life is a *monstrosity* when looked at in the light of the Scriptures. It is altogether different from the life set before us in the Word, where we find that we are made "new creatures," and have put off the old man with his deeds.

But not only so, we are also called to *act* aggressively *against*

this darkness. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but," it is added, "*rather reprove them.*" It is our privilege to put on the armour of light, and in that armour to militate against the darkness; and we shall be mighty in our war just in proportion as we ourselves are walking in the light, and letting our light shine. To come back again to the figure of the moon. When she is, or rather appears to us to be, turned *from* the sun, then we get but little light from her; but when her face appears to be turned completely towards the sun, then we see a full orb, and we get the benefit of her light. This, of course, is simply speaking of things as they appear to us on the earth's surface; but it serves to illustrate our meaning. Let us have our full face turned to our Sun, and so shall we arise and shine, for our light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon us.

Now, having called our attention to our character as children of God, the Apostle proceeds to give the practical admonition contained in our text, "See then that ye walk circumspectly." These opening words, "See then," are full of energy. They might be rendered "Take heed," or "Beware." Do not let us think that a life of Christian perfection will follow as a necessary result from the facts at which we have glanced. These facts are facts, and they are glorious facts; but they entail a continual and solemn responsibility upon us. We are called upon to live out what we have received, to be holy even as He is holy.

Observe, the word "walk" is used three times in this chapter.

First, "*Walk in love*, as Christ also hath loved us." This is an obligation resting upon us; and notice how it is enforced, "as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us."

Second, "*Walk as children of the light.*" Again, our relationship to Christ is brought in as the motive power of this "walk." "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Because the Spirit, the gift of Christ, dwells in us, we are to "walk as children of the light," so as not to dishonour that gift.

The third time that the phrase occurs is in our text "*Walk circumspectly.*"

The expression *walk* is a very suggestive one. You will be surprised how often it occurs in the New Testament. If you want a very practical lesson, just take down your concord-

ance, and refer to the passages, and see how often the word occurs. Whilst at times we seem to be resting, we are always moving on in this life. Life itself is a journey. Some may be walking in a wrong direction, yet they *are* walking. Others may be moving very slowly, yet they are w alking ; and others may be making rapid progress, still they are walking. The phrase implies that we are ever in mo tion, and making progress in one direction or another. Bles sed are they who "walk with God;" who, waiting upon H im, "renew their strength;" who "mount up with wings as eagles;" who "run, and are not weary;" who "walk, and do not faint."

But in order to "walk" at all in the right direction we must have a motive power. Where shall we find that? The true motive power is suggested to us in the first of these three phrases to which we have alluded—"walk in love." If a man is charged with the love of Christ, he won't be daunted by the roughness or the steepness of the way. But this force of love in our own soul can only be generated by the knowledge of His love to us. Hence the Apostle's pointed reference to this, "Even as Christ has loved us."

Love will always be power; but besides power we need *guidance*. We need the line and the rails, as well as the locomotive engine and the steam. Now that which guides us spiritually is light; hence the second direction, "Walk as children of the light." St. John employs the same phrase: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." The moving power is Love, the directing power is Light.

This term light is, as you will have noticed, used in two senses in Holy Scripture. First, it denotes objective truth, and thus it is used of Him who was the Truth, and who came to witness to it. Second, it signifies inward sincerity and honesty—truthfulness of purpose and singleness of aim. In each of these senses it is easy to see how essential the light is to the Christian's walk. Truly, "he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth."

But besides power and guidance, is there nothing else needed to ensure a truly Christian walk? Yes, the Apostle gives a third direction: "Take good heed that ye walk accurately," for that, in plain English, is the meaning of the word rendered "circumspectly" in our version. He who would comply with this direction must condescend to consider the value of

little things, for this admonition brings us down to the details of every-day life. Now in these days we need to be especially mindful of the importance of these little things. We are living in times of much intellectual and spiritual activity, of increased knowledge, and of intensified earnestness. And while we thank God for these characteristics of our time, we must bear in mind that even these very favourable features, unless we use great watchfulness, may readily engender superficiality and carelessness. If we are to have reality, we must have carefulness in detail. Carelessness and want of attention to little things will infallibly mar the career of even the most promising Christian; and how many are thus spoilt.

Take a watch—it seems to be all right, and carefully put together, yet it will not go. You take it to an experienced watchmaker—he looks at it, he finds it is well finished, everything seems to be quite correct; but at last, perhaps after half a day has been spent over it, he detects that one little wheel has been imperfectly made, and that is quite enough to account for the uselessness of an otherwise well-made watch. So in commerce, the merchant that would be successful must watch the little things. In the professional duties of the physician it is the same. He may be called to a case, and after examination think he has found out the disease, and prescribe accordingly. But he may have overlooked some slight symptom, and by-and-by he finds out that he has misunderstood the case, and has been administering poison instead of medicine.

Or a lawyer may have got up the evidence on a certain suit; he thinks his chain of evidence is all complete, but he overlooks some small thing, and when the case comes to be tried he finds that he has lost his cause by this one little omission.

Or, take a boy at school. He is, we will suppose, sharp and clever, but will not be at the trouble to be careful about little things. The result is, his whole work is spoiled by the want of accuracy. He may have considerable power, and yet he is sowing the seed of a bad harvest. He goes to college, and perhaps excites some expectation by his general ability, but he disappoints all the hopes that have been entertained of his future, and misses distinction by a few foolish blunders which, though trifling in themselves, turn the scales against him in an examination, and it is only too probable that the habit thus formed will follow him through life, and spoil the success of his future career.

Now, if this be such an important matter in the things of this world, how much more so in the spiritual life! The Apostle feels it to be so. How many Christians have marred their service and lost their power by the want of accuracy in little things, and have become stumbling-stones, and even scandals, because of the fly that spoiled the ointment. These little things! Oh let us take heed to the little things. How many whose theology is correct, and whose conduct is not outrageously inconsistent, yet dishonour the God whom they profess to serve, and bring discredit on religion because of their inaccuracy of walk.

How many Christians, for instance, are commonly spoken of with a "*but*." "She is a real Christian woman, *but* she is a terrible talker." "That is a good sort of man, *but* he can drive a very hard bargain." Another is "a very right-hearted person in the main, *but* he is so given to levity." Another is "a very worthy man, *but* he has such a bad temper."

What do these "*buts*" arise from? From our allowing ourselves to think lightly of these little things; and so we do not walk circumspectly or *accurately;* and thus we bring *disgrace*, so far as it is possible for us to bring disgrace, upon God and His service.

A Christian lady, who from the position she occupies sees perhaps as much of Christian society, and has therefore as large a field for observation as almost any one I know, remarked to me, "I wish you would caution Christians against a habit that is becoming painfully prevalent—the habit of untruthfulness. It is most painful to notice how much of moral obliquity upon this point exists amongst professing Christians. Again and again I have to notice the most serious discrepancies between the statements of persons calling themselves Christians." It does startle one to think that such should be the case amongst those who profess the Name of Christ; yet so it is. Many who will not tell a lie deliberately, yet begin by touching up a report or colouring a story, exaggerating the details of their own work, of the difficulties which they have encountered, until the basis of truth is overlaid and lost sight of beneath the mantle of fiction. When once such a habit is formed, it usually develops to a startling degree, threatening to sap all the foundations of moral integrity in the character that it infects. It will be fostered with the greatest assiduity by him who is the father of lies, and it

must with equal certainty produce an estrangement between us and Him who is the Truth. And the saddest part of the matter is, that when once the habit is formed we become almost unconscious of it, conscience becomes inoperative, and we lose to a great extent all clearness of perception as to the distinction between truth and falsehood. Let us remember that such a habit is much more easily formed than broken off, and that in forming it we are slipping down an inclined plane which must land us in utter untruthfulness. Let us watch against the beginnings of this evil. Beware of exaggeration. Surely we have cause to lay these words to heart: "Take heed that ye walk circumspectly."

Mark further how St. Paul strengthens his case by the words which follow: "Not as *fools*." This is very strong language, as applied to those who know Christ.

We are accustomed to hear the word "fool" applied to the outside world, to those who know not the Lord. We hear of the atheistic fool, who says in his heart, "There is no God;" and he does appear to us to be a fool. We hear of the rich fool, who is engrossed with his gains, and talks of building greater barns, and forgets God. He too does seem to be a fool.

But remember there are other "fools," or "foolish" people, spoken of in the Scriptures. There are the "foolish virgins" —*virgins* who had been brought near to God, who were waiting for their Lord, and yet they are called "foolish." Why? Because they did not use reasonable means to accomplish the end proposed. They knew that their lamps would not burn without oil, they knew it was to be had of "them that sell," and yet they did not provide themselves with oil. Therefore Christ calls them "foolish;" and this *folly* is the only charge made against them.

These are not the only persons who, although professedly religious, are spoken of as *fools*. There were some who showed their folly by their slowness of heart to believe in the resurrection of Christ (Luke xxiv. 25); and in after-years kindred spirits equally displayed their folly in making difficulties about the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. xv. 36). There were again the foolish Galatians who were bewitched by legal sophistries (Gal. iii. 1); but in the present passage an opposite form of folly is suggested to our mind: not the folly of the legalist, but of the practical Antinomian,—the folly of

him who is heedless and unwatchful about little things, because he believes in the great grace of God,—the folly of him who hopes that somehow or another the great end will be attained, while he is too careless to employ the means for its attainment.

True, the grace of God puts us on vantage-ground, yet is it only too possible to sacrifice our position. True, it has made us heirs—nay, possessors—of a wealthy heritage; yet is it possible to squander our spiritual possessions, as this is what the Apostle calls walking as fools.

Look at that prodigal young man. He has had fifty thousand pounds left him, and he has already frittered away two-thirds of it. Very likely he will die a beggar. But how has he lost it? Not by going to the seaside and flinging handfuls of it away. No! no! He has lost it by what logicians call the *fallacy of division.* He reduces the thousands to hundreds, and the hundreds to tens, and his resources seem to multiply in the process. He has only a limited number of thousands, but as for tens, and fives, and single pounds, of these he seems to have an almost unlimited store. What does it matter if he loses a few pounds now and then, or even a few score,—what are they to his fortune? But he forgets that the fortune itself is made up of the units that he is wasting. We call such a one a fool, because he is, we can plainly see, wasting his fortune, though he scarcely knows it himself. But he would never, fool though he is, have thought of giving it away in one lump sum. Is he a greater fool than we who squander in detail that which no wealth can purchase?

I cannot understand a Christian man giving himself wholly over to iniquity, or selling himself to the devil; but I can understand how some, copying the example of that prodigal, will fritter away their precious gifts, little by little, until they have wasted their lives. It is these little, unnoticed things that do it. A few careless words, a few angry words, a little carnal indulgence, a little worldly conformity, a little loss of communion, a little pleasing of ourselves,—thus it is that ground is lost and spiritual power sacrificed, and we bring discredit on our profession, instead of adorning "the doctrine of God our Saviour," and bringing glory to God.

It would be impossible to find a better illustration of what is meant by this accuracy of walk than by referring to our employment of that which the Apostle goes on to refer to—*Time.*

It is frequently the case that God's most precious gifts are His most common ones, and yet for that very reason we under-

value them. How many of us, who would shrink from wasting money, feel no compunction at wasting time; yet our means may increase,—our time is always of necessity diminishing. We may obtain more money,—we can never win back a lost hour. How do we lose our time? Few of us would willingly consent to lead a useless year; most of us would shrink from deliberately determining to waste a day; and yet how many years are wasted by the servants of Christ! How is it done? By the fallacy of division. We think much of years, but little of hours, and the hours make the years; yet we wonder how the time has gone, as one wasted year after another slips by. O my friends, let us learn to value the minutes, if we would redeem the time. Some of you may have seen a somewhat startling advertisement that was extensively circulated some few years ago. It ran thus: "Lost! Somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes! No reward is offered, for they are lost FOR EVER." May God save us from thus losing our lives!

But observe, the Apostle calls upon us, not only not to walk as fools, but *to walk as wise*. True wisdom is something more than the avoidance of folly. Socrates taught that knowledge is virtue,—that if a man only knew clearly, and without doubt, what is the right course, he would be sure to take it. There is more truth in the aphorism than may at first sight appear. It is strictly in keeping with the teaching of the wise man of Holy Scripture, who is never weary of pointing the moral contrast between wisdom and folly, attributing the highest moral qualities to the former, and the basest to the latter. Indeed, with Solomon wisdom is personified, and we cannot fail to discern in the attributes of the august ideal the character and person of Him who is the "Word of God." In His light it is our privilege to see light where the children of this world are blinded by spiritual folly. The wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ was folly in the eyes of the world, and it will ever be, whoever may exemplify it. It lay above everything else in this—the loyal, confiding acceptance of the will of the Father, under the full conviction that it is and must be, whatever it appears, though it should lead to a Gethsemane or a Golgotha, the highest good of the creature. To this conviction the heroic life of Jesus as a man was due, and it is this wisdom coming down from above that will make our lives, however humble, in one sense sublime. To this point the Apostle fearlessly leads

us up: "Be ye not unwise," pursuing the fickle fancy of a moment, or swayed by any passing influence of pleasure or pain, "but understanding what the will of the Lord is." This is the great secret of true wisdom, and in this respect pre-eminently knowledge is power. Just as in science true wisdom does not consist in knowing what a Bacon or a Newton may have written, but in discovering what the laws of nature actually are; so, in religion, true wisdom does not consist in being acquainted with the teaching of theologians, but in understanding what the Will of God is. And there is deep joy in such a discovery. One of the greatest of astronomers, on making the discovery of a most important physical law, is said to have thrown himself down on his knees, exclaiming, "O God, I thank Thee for permitting me to think a thought which Thou hast been thinking!" Not less is the joy of the soul when it begins to know the thoughts that God has been thinking towards us, and to understand what the Will of the Lord is.

Let me point out to you some of the practical results of the understanding of the Will of God, some of the forms of actual spiritual wisdom which will flow from acquaintance with it.

The understanding of His Will must make us wise as to the great *end and aim of our being*. How many live without any definite object! and how many, who have recognized life's object, without any definite reference to it! The truly wise will keep the end ever in view, as the pilot star by which he shapes his course across life's stormy main. We shall be *wise as to the relative value of things*—not fretting or worrying ourselves about the things of a passing day, but putting first that which is first, enduring as seeing the invisible. We shall be *wise as to the choice of means* towards the great end, not wasting our energies on unprofitable austerities or legal performances, nor, on the other hand, encumbering ourselves with the weights and hindrances of a luxurious and self-indulgent life, endeavouring to make everything either directly or indirectly conduce towards the one grand object, and avoiding those side aims and oblique pursuits which tend to distraction and the dissipation of energy.

We shall be *wise as to our relation with others*—wise to win souls, not living for ourselves, but for Him who has bought us, and for all because they are His. Not endeavouring to ease our consciences with a perfunctory service, but laying ourselves out, like good fishermen, at the Master's word, to catch men.

Wise above all in our continuous recognition of our dependence upon invisible resources. The unwise virgins took no oil in their vessels; our wisdom is to show itself in our being filled with the Spirit: only thus shall we be "ready for every emergency, and waiting for the advent cry.

Wise, finally, in that we live as in the light of eternity and in the presence of God. From each of these the worldling may well endeavour to conceal himself. Thank God, the citizens of Zion have nothing to fear from either, and everything to gain. They are wisest who know most of each.

Do our hearts echo of ourselves the exclamation of the prophet, "O that ye were wise!" Is it not written, "Jesus Christ is made unto you *wisdom?* We preach Christ crucified, the power of God and *the wisdom* of God." Let us thank Him that He has made us conscious of our own folly, for that is the first step towards true wisdom; and then let us honestly by faith claim Him to be our Wisdom. Trust Him to give us to see things as He sees them, and as He shall enlighten us let us give ourselves up in the spirit of full self-surrender to make proof in our own experience of the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God.

XIII.

The Christian's Walk, and its Object.

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."—1 THESS. iv. 1.

THIS is one of those passages in St. Paul's writings in which we may say we have an outburst from that warm and fatherly heart of his—the opening up of the intensity of his desire for those to whom he had, by the grace of God, been made a blessing. St. Paul was jealous for his spiritual children with a godly jealousy. He knew that the eyes of the whole world were upon them, and he knew that the blessed truth of the gospel would be judged by their contemporaries in those cities, as it is judged by our contempo-

raries in the nineteenth century, rather by the lives of those who professed the Gospel, than by the statements of the Gospel itself. Men read your lives far more readily than they read their Bibles, and they form their conclusions far more aptly from what they see in us, than from a careful study of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. St. Paul knew it was even so in those days, and not only was he eager with a godly jealousy to present those whom he loved so dearly, blameless before the eyes of their fellow-men, and to advance the cause of the Gospel by giving this testimony to the world of the reality of its power, but he was eager also for the spiritual blessedness of those to whom he was a father indeed. He was desirous that they should know all that there was for them to know, that they should rise to the height and sink to the depth, that they should be "filled with all the fulness of God," as he himself expresses it in one place. If you will read the preceding verse, you will see that there is in it an outpouring of the Apostle's desire in prayer—"And the Lord make you to *increase*." There is no stagnation in religion. If there is stagnation, it arises from disease, and is altogether abnormal. Religious life is a life of continuous progress. As soon as the plant stops growing it begins decaying; and we may be very sure that if we are not advancing we are retrograding. "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you, to the end that He may stablish your heart." These Thessalonian Christians, although they had known the Lord for many a day, required to be established in the faith, and the only thing that can establish us is that which St. Paul goes on to pray for. There is only one way in which a Christian can be established. As long as we are living a life of conscious weakness, and clinging to our besetting sins, and failing to put on the gospel armour, and to fight the good fight, and to win the promised victory, so long we cannot be established—"A reed shaken with the wind"—hopeful to-day, doubtful to-morrow, full of promise now, full of despair by-and-by. There is, I say again, only one way in which the Christian can be established, and St. Paul prays that the Thessalonian Christians may be established in that particular way, "To the end that ye may stablish your hearts *unblameable in holiness* before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Now this is the

Apostle's prayer, and no sooner has he uttered this prayer than he feels called upon to give an exhortation. Prayer and practice always go together in the Apostle's mind; and so, while on the one hand he pours out his soul towards his God, on the other hand he turns round with earnest entreaties towards these his spiritual children, and having already implored God, he now implores them with equal urgency of entreaty. "Furthermore"—"it is all that is left for me to do"—for so much is implied by the original—"I have asked the best thing I can for you, I have asked that God may make you to increase and abound in love, and He, on His part, will truly do and perform all that we desire in faith believing. But having asked of God, there remains that I should address myself to you, as members of the mystical body of Christ, and as being myself a member of that body, and as feeling that each member suffers in the sufferings of the other members, and flourishes in their prosperity, I beseech and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."

The Apostle made it a practice wherever he went, not to rest satisfied with merely preaching the gospel. This was his first great duty, his first great privilege. It was no use calling upon men to be holy, and to give themselves up to the service of God until they had first of all received the gospel. But even when he went on his evangelising journeys, when he went from place to place preaching the gospel of salvation, and plucking souls as it were out of the very jaws of death—even then it was always his custom, not merely to set before them evangelical truth, but to follow up that truth by direct and unquestionable spiritual teaching, by showing his converts what they were now expected to do, and how they were expected to live, by indicating to them the nature of the new life that God had a right to expect at their hands.

Now we are not told what were the actual exhortations which he addressed to these Thessalonian converts; we are not told what special directions he gave them with respect to their walk. But we are in a position to judge what those directions would be, from other portions of the Apostle's writings.

As you must have noticed, that little word "*walk*" is a very favourite word with St. Paul. If any of you when you get

home will take your concordance, and sit down and examine the different passages in which that word is used in St. Paul's writings, you will find in this a sermon in itself.

You want to know how to walk. You, young Christians, who have just cast yourselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, find now that you have got a walking power. You were paralyzed by spiritual impotence before; there you lay helpless, just like that poor man on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The thieves had fallen upon him, and there he lay, wounded, and stunned, and helpless; he could not even crawl to a place of safety. There are many of you who feel that has just been your experience. Perhaps there was a time when you thought you could stand, but God opened your eyes, and showed you your utter weakness, and you fell helplessly by the wayside, and there you lay. But God, who is rich in mercy, has come along the way—"Jesus of Nazareth has passed by:" Glory to His Name! and as you have caught the sound of the approaching footsteps of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, you have heard Him addressing Himself to you,—"Wilt thou be made whole?" and catching at the sound, you have looked up to His face, and you have beheld in Him the life-power, and like the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, you have found a new energy and strength and health imparted to your spiritual nature, and you have bounded up in the sudden joy of health, "walking and leaping and praising God." I want you to feel that all this new power that is given to you is not intended to be spent in "walking and leaping;" it is not given to you merely that you may be able to say, "Look how strong I am." It has been given to you in order to enable you to realize in your blessed experience the promise that "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall run and not be weary, they shall *walk* and not faint." While you are walking sometimes the sun will be very hot, and may shine upon you with such vehemence that you will be ready to give way; but you hear the promise, "They shall walk and not faint." Cheer up! you have got a long journey before you; it is a journey that begins on earth, but ends in glory; it is a journey that begins with forgiveness of sins, and ends with complete sanctification—the presentation of the Christian perfect and unblameable in the presence of his God. But although it is such a long journey, you need not be discouraged. Do not be down-hearted, for throughout the whole

length of the way you have got One who has promised to be your Companion in travel, and in every hour of difficulty lean upon the arm of your Beloved, and you will find that to be the real secret of walking.

A dear old Christian once said to me, "I want you to notice that word *leaning* on the arm of the Beloved. You give your arm to a lady to take her into the drawing-room, and she just touches your arm. But you go a long walk into the country with your wife; she is weary, and you offer her your arm, and she puts in her hand and presses on you with all her weight. Now, sir," he said, "that seems to me just the difference between the formalist and the real Christian. The formalist *touches* the arm of Jesus, he does not lean with all his weight; but the real Christian feels his own weakness and his own weariness, and so as he goes through the wilderness he leans on the arm of his Beloved, bearing all his weight upon that hallowed arm, and finding power and strength; and the more he leans, the more he feels his own weakness, and at the same time the more he feels his strength in Him."

St. Paul had given these Christians directions how they were to walk. He had not left them to go wandering about in the darkness, but he had taken care before he left the Church at Thessalonica to give accurate directions as to what their walk was to be. And he was not content with merely preaching to them, but he left them an example in his life. He was able to say what every minister of the gospel ought to be able to say—and shame upon us if we are not able to say it—"Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ." Sometimes we are constrained to say in our pulpits, "Oh! my dear friends, I speak to you of this because I find it in my Bible, but I cannot say that I have experienced it in my life." Oh! it is a melancholy thing when a spiritual pastor is not able to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is said, "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them." A dear Christian said to me, when I was just entering on an important charge, "There is one thing, my dear friend, I want to say to you. You can never count upon being able to instruct others beyond your own experience. God may use you; He may speak through you, but you cannot calculate upon being able to instruct your flock beyond your own experience. As far as you advance in the Divine life, you know God's power will be able to bring them on after

you, but you won't be able to thrust them on before you. God will send His own messengers; but so far as the more advancing sheep in your flock are concerned, unless your own life keeps pace with their experience, unless even you be able to keep a little in front, you will be a hindrance and not a help to them." Oh, how often have I thought of these words! How often they have humbled me! How often they have convinced me of the tremendous responsibility of my position! If there are any brethren of mine in the ministry here, I would commend this subject to their earnest consideration. When St. Paul taught the Thessalonians how they were to walk, he taught them by his own conduct. He could say, "Ye remember how I was with you; ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." If we had such ministers as St. Paul, we should soon find the powers of darkness shaken in our land, and we should see the tide of blessing spreading to remote heathen nations. But in every age the ministers of the cross of Christ have been the greatest opponents of the Gospel, and the worst obstructions to its progress. It is an awful thing to say, but it is true.

And now, dear brethren, let me call your attention to one or two expressions in which this word "walk" occurs. And the first to which I would direct your notice is the distinct statement of St. Paul that we are to "walk by faith, and not by sight." This is a lesson which we all have to learn, and young Christians are often slow to learn it. When a young Christian believes, it often happens that the new life bursts upon him with such a power, and he is so full of joy, that it is really more like sight than faith. He can almost think he sees Jesus. I do not say this is the case with all, and so if there are any in this church who have never experienced anything of the kind, do not you say, "I am not converted, for I have not felt that." I say that this is frequently the case, and I do not wonder that it should be so. On the other hand, God ever adapts His dealings to the character with whom He deals; so that it is not to be expected that He will give to all just the same kind of experience. Sometimes He gives to those whom He loves most less joy and rapture just at first. He tries them in the school of faith. I would just say in passing that there is a wonderful balance in this respect. The Christian who is converted with an extraordinary flood-tide of joy gets a good start. He is swept on by

a marvellous new impulse which he cannot control. And you say that this is a great advantage, and you, my dear friends, who have calmly and quietly laid hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, are perhaps saying in your heart, "Ah! I do not feel as he feels. I have not got that marvellous flood-tide to carry me over the bar of sin and the world, on my voyage of holiness across all the trouble sea of difficulties." But remember, while your brother Christian has a great advantage in the rush of joy which fills his heart, you have a great advantage too, in having learnt already something of the calm, blessed, unchangeable power of faith. Now, if you will watch your brother, the probability is that in the course of a fortnight or three weeks he will have a terrible conflict. That marvellous flood-tide will have begun to ebb, and the joy will not be so intense as it was. God does not keep us always in an atmosphere of changeless joy; we should not be healthy Christians if He did do so. When conflict and difficulty come, some of you may be led to exclaim, "Ah! was it not all excited feeling? I was terribly excited during that mission week." There is danger that those who have had a flood-tide of joy may thus be attacked by Satan when difficulties come: whereas you, my dear friends, who have been brought to God calmly, and place your simple confidence in His unwavering truth, will be able to stand firm, because you know that Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." I won't say that you or he has got the best of it; but things are balanced one against another, and there is a beautiful equality in all God's dealings, and so don't you complain, "Oh, dear me! God doesn't treat me as He treats other believers." Why, God has all kinds of gifts for us, and He gives us those which are the best for us; and if He were to give us any others, He would be doing us very great harm, because He would be listening to our folly instead of being guided by His own unfailing wisdom.

Let us learn then, first of all, this one grand lesson: "We walk by faith, and not by sight." We do not behold the blessed form of our Lord Jesus Christ marching before us and leading us on to victory; we do not see that when we take up our stand for the Cross of Christ, the reward is already present with us, and that instead of being losers we must be gainers. Sometimes it may appear to us as though our religion were bringing us into a complete maze of difficulties, as though there were surrounding us hosts unnumbered of mighty foes

against whom we have no power. But remember, dear friends, that when Elisha was in the little town of Dothan, and the armies of the Syrians compassed him, and his servant rushed in exclaiming, "Alas, my master! what shall we do?"—remember that when that servant's eyes were opened, he beheld the whole city compassed round about with horses and chariots of fire. The young man did not see them until the Lord, in answer to the prophet's prayers, opened his eyes. But the horses and chariots of fire were there before he saw them, and they are around you, although you don't see them. There is one text that I often console myself with, and I often give it to young Christians to comfort and encourage them: "The Angel of the Lord"—that is, the Angel of the Covenant—"encampeth round them that fear Him, and delivereth them." The believing Christian has only in faith to draw aside the curtain, and he will see that Jesus is there ready to give him strength and peace and encouragement. Our blessed Lord had His time of refreshing. He had the Mount of Transfiguration as well as the bitter agonies of Gethsemane. God knows what is best for us. He gives us both encouragement and trials, but don't you ask why; make up your mind that your life is to be a life of faith. As the Apostle says, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Only remember, *that* love is unchangeable, *that* arm can never lose its power, *that* heart can never be stripped of its sympathy, *that* mind can never be robbed of its wisdom. And here we may rest.

"So calm! so safe! so satisfied!
The souls that cling to Thee."

Take another use of the word walk. St. Paul calls upon us to "walk in the Spirit." "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." There are two great powers always acting upon us; there is the earthly power that is always dragging us down, and the Spirit power which is always lifting us up. Now this walk in the Spirit is closely connected with the walk of faith. I would venture to say it stands in relation to the walk of faith somewhat in the position of effect to cause; that whilst faith is the opening of our hearts subjectively to receive a blessing, the Holy Spirit is the objective blessing which is poured into our hearts thus opened. Dear friends, if

we desire to "walk in the Spirit," we must recognise that Spirit in all our ways, and put ourselves under His control. This is what the Apostle means when he tells us that "if we be led of the Spirit, we are not under the law, but under grace." It is not "Thou shalt do this and thou shalt not do the other thing," but we are to place ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." We are not called upon to be led either by our ministers or by our Christian friends—I do not mean to say that you ought not to be glad to get counsel from them—but the leading power which you should acknowledge is the power of the everlasting Spirit of God, which in measure is given to every living member of the spiritual body. Believe in the Holy Ghost; believe that He will take you under His control. We may believe all this without allowing ourselves to become silly. There are some people who carry this idea to the very point of silliness. They do not like to stretch out the hand or to do a single common duty without first having the conviction in their minds that it is the will of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God does not supersede my natural faculties, but takes hold of every faculty; and so the Apostle does not say, "God giveth you a whole set of new members," but he says, "Yield your members,"—yield those members that you have. If your intelligence is yielded up to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God will enlighten that intelligence, and will give you what my dear brother your vicar called, when preaching in my church not long ago, "*sanctified common sense.*" Let the Holy Spirit take possession of your mind, and He will rule in it, and will work out His own blessed purposes through you.

But do not allow yourself to think that because you are a Christian, therefore you must be a fool, in the strict sense of the word; "In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men," St. Paul says. Look what directions he gives to scrupulous people, how he weighs one thing against another; the expediency of exercising our freedom against the inexpediency of wounding conscience. Give up yourselves, mind and heart and soul, to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and then you will find that He will come and make the mind a spiritual mind, and He will fill the heart with spiritual affections, and He will make the soul a spiritual power, and work out His own good pleasure in it, to the honour and glory of His Name.

While I am speaking of walking in the Spirit, let me point

you to the contrary. Opposed to walking in the Spirit is "walking after the flesh." Oh! dear children of God, if you want to walk as the Apostle would have you walk, believe me it is impossible also to "walk after the flesh." If you are guided in your daily walk by worldly considerations, by a desire for your own carnal gratification; if it is the law of your life to please yourself rather than to please God, you are falling beneath your high calling, you are inviting a woful bondage, you are sacrificing the glorious "liberty wherewith Christ has made you free." Remember the solemn words which the Apostle uttered, "If ye live after the flesh, ye are on the point of dying," for so are the words in the original. As soon as we are guided by our own sight, and not by the glorious truths of the inner world, which only faith comprehends, so soon we are going back into the very region of death from which we have once fled.

Time will only permit me to touch upon two or three other phrases in which the word walk occurs. "Walk in wisdom." Do not give any unnecessary offence to your neighbours, to your brothers and sisters; do not put your religion before them in such an obtrusive way that they shall say, "What disagreeable people these Christians are!" We have plenty of hard work to do, and plenty of crosses to bear, but do not let us make ourselves unnecessarily disagreeable. A perfect Christian will always be a perfect gentleman. You are not called upon to push yourself forward, but to walk quietly and calmly before God, looking to Him for power, waiting for Him to give you the opportunity; and when the door is open and the opportunity given, be ready to employ all that wisdom which God gives you to win souls; for remember that "he that winneth souls is wise." We need to know when to be silent, as well as when to speak; but owing to our natural cowardice most of us are more likely to be silent when we ought to speak than to speak when we ought to be silent. Yet Divine wisdom is needed to guard us against both errors. On the other hand, let us be very careful lest in anything we cause scandal. Things that are lawful are not always expedient. Influence may be lost by conduct not in itself sinful, but under the circumstances ill-advised. We are in an enemy's country, let us be on our guard.

Twice we are called upon to walk honestly; the word would be more properly rendered *honourably*. There is a certain un-

affected dignity that belongs to the man who is the friend of God, that commands the respect of those with whom he has any dealings, and which will always secure him a certain influence in society. You who are a child of the Household Royal of Heaven, how can you stoop to any social meanness or commercial "sharp practice"? There will be a certain cheerful gravity, a truthfulness and self-control, even in the very manner and deportment of the true Christian, that will distinguish him from the haughty and reserved man of the world on the one hand, and from the flippant and complaisant slaves of society on the other.

There is another instance in which the word "walk" is used. I should like you to pay particular attention to the expression of the Apostle: "See then that ye walk accurately—we render it "circumspectly," but "accurately" is perhaps a better translation. What does he mean? Be very particular about little things, little vanities, little self-indulgences, little worldlinesses, little sins of the tongue, little sins of the temper. "It is the little foxes that spoil the grapes." Dear children of God, "walk accurately." There are some of us who seem to have only a vague and general notion—no accurate idea—of what a Christian's walk ought to be. Other Christians walk very timorously, always expecting to make mistakes; but there is a great difference between walking timorously and walking accurately. Some strike out wildly, never thinking where they are going; others go along painfully, as if they were always walking on egg-shells or glass bottles. Let us endeavour to steer between these two extremes—not to allow ourselves to be so bound and hampered as to lose our spiritual liberty; and on the other hand not to disregard trifles, not to think lightly of those little things which when put together make such a very great thing in the end.

Now, having spoken thus much of your "walk," I want to call your attention to the *motive.* "As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and *to please God.*" We shall never walk rightly until we have the right motive in walking. God looks not merely at the action done, but also at the way in which it is done, at the motive as well as the effect; and if you, dear friends, are going to be real Christians, the sooner you grasp the real life-motive of the Christian the better will it be for you, the better for your spiritual walk, and the better for all with whom you may come into contact. Have you grasped it yet?

What are you going to live for? Have you asked yourself that question? Well, I dare say some of you have not. The little infant never thinks of asking itself such a question. As it begins to prattle, the first thought in its mind is not, "Why do I exist? what is the object of my life?" it is simply conscious of the enjoyment of life—life itself is such an enjoyment to the child. So spiritual life has its own joy. You feel that you are freed from that body of death, freed from that awful hell-thraldom, and you are just now rejoicing in your new life-energy. But what are you going to live for? Perhaps you may say, "I hope I shall live to be very happy." Do not make that the motive. It is a very blessed thing to have happiness, but that is not what we were sent into the world for. "Well," you may say, "I hope I shall live to get to heaven." But you are not sent into the world to get to heaven; a higher object than that lies before you. If you want to find out what is to be the object of your life, look at Jesus; and if you can find out what was the object of His life, you will be able to discover what should be the object of yours, because you are to be "made like Him;" you are His brethren—"He is the firstborn among many brethren," and all His brethren are to resemble Him in their motives as well as in their conduct. He did not live in order to win heaven. Heaven was His from all eternity. What was the life-motive of the Lord Jesus Christ? From first to last it was simply *to please the Father.* He came to do the Father's will, and He did it. You may do a man's will because you are his servant paid to do it, or because you feel it your duty to do it, and you are an honourable man; or you may do a person's will because you are in love with that person, and it gives you a thrill of delight to do whatever pleases him. Now, between these two classes of motives there lies just the difference between the law and the gospel. There are a great many Christians who begin with the gospel and end with the law. They begin by taking Christ for their Saviour, and then they go on by asking themselves, "What must I do? What is it my duty to do? Must I do this? Is that necessary? Is it necessary that I should work for Christ? and is it necessary that I should give up so much of my time to His service? and is it really necessary that I should make myself so peculiar? and is it necessary that I should so renounce the world?" And thus they go on trying to find out how little Christianity will possibly do, trying to reduce matters to the lowest possible

minimum, and to get to heaven with the least possible trouble. You and I are called to live the life that Christ lives. In preaching from this pulpit, I have often set before you God's claims upon you, and the thought may be suggested to your mind, "Why does God make these claims? would it not be kinder to leave me more free? But I am His property, and if He asserts His rights, I suppose I ought to yield!" Dear friend, you must feel that to admit such a thought is to become a slave rather than a son. But how is it to be silenced? By understanding why it is that God enforces His claims. The secret is, that His will, whatever it seems, is really your truest interest. He knows perfectly well that you can be fully happy only when you are living in accordance with His will. The devil did not think so. It would appear that he was a bright and exalted angel once; but he thought that with the grand intelligence and the marvellous powers that he possessed, if he could only do his own will, his happiness would be complete; but he made a great mistake, and his rebellion took him right down to hell. In a moment he constructed for himself a hell in his own heart. He left the central point of bliss, and is now wandering from God, getting farther and farther from his true orbit, and therefore more and more miserable. God is the one great centre of all true bliss. Supreme enjoyment is concentrated in His personality; and if that be the case, the nearer we get to Him the happier we shall be; and the only way in which we can get near to Him is by yielding up ourselves completely to His will. Hence this is the key to all true bliss.

But there are two ways in which we may seek to do God's will. It may be, as I was saying, either because we are bound to do it, or because it is right and it is our duty to do it, or because there is a necessity laid upon us, and we must do it lest we be sent to hell. Or, on the other hand, we may do it from love and a desire to glorify Him.

Now it is this thought that will suggest itself to a well-instructed mind as the true answer to the question, What is the great object of life? "Man," says the Westminster Confession, in memorable terms, "was made to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever;" but, mysterious though the assertion may seem, and the fact may be, God will be glorified, and His will shall be done, in spite of all the opposition of devils and of men. The Lord is working out His own sovereign purposes; and when the last great revelation is made, and the mystery of ages is cleared

up, it shall be seen before the eyes of wondering intelligences that not one thing of all the Divine purposes has failed, that the Sovereign of the universe has taken the very vessels of His wrath, and has made them the instruments for carrying out His designs; and it shall be acknowledged at last, by wondering spirits in glory, and by astonished fiends in hell, that God's wisdom is perfect, and "His ways past finding out."

Hence it may well be asked, How am I to glorify God? How am I to bring this sublime aim so within the range of my common experience, that it shall not be a mere high-sounding phrase indicating a grand but unintelligible consummation, but a practical motive-power seriously affecting my life? Let me suggest as a reply that we descend from the somewhat lofty and abstract expression glorify to the very intelligible word employed in our text—*please*. Yes, we all understand what that means, do we not? Amongst ourselves, in the various relations of life, we are constantly pleasing and being pleased. Is it possible that even thus we may please Him to whom we owe our being? Let us refer for a moment to the life of Jesus Himself; for in this respect, as in every other, He is our example. In the eighth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and the twenty-ninth verse, you will find these most precious words. They always seem to speak to me with fresh power. It is not so very often that Jesus opens up the inmost depths of that wondrous life of His. When He was in the world, surrounded by that strange element of isolation which belonged to Supreme Perfection amongst the imperfect, He said, "He that sent Me is with Me; the Father hath not left Me alone; *for I do always those things that please Him.*" From that marvellous life of Jesus the Father's eye was never averted. He saw Him a little Babe in the manger at Bethelehem; He saw Him in Joseph the carpenter's shop, working as hard as any apprentice lad ever worked. He saw Him in the Jordan, submitting to the ordinance of Baptism, and the Father's heart was so filled with delight, and so thrilled with rapture as He gazed on His obedient Son, that even the voice of the Almighty was heard on earth, and the eternal God exclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The joy of God in Christ knew no limit. Yet again He bore witness to Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, testifying that He was pleased with Jesus. Half Christ's career was done; He was moving onwards towards its close. In all those miracles that had been

performed, there had not been the slightest approach to ostentation; in all those words that had been spoken, there had not been the slightest approach to self-display. The life of Jesus up to that point was absolutely perfect, and the everlasting Father gives this attestation to it, and Simon Peter and James and John heard Him say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." Let that life speak; let that perfect life which is in continual obedience to the perfect will of the perfect God—let that life speak, "*hear ye Him!*" hear His unwavering obedience, hear His filial love, hear His constant self-denial, hear His renunciation of the world, hear His spotless purity: let this life speak, and tell what God's ideal of perfection is; it has spoken, and it speaks still.

Dear children of God, shall we just make this our life-object —*to please Him?* When you think of all your imperfections, and of all your sins, is it not a marvellous thing that God can find pleasure in you? Yet this is not too much to aspire to.

But there are two ways in which we may seek to please God. We often notice in earthly relationships that there is less of conscious anxiety to please where the love is deepest and the confidence most thoroughly established, while, on the other hand, strenuous efforts to give pleasure are frequently the result of misgivings as to the affection or the general disposition of the person whom they are designed to please.

I cannot help thinking that the same kind of thing may be said of our relationship towards God. There are some who really wish to please Him, and who go on working and praying with a view to this end, and ever and again they say to themselves, "I wonder whether this has pleased Him;" and they read their Bible and say, "I wonder if I have studied it in a way which will please Him." Now, the blessedness of our position lies in this, that you and I are at the present moment accepted in the Beloved, and that God places us in this position of perfect acceptance so that He can look upon us with complete complacency, just in order that we may go on to please Him. If I have any doubt in my own mind as to whether I am "approved in Christ," whether I do please God, or whether my life is such a one as that God can obtain no pleasure from it; then, from this want of confidence between Him and me, I shall regard Him with a kind of shrinking

feeling, as if He were such a tremendous Being that He could derive no satisfaction from anything I did, and as if I must try to win His favour as a dog endeavours to curry favour with his master. Christian devotion is not like the devotion of a dog to his master, but rather it is like the devotion of a child to his father. My little boy never doubts that I love him. He is as convinced of the fact as he is of his own existence.

When we know that we are accepted in the Beloved, then we cannot but devote ourselves to His service, because we love Him and because He loves us. So, when you make your offerings to Him, you may be conscious that they are very unworthy offerings, but remember that they are accepted in the Beloved; and while you present them to Him, you may be perfectly certain that they do please Him.

How it pleases a father to see the traits of filial affection developing themselves in his little boys! When he begins to see that they really have the proper feelings of sons towards him; that their love is increasing, and that they are willing to deny themselves to give the father pleasure; how it fills the father's heart with pleasure, not because he ever doubted their affections for a moment, but just because he delights to see their affection developing!

It is just the same with our Father in heaven. We do please Him, but let us always please Him. Jesus was guided from day to day by the Father's will. His mother comes to Him at the marriage feast, and seems to suggest, "Now is the time to make a display of your miraculous powers." He loved His mother dearly; we know that by the way in which he treated her when He was on the cross; but His reply is, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." And why was not His hour come? Because He was not going to be moved to work a miracle by His mother's natural entreaty. He could only work a miracle when He got the sign from the Father's presence. He will not anticipate God's will, but will be guided by it. He wanted to please God by His miracle. By-and-by the "hour comes." He gets the look, and then the miracle is done. Just so was it with the whole life of Jesus—"I do *always* the things that please Him."

Well, let us live to please Him. And let the thought of pleasing Him ever take precedence of the thought of pleasing ourselves. Let the first inquiry ever be, "will this please Him?"

and let each of us lay it down for certain, "what displeases Him can never really please me."

But shall I tell you one way in which you will please Him? You are pleasing Him much if you are trusting Him a great deal. I do not think that anything ever pleases God more than to see His children trust Him. We cannot please Him when we doubt Him. To doubt Him is to cast such a reflection upon His love. Some of you are in poor circumstances, it may be, and are passing through a great deal of trial in your business; if you go about with your head hanging down and your heart drooping, and say, "I am going all wrong, and God won't hear me,"—that is not pleasing Him. That is as much as to say to the world, "I have a God, but He is one that I cannot trust; I do not know what He will do with me, but I am afraid He will leave me in a miserable position before long."

"I shall one day perish by the hand of mine enemy," said David; but I do not think that he pleased God when he said it. And what was the result of his saying that? He had to go over to Achish, king of Gath, and he got into so many entanglements that he could not extricate himself without telling a great many lies, and thus disgracing himself—and that all came from his not trusting God. He should have said, "I have got the everlasting God for my security and my strength." David knew that well enough, for he has left it on record in his Psalms. He says, "Thou art my hiding-place." If that were so, why did he not go and hide in God, instead of going and hiding in the court of Achish, and there bringing himself into disgrace, instead of pleasing God? If you want to please Him, launch out into God. Take your pen and scratch the word "can't" from your vocabulary, and say, with St. Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Trust Him in the dark as well as in the light; trust Him in sorrow as well as in joy; trust Him in the hour of difficulty as well as in the day of prosperity; trust Him when you are fighting with the devil, as well as when you are dwelling in a state of blessed peace; trust Him when the shades of death close around you; trust Him as the world recedes from beneath your feet; trust Him as you stand before the throne of judgment; trust Him throughout the days of the years of eternity. And so you will please Him, as He will look upon you, and will see all His own work wrought in you, His own will perfected in you; and He will be able to say of you, in measure,

as He said of His own Son, in the fulness of His heart, "This poor fallen man, this poor frail girl, this is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

One word more, and I have done. St. Paul not only tells the Thessalonian converts how they are to walk, and what is the high Christian motive of pleasing God, but he also sets before them *the law of Christian progress.* What is that? "*So ye would abound more and more.*"

There are a great many Christians who look back to the days of their spiritual childhood, and say, "How happy I was then! How pleasant it was to praise, how easy to pray! With what rapture I listened to the Word! Those were days of joy, and life, and power, and vigour. I have not got the power I once had, though I hope I am not altogether a backslider." There are some people whose religion gets less and less, until at last it becomes such a tiny spark that you can hardly tell whether there is any left. Sometimes there is nothing but a little smoking ember which seems fast dying out. But, dear friends, do not let your religious experience be less and less. We are called to steady progress in our religious life, until we grow up to the fulness of the measure of the stature of Jesus Christ, filled with all His fulness, beautiful with all His perfection, shining in the light of God, and carrying about with us the blessed savour of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever we go *more and more;* stronger in prayer, more zealous in work, more eager in faith, brighter our hopes, and firmer our assurances, and more sincere our devotions—*more and more, more and more,* until at last the shadows flee away, and the light of the new day bursts upon our enraptured soul; and then the saying will hold good in all the experience of eternity, we shall be ever getting nearer and yet never reaching the centre: but throughout eternity it will be still "more and more, more and more"—more of heaven, more of purity, more of happiness, more of God—He who filleth all things will take us up higher and higher into blessed fellowship with Himself, and thus shall we attain unto that infinite blessedness which belongs to those who are one with Him for all eternity, even as the Divine Father is one with His own beloved Son.

XIV.

The Ministry of the Gift.*

"As every one hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."—1 PETER iv. 10.

IN this passage, my dear friends, we have brought before us a principle of the very widest application. Naturally our thoughts turn first to that unspeakable gift for which above everything else we exclaim, "Thanks be unto God!" and then to that other all-important gift which flowed from that first one, the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. But this verse, though it suggests these great gifts to our mind, does not even refer specially to them. Its primary reference is evidently to those specific good gifts which were bestowed upon the primitive Church in order to enable her to fulfil her most responsible mission in the world. Nay, further, it seems to me that the words are capable of an even more extended application than this. Not only is the Apostle speaking here of those specific spiritual gifts which were so liberally bestowed upon the early Church—and which, thank God, are not withdrawn from the Church in our own day; but he is speaking of what we may call external gifts—those gifts which belong to many of us in virtue of the position in life which we hold, the circumstances with which we are surrounded, or even the natural talents and disposition which God may have given us.

In all these respects the universal rule is applicable, as every man hath received, not *the* gift, as we read in our version, but *a* gift—there is no article in the original—as every man hath received a gift, whatever the gift may be, even so let him minister the same, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God. And when we take this view of the matter, we find that we have a law which applies equally to the exercise of the

* This address was delivered at the Mildmay Park Conference in the year 1872.

highest apostolic function, on the one hand, and to the gift of so little as a cup of cold water to one of Christ's little ones, on the other; a law which extends over the whole range of our experience, sanctifying the most holy of life's offices, and not less sanctifying those which, in common parlance, we are wont to speak of as secular. For, with the Christian, there is nothing secular; his whole life is one grand sacrifice to the God who dwells in him, and who has consecrated him as a priest in God's temple, to offer spiritual sacrifices to Him. We are called upon, then, by the Apostle, in this particular text, first of all to consider ourselves as gifted in all those little things which, perhaps, we are apt to think too little about. "Use hospitality one to another, without grudging," a very simple, and, one would almost have thought, a needless command, when we consider how ready was the hospitality of those early days. "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord," says one, "come into my house." This seems but a little thing to enjoin; and yet, coupled with this direction to use hospitality one to another, comes this grand text, upon which we are now meditating, and in which so much seems to be contained that we may well continue to meditate upon it long after our meeting of to-day has come to an end. "As every man hath received a gift," whatever the gift may be, whether it be an earthly gift or some spiritual grace, "even so let him minister the same, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God."

Oh, what a halo does this cast around our daily life, my brethren! When we behold it from this point of view, the whole tissue of life, so to speak, is sanctified; everything becomes one of God's manifold graces. Thus, who would ever have thought of finding money—that which our Lord calls the "mammon of unrighteousness"—appearing under the title of "grace," in God's word? And yet I believe we shall find, by referring to the eighth chapter of the second Corinthians, that this is actually the case; for there St. Paul, speaking of the grace of God which had been bestowed on the churches in Macedonia, uses this expression. First of all, you see, he speaks of a grace of God which was given to the Church of Macedonia; and then, in the fourth verse, he goes on to say, "Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive *the grace*"—"gift," we render it, but the word in the original is exactly the same as that used in the first verse—"that we would receive the grace, and take upon us the fellow-

ship of the ministering to the saints;" so that even that which has been justly called "the mammon of unrighteousness," the love of which is described as "the root of all evil," even that, when it comes under this sanctifying law, is not only a good thing, but may actually be described as one of God's graces, a gift from Him, which, being put into our hands, and used by us for His glory, becomes a grace working through us, and communicating the blessed influences of God's divine purpose to those with whom we come in contact. Surely, if this be so with money, it must be so with everything else; and therefore I would say, brethren, let us be very careful that we do not allow ourselves to reason as, in the parable, the man who had received only one talent did. Let us not say within our hearts, "It is only a little thing I can do; few are my advantages, slender is my influence, meagre are my opportunities." When we thus speak, we are really doing just what Jeremiah warned Baruch the scribe not to do. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." In seeking these great things we may be sure we are generally seeking them *for ourselves*, although we may be professing to seek them for God. It is easy for us to say, "If I were in a more exalted position—if I possessed greater talents or wider influence, I should be able to do a better and a nobler work for God." Ah, but, in that very desire, how much of self is there! If God knew that you were just the right man for that particular position, fit to exercise that higher gift or that vaster influence, surely, in His infinite wisdom, He would have placed you accordingly. But is it not obvious that God, in placing you just where you are, has put you where you ought to be? We men are always making mistakes in this respect. When we have to select an agent for this or that work, ever and again we find that we have made a wrong choice, and that if we had made a different appointment we might have done far better. But God makes no mistakes; He knows exactly what we are fitted for; and if we are merely a doorkeeper in His house, a hewer of wood, or a drawer of water, we may be sure it is our proper work; and let us use His gift for it in humble, adoring gratitude that God permits us to perform even the slightest office that may indicate the love which we bear to Him.

And here I notice that grand, universal law obtains, which our blessed Lord Himself laid down when He says, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

How many of us are there, brethren, who are praying—and earnestly praying, it may be—and longing and yearning for deeper, and higher, and nobler things! We want to be in a position of greater spiritual power, we want to do a more thorough and lasting work for God's glory; and yet, when we come to examine ourselves, and to look at our lives in the light of truth, what do we find? Little duties left undone, little powers allowed to slumber, little opportunities wantonly thrown away, little blessings unrecognized; and thus, as we go on, still unfaithful in these little things, God cannot trust us with power. Before God puts power into our hands, He must prepare us for that power which we desire. Were we to obtain the power which some of us would like to have, without having first been disciplined for that power, surely our very power would do far more harm than good. God never will try so dangerous an experiment. First of all, He gives us what He knows to be compatible with our state of spiritual development; puts us in the position which He sees to be—even though it seems not so to us—exactly suitable for us; and then, when He has done that, He acts upon us by His Holy Spirit, inducing us to be faithful in that which is least; and when we are, then He says to each one in turn, "Friend, come up higher." A wider door is opened to us, a more important work is to be done; but it is only as we are faithful to the little gifts that we can count upon receiving those vaster treasures from His liberal hand.

It has often been pointed out—and it seems to me a very important consideration—that the Lord has given *every* true Christian some gift or other. St. Paul, in that chapter in the Epistle to the Corinthians in which he deals specifically with this subject of spiritual gift, uses the same word, *every one*, which occurs in this particular passage. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to *every man* to profit withal." We have, every one of us, our own gift; but I do not think that all of us know what our gift is. I believe that there are a great many Christians to whom God has given a gift; but it is a latent gift, they are not aware that they possess it, and they will not be aware that they possess it until they come to God for light upon that particular subject. If we are leading an indolent, careless, self-indulgent life, there may sleep within us all kinds of powers, of the very existence of which we shall know nothing whatever; but if, by the Spirit of God, we stir ourselves up,

and ask ourselves, "What would God have me to do? what is my life's work?" then, no sooner have we found out what our work is, than we shall also find out what our gift is; for I believe that there are just as many gifts as works. When the Apostle gives a catalogue of different gifts, he names gifts which were proper to that particular period of the development of the Christian Church,—the gift of tongues, the gift of healing, the gift of miracles. All these were singularly appropriate to the state of the Church at that particular era; but I do not believe that the Apostle intended to give an exhaustive catalogue of gifts, any more than he gave a complete catalogue of the various members of our body. He speaks of the eye, and he speaks of the hand, but he does not go through the whole list of all the various portions of our physical system; and in the same way, I apprehend, he only names some of the more prominent gifts which were bestowed upon the Church at that particular time. I believe that, as the ages roll along, and the history of Christ's Church proceeds, there are ever and again being discovered new branches of Christian activity, new *works;* and, answering to those new works, I believe that there are new gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit of God, all coming to us from one and the same Spirit, but gifts, nevertheless, differing in form, and capable of being used with profit towards those particular works to which, from time to time, our attention is called. It is not so many years ago since there was no such thing as a Sunday-school in our land; not so long since, we had no Bible-women or Scripture-readers. How much has been done in recent days, in the way of attempting to improve the position of the prisoner, to raise the fallen, to lay hold upon the degraded and destitute children of our streets! All these are so many different branches of work, and they all require their own specific gift; and to every man is given his own particular gift to profit withal. God has given it to us with a view to a proper and specific end; and what you and I have to do is to inquire first of all before God, "Lord, what is it that Thou hast called me to do? what member of Thy body am I? what is the function that belongs to me as a member of that body?" And if we make this a matter of earnest inquiry and anxious prayer, let us have not the least doubt that God will make it plain to us, and that, whatever our circumstances may be, however cramped and fettered we may seem to be by our own

surroundings, there will, nevertheless, be found something—it may be a very little, but a very important something—wherein we may exercise our gift, and glorify our God.

Brethren, not only so, but we have a word from St. Paul to which we shall do very well to take heed. Do you remember what he says to the Corinthians, who were very much exercised upon the subject of gifts? He says, "covet." That is a very strange word for an apostle to use. Elsewhere he classes covetousness with idolatry; but covetousness, like every other vice, answers to a certain radical tendency of our nature, which may either have a vicious development, on the one hand, if acted upon by the spirit of evil, or it may have a holy development, on the other hand, if acted upon by the Spirit of God. What is there to answer to the vice of covetousness on the opposite side? A holy desire, an aspiration after spiritual progress and spiritual profit. *Covet earnestly;* as the miser covets his gold, as the man of the world covets the object of his ambition, so you, Christians, covet earnestly the best gift. With worldly men, their covetousness always embraces the idea of selfishness, because in order to aggrandize themselves they have to rob somebody else; but it is not so, thank God, with us. We have an infinite treasury to draw from, and God delights to see us rich.

In the first chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians we have the description of a very desirable state of things in this respect. We find St. Paul thanking God on behalf of the Christians at Corinth for their wealth in spiritual gifts; he says, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ, that in everything ye are *enriched*"—let us lay that word upon our hearts—"enriched by Him in all utterance"—I understand that to mean the knowledge of the word of God—"and in all knowledge"—the knowledge of God Himself—"even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in *no gift*, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here was a wealthy church; and you and I, dear friends, ought to be wealthy Christians. Now, just as in this world the various grades of society differ from each other in respect of wealth, so it is, I believe, in the spiritual world. You have your *affluent Christians*, who have found their fulness in their God; Christians who know in their own blessed experience what

it is to have a golden key to that infinite treasury, and to draw from its treasures in the hour of need! Blessed be God that some such still exist! You will find them diffident, self-distrustful men; men who know their own weakness, but who make proof of God; men who have found that God never fails them that put their trust in Him, and who march forward therefore with a firm step; their eye is bright, their heart is bounding with joy, and their faces tell us that in all things they are fully supplied and equipped for the work of the battle of life. Yes, there are wealthy Christians; but ah! too few of them. There are only a few millionaires in England, and I am afraid there are only a few spiritual millionaires; only a few like Joshua and Caleb, who follow the Lord fully. And what is their reward? They leave the ten spies, who went with them, corpses in the wilderness. They leave that perverse generation who refused to believe in the wealth of God's own love, and the faithfulness of God's promise; they leave them all behind; and their God gives them an *inheritance*, and they enter into the land of which they themselves bear witness that it is an exceeding good land, "flowing with milk and honey;" the grapes of Eschol are there, and the figs and the pomegranates; the smile of God rests upon it, and the fertilizing dew of heaven is ever present there. Ah! blessed, happy they who are ranked amongst God's nobility, and are in the full enjoyment, even here on earth, of heaven's boundless wealth.

Then there are the *Christians in moderate circumstances*, who are not absolutely poor; and yet they have not found out how rich they are. There are times when it is very well with them, and there are other times when they do not feel quite so well off. And, again, there are *Christians in precarious circumstances*, oscillating between poverty and a tolerable maintenance; sometimes they have got enough, and sometimes they feel as if they were ready to starve. And, last, there are your *spiritual paupers*,—beggar Christians, if we are to call them Christians at all,—always leaning upon some friendly crutch, always looking out for a crumb of comfort from some wealthy Christian's table; but with no resources in their God, or with so slender a knowledge of their resources that it almost amounts to no knowledge at all; and thus they go on leading a life of continuous beggary. Sometimes you would think them ready to die, and then their sickly life gets faintly revived. If you will turn to the book of Deuteronomy, I think

you will find a typical representation of this miserable class. Turn to the twenty-third chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, and read the blessings of the tribes. Who is it that comes first? "Let Reuben live, and not die;" and, as some ancient manuscripts have it, "and Simeon, his men shall be few." You will notice the name of Simeon is not mentioned in this list of blessings, and the probability is that it was originally inserted here, and somehow or other has dropped out of our text. "Let Reuben live, and not die;" that was the best thing that Moses could hope for him. He was in such a dying state already. If you look at the two enumerations of the tribes, you will find that of Reuben is already beginning to go back; instead of their numbers having increased, they have considerably diminished. And when you come to the tribe of Simeon, the numbers are almost cut down by one half. That tribe had been very distinguished in its rebellious opposition against God; and the result was—down, down it was going, until, when the lawgiver came to give his fatherly blessing, the very best thing he could say of these two tribes was, "Let Reuben live, and not die," and poor Simeon! "his men shall be few." He is withering away before our very eyes! And how remarkably was this fulfilled in the history of Reuben,—settling on the wilderness side of Jordan, becoming less and less Israelitish, the very first of all the tribes to be swept away. And when the critical hour of Israel's history came, where was Reuben? "For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart;" but, nevertheless, "Reuben abode amongst the sheepfolds, and listened to the bleatings of the flock." There was the secret, the history and mystery of it all. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." When we allow ourselves to be blown about by every wind, now looking at the world, now following self, and now for a moment turning our thoughts towards our God, the curse, the blight of spiritual poverty is upon us. And if Reuben does not die down to the roots, that is the very best thing you can hope for him. Go on a little further, and by way of contrast read the blessing of Joseph. "Of Joseph he said, Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains; . . . for the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush, let the

blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh." Here is the contrast. But let us take it home to our own hearts, and let us ask ourselves, Are we, as St. Paul could truthfully say of the Corinthian Church, are we enriched with every spiritual gift, and thus in a position to bestow a gift, by God's grace, upon others?

This leads me to call your attention to that word "as." There is a law of proportion here. "*As* every one hath received a gift, even *so* let him minister the same." You and I can only give large sums of money to God's service, as God makes us wealthy. One poor widow comes with her farthings, and offers them for the Lord's acceptance, while a rich man lays down his thousands. It is so in earthly things, and surely it must be so in spiritual things. When we covet earnestly the best gifts, God gives them to us, if we covet them and seek them in the right way; and the result of our possessing these best gifts is that we are proportionately able to distribute spiritual blessings wherever we go. "As every one hath received a gift, even so let him minister the same." If we are living in the fulness of God, then the promise of Jesus Christ shall be fulfilled in our case,—"out of our belly shall flow rivers of living water." If, on the other hand, we are straitened in ourselves, and the gracious influences of God are scarcely allowed to descend upon our souls, then what wonder that our life should be unprofitable, and that we should scarcely to any degree minister the gift, simply because we receive it so scantily.

But when I look again at that word "as," another thought occurs to me. It strikes me that we have not only there a law of proportion, we have also a law of quality, qualifying the bestowal of the gift. The gift is bestowed by the hand of Him who is an example to us in giving, as well as in every other respect. Now, let us dwell just for a moment upon that. As we receive, so we are to give. I need scarcely remind you of that well-known passage, (yet how apt we are to forget it!) "Freely ye have received, freely give." Here we learn the true character of Christian charity. Dear friends, there ought to be a certain God-like liberality in our efforts to distribute

the favours with which God loads us. We ought to go through the world with open-handed generosity and spiritual benevolence, stinting our measure to none; for freely we have received, and freely we ought to give. But further, that word "as" seems to teach us more than this. Not only have we received the gift freely, but we have received it wisely; that is to say, God, in bestowing the gift upon us, exercised a wisdom which belongs to His own nature, preparing us for the reception of the gift, and bestowing upon us just the gift appropriate to our state. Are we not too often very clumsy in this respect? We get into a kind of stereotyped way of working for God. We go into a meeting, it may be, where there are anxious souls seeking peace. We go to one, and ask some customary question; we pass on to the next, and repeat the same; and so, perhaps, with a third; and yet these persons may be in totally different states of soul. Or, it may be, in giving advice we have our own prescribed method, which we have found to be often useful, and we have a general idea that it will be the right thing in nine cases out of ten; and we go on applying it like a quack doctor, who has got one single prescription for every ailment. But what a delicate observance of human character had Christ. He meets every man according to the state of his own soul, turning sharply round upon Nicodemus with, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" drawing out the heart of the woman at the well of Samaria, by asking a favour from her; whenever He comes in contact with one He is going to benefit, suiting His means to His end, and preparing the recipient for the gift which He intends to bestow. I cannot but feel that, if we would minister the gift as the Lord would have us minister it, we require greater delicacy of touch, keener discernment of human character, and a fuller and deeper appreciation of God's different methods of dealing with different souls, than are commonly to be met with.

We are called, then, to minister the gift as we have received it. And, let me say, we are called to minister, first of all, to the Lord Himself. This seems to me a thought that we ought not to let pass lightly. We are not only called to minister to each other, but we are still called to minister to the Lord. If you will turn to the Acts, you will find this truth brought out in a very remarkable passage in the thirteenth chapter, first verse: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain

prophets and teachers, as Barnabas and Simeon," and so forth; and in the second verse, "As they *ministered to the Lord*, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Now, I cannot think that this ministering unto the Lord was the usual evangelistic or ministerial work which was carried on in the Church or in the world. Considering the connection of the phrase with the fasting spoken of here, and with the call of Barnabas and Saul for their work by the Holy Ghost, I can only believe that the word from which we get our word "liturgy" indicates a continuous series of devotional exercises ministered unto the Lord. I wish that we grasped this idea more; and I cannot help thinking it would do a very great deal to deepen evangelical piety if we were more fully conscious of the necessity and privilege of *worship*. It is one thing to come and hear a profitable sermon; it is one thing to offer a fervent prayer; and it is another thing to cast ourselves down with Angels and Archangels, with all the company of heaven, and to laud and magnify His glorious name, to offer up ourselves, body, soul, spirit—all that we have, and all that we are—to the holy service of our Lord. Is it not a wonderful and blessed thought, that although He sits on yonder throne, adored by Seraphim and Cherubim, yet He condescends to accept this ministry of love, just as much in our own day as He accepted it of old, when offered by the ready hands of a Martha, or the willing heart of a Mary? And the mention of this last name brings another thought to my mind. Just notice Mary's services, notice her ministry unto the Lord as contrasted with Martha's ministry. They both ministered to the Lord; Martha so busy, rushing about the house with that very haste and hurry which too frequently characterises the lives of professing Christians, all eagerness to have everything in order, that the feast might be acceptable, and the Master well served. It was all very well as far as it went; but, while she is rushing to and fro, her sister is sitting at Jesus' feet, looking up into His face, gazing and listening, and listening and loving; and the winged moments fly, and still she is there. Is she not ministering? Ah! far more truly than her sister; for who shall tell the value of that sympathy to the human heart of Jesus, that so seldom met with it here? Look on a little further, and there comes a second feast; and this time Lazarus is sitting amongst them that are at meat. Jesus is by the table. There is Martha still

busy, always ready with her hand. Mary steals in beside Him with a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious; and she anoints the feet of Jesus, and wipes His feet with her hair, and the house is filled with the odour of the ointment, while the heart of Christ is filled with the fragrance of that act of love. "Then said Judas, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence?" Why not go out and work for the Lord? What is the use of spending so much time in ministering unto Him directly; cannot you be satisfied with ministering to Him indirectly, by giving a cup of cold water to the fainting, or your penny to the poor? Nay, says our Lord; let her alone; she is well employed; she is doing the very thing of all others which I delight in her doing; let her alone. "Against the day of my burial hath she kept this."

Dear Christians, as we have received the gift then, as the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us, even so let us minister the same; and let me say that there is no ministry that will please God so fully as the offering which is made by Himself dwelling within us to Himself. In proportion as Jesus Christ is formed in us, and the Spirit dwells in power within us, so that we through the Spirit present our ministry to Christ, and offer the service, not merely of our own bodies, but of Jesus dwelling in our bodies, back to the Father,—in proportion as we do this will our service be the perfection of worship, and our ministry what Jesus Himself will receive and delight in. Blessed thought! that we by the Lord may minister to the Lord.

And if we can minister to the Lord, we can also minister to each other. A word or two about that. Let us take care how we minister to each other. It requires delicacy to deal with an unconverted man; I think it requires far greater delicacy for us, who are God's children, to minister effectively to one another. I sometimes think of David's words (they are one of the few ironical passages in the Bible, but none the less powerful or inspired on that account), where he exclaims, "Let not their precious balms break my head!" Ah! when a Christian is spoken to by a fellow-Christian in a censorious, uncharitable spirit—when there is an unfriendly gesture, or a hypercritical tone, or an arrogancy of demeanour, as though the person intending to act a friendly part were putting himself upon an altogether higher platform,—"I have attained to something thou knowest nothing about, I have got into deep waters that thou canst not sound, and thou hast been lagging

so far behind that thou canst scarcely understand the language I make use of,"—when there is that kind of spirit between Christians, not, of course, expressed, but nevertheless more or less influencing the heart, there is sure to be a wound left behind; and, although good may be done, it will not be done as Jesus would have it done, and the Master peradventure may be grieved in His grieved servant.

Let me add a few words about the responsibility of ministering to those who know not God. Do you remember the story of the four lepers at the gate of Samaria; how they sat there in their starvation and poverty, through weary hours of hopelessness, where all was dark, dreary? At last they made up their minds, "If we perish, we perish;" they came to the camp of Syria, and found the table spread in what had been the wilderness, and a royal banquet awaiting them, such as God alone, under the circumstance, could have provided. Do you remember how they went from one tent to another, and carried forth raiment and gold and silver, and hid it, and came back again and again to do the same? But while they are carrying on this work of selfish aggrandisement, there rose up another thought in their mind: "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Now I ask, are there not many Christians in this hall, who if they spoke out the honest, plain truth from their hearts, would say, "These very words describe my life"? This day is a day of good tidings; the Gospel is being preached as it has never been preached before since apostolic times; souls are flocking to the cross of Christ; the glories of God are being revealed to numbers who have hitherto sat in darkness; and amidst all this work, this motion of the Spirit, this latter-day rain, what am I doing for my God? It is a day of good tidings, and my lips are closed, and my heart is cold, and my love seems paralysed. How comes it to pass that I can look on and see my fellow-sinners starving for lack of that which I possess, without so much as stirring myself up to go and tell them the glad tidings of great joy, that the feast is ready, and that they have only to come and be welcomed at the table which God has spread?"

Ah! thou doest not well, my silent brother. "But I preach by my example." The lepers preached by their example. Where were they? The watchman at the gate of Samaria might very well have said, "What is become of those four

leprous men? I saw them go out into the twilight; I had better go and see if they have succeeded in their mad enterprise." He might have said so, and thus they undoubtedly were preaching by example. But this did not satisfy the consciences of these four men. Ah! "we do not well," let us go back; let us tell the news and spread the tidings, and as every one of us has received a gift, the highest of all gifts, the gift of everlasting life which comes to us through the crucified Saviour,—as every one of us hath received the gift freely, fully, mercifully, from a heart moved with compassion and a hand directed by wisdom, even so let us go forth, looking up to Him to set our heart all on fire with the same flame of love that glows within His own, and minister the same. Let us go forth, not to tell a dolorous tale, and try to rob poor empty-hearted worldlings of the hollow pleasures which at the present moment they fancy they enjoy; not to say to them, "You must give up everything;" but let us go forth, with the Gospel message upon our lips, to tell that this is the day of glad tidings —"All things are ready;" come to the Gospel feast!

Just two words in conclusion. *As* we received the gift. We received it, dear friends, at the cost of Calvary. Nothing short of the blood, the death of Jesus, purchased that gift for us. Oh, then, shall we stick at self-denial? Depend upon it we shall never administer the gift as God expects us to administer it, unless we too are willing to do what Jesus did, to empty ourselves of all, to turn our backs upon all carnal considerations of self-interest, to take up our cross as He did; and, following in His steps, we shall find the power of self-denial which wrought through Jesus working also through us. And one last word. The exercise of such gifts as these, if carried out in the right spirit, so far from puffing us up, will really humble us. When Eliezer, Abraham's steward, met Rebecca at the well, and put the gifts upon her hand, do you remember how it is recorded that the man bowed his head and worshipped, awe-struck at the success which God had given him? So was it, I well remember, with one whom I have ever regarded as the holiest man I was ever privileged to know, at the close of his life of ministry. Just before he was laid upon his dying bed, he had been praying for some hours with a seeking soul, whom he had at last been permitted to lead into peace and joy in believing; and on returning to his home, weak and prostrate in body, but with his heart very full, he threw himself on a seat

as one overpowered, and sobbed like a child. When asked by my dear father what it was that ailed him, he replied, with the tears still running down his cheeks, "Ah, to think that God should save a soul by such a poor miserable sinner as I am!"

XV.

The Messenger Faithful to his Mission.

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.—AMOS vii. 14, 15.

HOLY Scripture seldom teaches more impressively than when it teaches by contrast. Speaking this morning to Christian workers, I wish to present a contrast between two classes of religious workers—a contrast suggested by this passage. The first of these two classes I will describe as professional religious workers, and they are represented by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, a man who seems to have occupied an exalted position in the ecclesiastical world of his day. His post was somewhat similar, I suppose, to that of a court chaplain, or even a leading dignitary of the Church in our own day. He was, I suppose, a leader of popular religious opinion, and a man of considerable political power. He stands before us as a thorough specimen of the religious man of the world,—a man of the world thoroughly in sympathy with the worldly and idolatrous king of Israel, while at the same time he is ready to be condescending and patronizing to the "over-zealous herdsman of Tekoa." He winks at the idolatrous practices of the court, and assists at pagan ceremonials. It was a sufficient argument with him, "It is the king's chapel," yet at the same time he would, no doubt, have been greatly insulted by any reflection on his religious character. Let us look more closely at this professional religionist, and endeavour to form an accurate estimate of his character and modes of action. Like most

worldly men, he has got two sides to his character. He sends an intimation to the king of Israel, that the land is not able to bear this humble man, and suggests that Amos should be got rid of; thus trying to ruin Amos behind his back, while at the same time he addresses himself to the prophet in terms of friendly advice, as one apparently most solicitous for his welfare, though all the while the only thing he cared for was to get the objectionable enthusiast out of the way. To the prophet himself he is all that is courteous, affable, and agreeable, and is apparently most considerate and well-intentioned.

His advice seems most rational and sound; he does not in any way disparage the character or the message of this humble man of God; on the contrary, he dignifies Amos with the title of "Thou seer," and is ready enough to admit his call to the prophetic office; only he seems to suggest, "Amos, you are the right man in the wrong place; really, you are a man of great gifts and manifest earnestness, but here you are not appreciated. It is very unfortunate that you should waste your time here; go across the border into Judea, and there you will be welcomed. We don't want to do you any harm, but you are out of your proper position. You are doing no good here, while there you will be able to carry on your work with popularity, and will gain sympathisers. Don't you see that by remaining here you are becoming obnoxious to Jeroboam? The thing is not seemly; this is the king's court and the king's chapel, and it is not etiquette to remain here, when your presence and your prophecies are distasteful to the king. Go across the border, where you may prophesy to your heart's content. They will put you in the way of dignities and emoluments over yonder; they will honour you as a martyr and a hero; whereas here you can only incur odium and risk. Now be wise, and take a word of friendly advice in time, before things become more serious."

No one could seem kinder and more polite than this man of the world was; at the same time he has a deep hatred to Amos —deep as the hatred of Cain to his brother Abel, or of Saul to David—just because his very presence seemed a reproach to his own actual irreligion and ungodliness. That is the one side of the picture. In every age there have been such men—conventional religionists, whose creed is compromise, and whose maxim is, "Sail with the stream;" and, I fear, such are not wanting in our own day—men whose religious profession produces no

change in their private life, neither does it distinguish them from the world surrounding them. These are the Christians who find themselves quite happy in the midst of the frivolities of worldly society; whose religion is toned down to suit the feeling of the society in which they mingle. They can command more or less of it as the occasion seems to demand, or the company they are thrown with to expect. They can be orthodox with the religious, and sceptical with the literary, grave with the earnest, and frivolous with the profane,—all things, indeed, to all men; but from such versatility may the Lord deliver us. Persons of this class have in every age been the deadliest enemies of God's truth. These professors have done more harm than all the open sceptics, scoffers, and infidels that ever lived. Better far the bitterest outspoken enemy, than the smooth-spoken, false friend.

Then, in the second place, side by side with this professional religious worker, and in striking contrast with him, we have here a man whose heart the Lord had touched. Look at him more closely. Observe, first, his surroundings. Amos lived at a time when a gleam of temporary prosperity and peace had lit up the darkness of the history of the ten tribes of Israel. Their history was indeed a melancholy one from beginning to end—from the time of their violent separation from Judah, down to the time of their being carried into captivity. But in all this dark and disastrous period the reign of the second Jeroboam was perhaps the most prosperous and hopeful interval to outward appearance. Nor was the idolatry of that day the gross and revolting thing which in the form of Baal worship had disgraced previous reigns.

No doubt the worldly men of that day were in high spirits about things in general. Commerce was prosperous, business was flourishing, the statesmen had easy minds, all was going on well. At such a time as this the man of God was charged with a message to God's people; and he appears as an unwelcome visitor at the very centre of the idolatrous system of worship which it was his mission to denounce.

The high priest of Bethel, and the other great men, leaders of the religious world and of the State, were terrified lest he should succeed in turning the hearts of the people, and producing something like a popular revival of true religion. They shrunk from making a martyr of him, lest they should arouse anything like religious fanaticism on the part of the people;

but they use all their influence to induce him to leave the country. No doubt they would willingly have resorted to more stringent measures, but that they could not divest themselves of a sort of lingering half-superstitious fear of the God whom the man represented.

What was it that they were afraid of in his message? They may have feared lest the people should be roused to think, and to remember that they had left their God and His worship; and were the people to go up to Jerusalem to worship as of old, they might very soon have thought of a reunion with Judah. But there was a deeper and more personal cause for their fear of this simple man than this. They felt the inward uneasiness which hollow profession must ever experience when brought into contrast with genuine piety and the power of the Holy Ghost. The presence and testimony of Amos condemned them; the people felt the power of his message, for he "commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," and they themselves were inwardly convicted. So the seer was a "dangerous man," and the only thing was to get him out of the way. The priest Amaziah, therefore, approaches him with a very conciliatory manner, suggesting that he should flee away to the land of Judah, and expressing much solicitude as to his personal safety.

Now, observe, there would have been nothing necessarily sinful in following this advice. Of course there is sin in everything we do that is not in accordance with the Divine will; but I mean no actual transgression of God's command, no sin in the ordinary sense of the word. He might well have reasoned with himself somewhat after this fashion: "I can find no sympathy in this land of Israel; the whole tide of state power is against me; I am in danger every moment. If I were to cross the border into Judea, as this kindly man Amaziah advises, I should be safe, and find plenty of adherents."

He might easily have arrived at this conclusion, and with much truth. The presence of the prophet in Jerusalem would have been hailed with the warmest sympathy and welcome; he would have gained a wide popularity, and would have been an object of general admiration; all the more that he was an exile for his faith from the neighbouring state of Israel.

We are all liable to be influenced by such motives. We don't like to stand alone, beset with continual difficulties arising from our position. Amos was a man of like passions

with ourselves, and would naturally feel the full force of such considerations. No doubt he would have yielded to them had he not been walking in the Spirit, and it is only this that will keep any of us at the post of duty. If the position we occupy be a lawful one, God has placed us where we are for some wise purpose; and although it may entail a good deal of annoyance, and even suffering, surely it is better to bear the cross God has given us, than weakly to run away to avoid or escape something unpleasant in our experience. We are often tempted in this way to run away from the cross given us to bear, flattering ourselves all the time that in doing so we are seeking opportunities of greater usefulness.

This is often one of the first temptations in a Christian's path; the young convert is confronted by it on entering the new life; his old companions, or those with whom his lot in business or in home-life is cast, frequently make things so "hot" for him that he is tempted to retreat from so unfavourable a position, or to conclude that it is impossible to stand up for his Master there. But the Lord's message to such is, "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; . . . to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and my words, *in the midst* of an evil and adulterous generation, of him will the Son of man be ashamed."

We cannot get away from the cross; it is the law of true Christian experience. Satan will always entice us to run away, even as Jonah did of old. But what did he gain by it? By running away from God, he only plunged into fresh difficulties and trials; and at last, after passing through agony and danger, had to come back to the very work from which he had flinched. How much better would it have been for him to have gone at first where God sent him, than to have to learn obedience in that strange school to which he was dismissed! And so will it be with us, if we forsake the post God has called us to occupy. How many imagine they will be more happy, and have more peace to serve their God, if they only take their own way. They wish to follow their own plans, because they promise most pleasure, least pain; and lo! like Jonah, they find themselves tossed on a sea of perplexity, until God brings them back to His will by His own gentle discipline. Following our own wishes will only bring us under dark clouds and into storms of adversity. If we are truly God's people, He will in

mercy bring us through these experiences, in order that we may learn to accept His yoke, which is, in reality, easy, and His burden, which is light; but why should we court the rod?

My dear friends, the first invitation to us is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and find rest from our sins and sorrows. The next invitation is given when we have come to Jesus as our Saviour, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is only as we willingly take His yoke upon us, that we can truly find rest to our souls, for His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Now let us consider the temptations of the prophet a little more in detail. And, first of all, observe *immunity from danger is promised.* He is in a state of continual danger where he is. The king of Israel was one of the old stamp of monarchs. He had life and death in his hands; and this continual provocation from Amos was enough to tempt him to use his power. In fact, the man was risking his life by remaining at Bethel. The message which Amos had delivered, would seem to have excited considerable attention. No doubt courtiers, statesmen, and every one were talking about it; so much so, that this court preacher said that the land was unable to bear his words. I suppose a great revival was taking place; men were being roused up to think about spiritual things, even as it is now. But remember that the very fact that he had excited so much attention made his position incalculably more dangerous. Ah, how these ancient saints put our milk-and-water Christianity to shame! How many of us are ready to turn our backs at once, if a few friends laugh at us, or talk lightly of our work, though there is neither the person, nor the axe, nor the stake, to back their hostility.

My friends, if our Christianity be indeed that of the Divine Master, surely it will rise above such considerations as these. The man who is to follow Jesus must be ready to give himself wholly to the Master. Men nowadays know very little of this "wholly." We read of those who, only a few centuries ago, were content to lay down their lives at the stake, or of those who in earlier times faced the savage wild beasts in the Roman arena, rather than turn their backs on Jesus, contending with their own lives for the faith once delivered to the saints,—that faith which we now enjoy in perfect peace.

But what is the use of our reading about them, and admiring them, if we are not ready to follow them? True, we are not

now called upon to face death and danger, or persecution in this form; the worst we have is hard words or mockery; and hard words break no bones. Our fathers had something much more serious than ridicule to contend against; but with the power of God supreme within, they faced danger, torture, and death, calmly, bravely, and fearlessly,—passing on through these to a glorious crown.

How many of us could face such things? We are dismayed at even slight opposition. If we meet with ridicule in our family, or in the office or workshop, we complain of it as if it were the most distressing calamity. Don't think you have no sympathy from the preacher this morning, while I thus speak. I know how hard it is for flesh and blood to stand even against a witty cynicism, or a contemptuous sneer; but I also know there is the needed strength for us, if we will only look up with faith, and claim it as our own. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." He who sends the cross will likewise send grace to those who take it up in love; but, remember, it must be taken up willingly, if we would know something of the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

Look again at this man Amos. If he would only go across the border, he had a clear prospect of obtaining what none of us can do without—*bread.* "O thou seer, go flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there *eat bread*, and prophesy there." He might count upon, not only immunity from danger, but also a comfortable maintenance,—"*a good living*," as we are wont to say without a blush in our own day. This was surely something for a man who was only a herdsman to start with! A judicious use of his religion would have got him on in the world, and his godliness might have been made the stepping-stone to rank and fortune.

The position of Amos where he was must have been very precarious; he had left his regular means of livelihood, and was living a life of faith. He must have been living from hand to mouth; he had no fortune—no banker's account on which he could reckon, if he remained where he was. He had neither bread nor raiment. It seemed as if Amaziah, out of the kindest interests for his welfare, was pleading thus: "I really admire your earnestness very much; but, holding the opinions you do, it is impossible to expect that the king will assist you, or promote you to any court appointment. Your

position, as long as you remain here, will be one of chronic impecuniosity. Go across the border, and you will very likely be promoted to be court seer; and you will live well, and have bread to eat, and be free from all these cares and causes of solicitude which surround you here. Another thing: you will become the lion of the hour, and your prophecy will be greeted with enthusiastic applause, and of course you will be able to exert a mighty influence for good amongst those who will be so favourably disposed towards you."

On the other side, to stay where he was were to continue in poverty, perhaps to starve. It would be an excess of charity to deny that such considerations have any weight with some, at any rate, of those who call themselves Christians in our day. But upon this subject, thank God, we have a clear and explicit statement from lips that never lie, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." So that the man who would use his religion as a stalking-horse for the acquisition of worldly or ecclesiastical success, will very soon find that he has none to use.

But there was something more than even *bread*. Which of us is there that does not know *the yearning of the human heart after sympathy?* How painful it is to stand alone! how pleasant to be "fondled in the breath of friendly voices"! Which of us is altogether indifferent to popularity? Which of us does not shrink from the thought of being hated of all men for Christ's name's sake? Have any of us known what it is to stand alone, to be looked at askance by party because we will have nothing to do with party spirit, to be misinterpreted even by the good, when by a little accommodation of ourselves to circumstances, the adoption of a Shibboleth or two, the sacrifice of honest convictions, or of true charity, to meet the spirit or the prejudices of the hour, we know full well that we could be backed by a powerful array of friends, and supported with enthusiasm when we are now suspected? Nay, further, our temptation is intensified by the thought that thus our influence would be extended and increased, and barriers that now stand in the way of our usefulness would be removed? Never mind: Jesus Christ was backed by no party; the Master stood alone upon life's battle-field. Popularity is too expensive when it is purchased at the sacrifice of the smallest portion of truth, or by a single act out of harmony with the will of God.

But even this was not all. The temptation is backed by an attempt to get up *a question of casuistry*. "Surely loyalty

to your king, and obedience to the laws of your country, are things that deserve consideration on the part of a truly religious man. You are prophesying here at Bethel. Why, it's no less than an act of rebellion. Prophesy not again any more at Bethel, for it is the king's chapel, and the king's court." He has commanded you not to speak, and you are disobeying him. You will have the people suppose he is little better than an idolater. "It is the king's chapel." Is an illiterate peasant to lay down rules for king and court? You have not even been brought up at the college of prophets. How dare you arrogate to yourself such airs of superiority, and set yourself up as better than every one else?

My dear friends, this is *one of the severest trials* of a Christian's life. It does seem to those who do not take pains to find out the truth, as if we assumed an attitude of religious superiority. But, after all, our position is not as trying as Amos's was. We are brought into no direct collision with the powers that be; and so far from setting ourselves up on a pedestal, we only profess to be sinners saved by grace. Let us seek to show by our manner and modes of action that we are really "walking humbly before our God," but let not this prevent us from being valiant for the truth. With respect to such questions of casuistry as may arise, let me just remark, in passing, that our only safety is ever to put our *direct* duty to God before our *indirect*. Be loyal to Him personally, first; be loyal to Him indirectly, through your king or your parent, second; and remember you cannot be loyal to Him indirectly, when you have ceased to be loyal to Him directly.

Well, when you think of all these probable considerations, you will admit it was a difficult task, a hard battle to fight. It seemed a most presumptuous thing for a poor herdsman to stand there and bear testimony against the king, the religious men, and the literary men of the nation. No slight task, certainly. Everything, in fact, seemed to point towards going across the border into the land of Judea. The tide of circumstances seemed to be sweeping him away from the position he had begun to occupy.

Again, I return to the consideration that there was nothing absolutely wrong in the taking such a step. He might have argued, as we have already seen, "All things are against me; I can make no impression here; and this affable man, Amaziah, is evidently looking to my good. It is the same message

wherever I go. Souls in Judea are quite as precious as souls here. I don't see why I should continue in this place; if I go yonder, I shall get into comfort and peace." You can easily imagine him reasoning in that way, and which of us would have been prepared to condemn him if he had done so?

Now against all these considerations of expediency and self-interest, what had Amos to set? Only *one mighty word from the lips of God.* It was this that kept him at his post. Read his own account of it: "Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos vii. 14, 15). That was all. He had been no prophet, a mere herdsman; had had no theological training, but God had called him, and that was enough. Against all these inducements, these prospects of getting on in the world, and of a quiet life, of human popularity and sympathy—only this one thing. In the solitude of the mountains, whilst he was following his flock, God had appeared to him, and given him a manifestation of His will. While his heart was burning within him at the thought of the national sin of idolatry, the voice of God broke in upon his silent meditations. And that voice said, "*Amos, go!*" From that moment Amos lived for God and His work; he turned his back upon the sheepfold, gave up the gathering of sycamore fruit, and begins to deliver his message.

It was a woful message he was charged with. How different from the message, you and I are charged to deliver! Ours is a message of peace and love; his was an announcement of God's judgment on the nation for their sin. Already the air was charged with the thunderbolt which was to blast them to ruin. It was no agreeable message to deliver to his fellow-countrymen—one from which flesh and blood would naturally shrink,—but the voice within him said, "Go!"

Everything seemed to wave him back to his primitive seclusion. "Go back to thy flocks and herds, ignorant man; why wilt thou disturb a nation's peace and tranquillity?" But against all opposition rung out the clear, still voice, "Amos, go; Amos, go: have not I sent thee?" And he went, with his life in his hand. He went, in the face of the jeers, and scoffs, and threats of the world, and the advice of such religious professors as Amaziah. They argued with him, they tried to

influence him or to terrify him, but still the tremendous voice of power thundered in his heart, "Amos, go!"

Everything was against him outwardly; but inwardly, the blessed consciousness, "more are with me than against me." With the everlasting Jehovah on his side, he turns, and finds himself confronted by a nation's sin. He is standing in the very head-quarters of the false religion, the very nest and hot-bed of idolatry. The wrath of God is about to be poured out because of the nation's sin; and although the prophet is standing before the representative of power—before the king in whose hands are life and death, a word from whose mouth would have slain him,—yet he flinches not. He has a message, and he must deliver it.

His heart is fixed; the will of his God is law, and none can hinder him. Bold as a lion, there he stands. Christian workers, this is the kind of thing we want. It is easy to be a good Christian when we are surrounded by sympathetic Christians. When you meet your little *coterie*, you have your religious conversation; you talk about doctrines, and speculate on religious theories, and so forth; that is easy, but that is not the battle of life.

How many there are who, like Amaziah, are very good Christians so long as they are amongst Christians, and thorough worldlings when they are amongst worldlings. God save us from such a religion, which is a great deal worse than none at all. Two-faced Christians—worldly with the worldly, and sanctimonious with the sanctimonious—these are they that bring disgrace on the Church of Christ,—fruitful sources of spiritual weakness, Achans in the camp, traitors in the Lord's army.

We want men who will not merely occupy recognized posts; who will not be content to be merely ministers of the gospel, elders, deacons, or visitors as a matter of professional routine. But men who, like Amos, are carried forward by the mighty consciousness of the Divine call—men in whose inmost heart the mighty voice of God is heard calling them as by name, and bidding them, "Go!" When a man hears the voice within him, and from a purified heart says, "Here am I; send me!" he has a force within him that no antagonistic power in the whole wide world can resist.

Yes, my friends, believe me, you have a power within you that the world cannot withstand. Some of you have newly

entered the Christian life. All things look dark; the world is against you; your efforts to serve your Master are met with frowns, or, even worse, with a quiet smile and the whisper, "new-fangled zeal." Never mind, dear friends. This power within you is sufficient, if you will only follow its guidance, and trust to its strength to lead you on to glorious victory, and stimulate you to greater exertion, as it whispers within you, "Amos, go!"

But you say, "My friends turn their backs upon me, and laugh at my profession." Don't you see that there lies your opportunity? Just because these are against you, you have the opportunity for manifesting a special power and zeal. Don't be afraid of them; they cannot hurt you. Why, they cannot even hurt your body in our days. Take courage; the strongest opposition is just one of the most encouraging features of the believer's experience. When opposition is unusually strenuous, you may look for more than usual grace, if you will face the opposition. And grace you will have now, and glory by-and-bye.

Learn, like Amos, not to fear, though all things seem to be against you. Don't allow yourselves to think they are *all* against you. Many things are, no doubt; but what of that? You have One *for* you—God; and who can stand against His right arm? Be not afraid; He will deliver us, if we are only obedient to His will.

But these professedly religious men, like Amaziah, will find that the very things they cling to now will be their bane by-and-bye. What became of Amaziah? His wife became a harlot on the streets; and there was an end of his respectability. His children fell by the sword; and there was an end of his prosperity. His land divided out by line; and there was an end of his wealth. Israel is carried to a polluted land; and there was an end of his professional dignity and rank. He dies in a dungeon in a strange land; and there was an end of his miserable career, and the break-down of his conventional religion.

What became of Amos? I don't know. Scripture does not inform us what became of him. It may be that he was one of those on the glorious roll who were destitute, afflicted, and tormented; certainly he was one of those of whom the world was not worthy. And, any way, up yonder the humble herdsman is in the enjoyment of the full blessedness of Christ's

presence, and is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, when the crowns shall be awarded to those who have fought the good fight and kept the faith. May we, like him, be faithful unto death, and one day we'll see the lion-hearted shepherd of Tekoa up there.

How different (as we look back on history) is the estimate we form of the two men! how startling the contrast in their position now! The courtly minister is (we have every reason to fear) at this moment amongst the lost; the poor and godly herdsman has entered into the presence of God. Christian workers! open your ears to the Divine voice; listen to the call, as Amos did; and when you do hear it, go straight forward. Don't ask, Is this pleasing or praiseworthy in the eyes of men? but go right forward—never flinch. Turn neither to the right hand nor to the left hand; but, confident in the power that worketh in you, and believing that He who hath called you will stand by you in the time of temptation and trouble, will strengthen you in time of weakness, will guide you in doubt, will sustain you in the hour of battle, go straight on, and do the Master's will.

Thus serving God, fear not! He will be with you, turning your darkness into light, your weakness into strength, until by-and-by the mighty "*Go*" is changed into the tender "*Come*,"—"Friend, come up higher." "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

XVI.

Polished Shafts.*

"And He hath made my mouth a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid me; and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I am glorified."—ISAIAH xlix. 2, 3.

THERE are few of us, fellow-Christians, who do not know what it is to set forth upon our life's journey, at the commencement of a new year, with feelings of apprehension and

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misgiving, rather than of confidence and of hope. The recollection of past failures and shortcomings discourages us, in many cases, from entertaining the confident expectation of future success. The past casts its shadow upon the present, and we can scarcely bring ourselves to believe that the experience of the future will offer any forcible contrast to the facts of our bygone history. Yet has it not been to this very misgiving that we have often subsequently owed fresh failure and losses? For how can they be successful in the battle of life who do not even expect to win? Do not these gloomy vaticinations arise from our computing the probabilities of the future rather from the events of the past, than from our inward and assured conviction of the character of the resources from which it is possible for us to draw? True wisdom surely lies, not in allowing ourselves to be dejected on account of former failures, but in determining to extract from the very record of those failures the secret of success. Let us begin this new year by endeavouring to lay a stronger hold on God's good purposes towards us. Let us move forward with a firm step, staying ourselves rather upon the thought of what He is to us, and what He is able to do in us, than upon the recollections of our past experiences. Here is a firm rock for us to put our feet upon—"*I have made.*" Yes, though these words were originally designed to refer to the Messiah as God's greatest Instrument for God's greatest work, yet let us remember that both He that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are all of One. "As He is, so are we in this world." The power which fitted Him for service is the same which is to fit us; and thus, in our measure, that which is true of the Head, is also true of the spiritual members. "We are His workmanship," says St. Paul, "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

It is profitable to reflect that this was also true of the man Christ Jesus. His human character, which we all contemplate with admiration, was the workmanship of the Divine Spirit, to which He yielded Himself that He might be modelled and fashioned after the law of His Father's will; and in His human life we have the one perfect specimen of what Divine workmanship can produce when our human nature is entirely yielded to its creative power.

In nature we see what a wonderful thing God's workmanship is—how wisely He adapts means to ends, and agencies to the

effects which they are to produce; how He fits each particular plant in the vegetable kingdom for the position which it is designed to occupy—endows it with qualities which enable it to turn to the best advantage the conditions of existence by which it is surrounded; how in the animal kingdom He fits, in His creative wisdom, the various species for the manner of life which they are designed to lead, supplying them with tools, as it were, in their own physical construction, for the work which they are intended to accomplish. Is God so perfect a workman when He deals with material objects, and yet shall His workmanship be a continuous failure in the spiritual world?

But here a difficulty promptly suggests itself to our minds. Impassive nature offers no resistance to His divine will. Man, possessed as he is of some degree of moral freedom, and its attendant responsibilities, may offer such an obstruction to the efforts of Divine Wisdom and Omnipotence as is not to be met with elsewhere in the universe. This is perfectly true; but let us consider for a moment what this truth amounts to. It does not amount to an admission that God is either less able or less willing to work in the spiritual kingdom than He is in nature. We have simply recognized the possibility of our opposing obstructions to His divine and beneficent purposes; but there is obviously no necessity, in the nature of things, that we should offer such obstructions; and if we do not, what is there to interfere with the completeness of His work?

Perhaps the most serious obstruction that we do offer Him arises from our perverse attempt to put ourselves in the position which belongs to Him. We are the clay, He is the Potter; He the Creator, we the material to be yielded plastic to His will. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." The word of Divine power, "*I have made*," has already gone forth from the Creator's lips, and upon this great fact our faith is ever to rest. The acorn contains the oak in the mind and purpose of the Creator. The new-born soul contains, in the same manner, the ideal of Christian perfection as existing in the mind of the Creator. As the acorn is exposed to the influences which God has appointed in the economy of nature for its development, the oak is produced. As the new-born soul, itself a voluntary agent, exposes itself to the influences which God has provided in the economy of grace, the ideal is realized.

Now observe, that in constituting us His workmanship, God does not undo, in His relationship to us as Re-creator, the work which He has already performed as Creator. He does not strip us of our natural faculties, and endow us with others altogether distinct from these. Our natural faculties are in themselves neither good nor bad, but in every case are capable of development, either in the direction of good on the one hand, or of evil on the other. When first the grace of God finds us, the powers of evil have more or less infected our nature, and most of our faculties (if not all of them) have exhibited a downward inclination; our members have become "instruments of unrighteousness," the weapons which Satan has used to do his own fell work. It is upon these dishonoured faculties that God lays His hand when He enters and takes possession of the new-created soul. What He demands on our part is, that these members should be surrendered to Him, as they formerly were to the powers of darkness.

The prophet here speaks of one important faculty which exercises an influence for good or evil second to none that affects society—the tongue. The faculty of speech is one of the noblest endowments of humanity, distinguishing us as it does from all the lower animals, rendering social life possible, and binding humanity into one. Yet how much of evil originates with the tongue! The gift of speech may indeed distinguish us from the animal; its abuse may assimilate us to the devil! St. James goes so far as to say, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." He even compares the tongue to the small helms of great ships, directing and controlling these vast bodies, as they pass through the water, by their slightest motion; nay, he speaks of the tongue as a world of iniquity, defiling the whole body, setting on fire the course of nature, and being itself set on fire of hell. He speaks of it as untameable and untamed, full of deadly poison; and yet he proceeds to indicate the very truth to which we have just been bearing witness. It is not that the faculty is evil in itself, but that the organ is capable of a double use, and the faculty of contrary developments. "Therewith," he says, "bless we God, and therewith curse we man."

Now it is worthy of notice that the Psalmist employs in an evil sense the very same phrase which is here used by the prophet in a good one. In Psalm lvii. 4, he speaks of the sons of men as being set on fire, having their teeth as spears and

arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. The same figure is repeated in Psalm liv., where the wicked are described as whetting their tongue like a sword. The similarity of the phrases employed in the two cases suggests the thought to our minds that not only may the same number be employed in opposite ways, but that even those characteristics of any particular faculty which seem most conspicuously adapted for the sinister purposes of hell may be so completely converted by the grace of God as to be employed by Him for the efficient performance of His own work.

Reflect for a moment on the abuses of the tongue—the words of scorn and hatred, too common in human intercourse; the low jest; the savage oath; the malignant slander; the poisonous falsehood; the mischievous gossip; the idle prattle. Most of us spend a larger portion of our lives in talking than we assign to any other employment whatever; yet how little of good there is to show for it. How much of this breath is worse than misspent! And yet what a mighty engine for good language may be! Surely God has put no small honour on human speech when He permits His own Son to be described as *the Word* of God.

But we have even more to deplore than this directly evil or useless employment of the faculty of speech. How many of us are there that have endeavoured to use our tongues in the service of God, and yet our efforts have been so singularly weak and unsuccessful. As we ministers of the gospel look back upon another year, how few of our sermons seem to have produced the result for which they were preached! You district visitors and Sunday-school teachers, how many words of a more or less religious character have passed from your lips, and yet what slender effects have been induced! Well, let us not be discouraged, but listen to this word of power: "I have made thy mouth a sharp sword"—sharp no longer for sarcasm and cutting scorn. The withering scoff, the poisoned slander, the bitter reproach, are no longer to proceed, like a sharp two-edged sword, from those consecrated lips of thine; but, if thou wouldst but believe it, a new power has been communicated, in virtue of which that very member, which was of old so keen-edged a weapon in the hands of the destroyer, is now to be equally sharp and pointed in the grasp of its Divine Master. Say not in thine heart, "I am a man of uncircumcised lips." He who made man's lips claims to have the control of thine.

Can He not use them? Trust Him to use them. Put yourself, with all your infirmities, into His hand: claim, with simple faith, that He shall vindicate His own workmanship; and, though your words may still seem feeble, you shall marvel to discover how sharp He can make them.

But here let me pause to ask, "Have we yet begun to be discontented with our want of sharpness? Have we even got so far as to feel that this sharpness is desirable? I cannot but fear that too many Christians have almost ceased to expect that their mouths should be a sharp sword; nay, I would almost say, would seem to prefer that it should be otherwise. How many sermons do we hear, and that from good sort of men, which seem specially designed to prevent the hearer from being disturbed! How much religious conversation is uttered rather to ease the conscience of the speaker than to send an arrow to the heart of the King's enemy! Are we ready to be used by God as a sharp sword? Have we counted the cost? Are we prepared for the consequences? If we are, our weakness matters not;—God can use us: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will make thee a sharp threshing instrument having teeth, and thou shalt break in pieces the mountains." A worm is indeed the last tool that one might expect to be employed for this stupendous undertaking; but when God employs even a worm, He fits the worm for the use that He is to make of it. "I will make thee a *sharp* threshing instrument," and, as if even that were not enough, He adds, "having teeth."

My dear friends, how many of our well-meant efforts fail for want of *teeth!* An able and interesting sermon is preached, and men go away admiring the preacher's eloquence and ingenuity, his lucid expositions, his happy illustrations, and yet they leave unimpressed because there are no *teeth* in it.

You, my friend, who are a district visitor, sit down in one of your cottages for a friendly chat. You ask the number of the children; their ages; do they go to school? do the parents go to church? what a nice thing it would be to have family prayers; how important it is to think about the things that concern our peace; and then it is, "Good morning," and the work is supposed to be done; but *there are no teeth in it*, and the stony, unregenerate heart is not even dinted, much less crushed or broken. Oh that in the discharge of these acts of Christian labour we endeavoured to keep the end in view! The fisherman does not forget that his object is to catch fish,

not to cast his line well. The farmer remembers that his object is to reap a harvest, not merely to cultivate his soil. The man of business will not forget that his purpose is to make things pay, not to carry on a business. But how many of us Christians seem to be so taken up with the means, that the end is almost lost sight of, and we are scarcely troubled that it is not attained.

An anecdote, which has frequently been related, may not be out of place here, to illustrate our subject.

Two young men were educated together in an American university. The one was possessed of very considerable talents, and subsequently became the popular minister of a large and fashionable congregation; the other was a man of humble abilities, but possessed by an ardent desire to win souls, and therefore ready to adapt his means to the attainment of this end.

Years rolled on, and the popular preacher had occasion to pay a visit to the parish of his old acquaintance. After witnessing all that was going forward in connection with his friend's congregation, he could no longer repress his astonishment. "I cannot understand how it is," he said, "that everything in your district and congregation seems to flourish. Your church seems full of really converted souls. The number of your communicants is astonishing, and the amount of work that seems to be going on all round fills me with amazement. How can it be that I, preaching the same truth, yet see scarcely any definite result of my labours? I can scarcely point to any who have been turned from darkness to light as the result of my ministry." After much conversation, his friend requested him to try an experiment. "Will you," he said, "take one of my sermons (which in style and composition are by no means to be compared to your own), and deliver it to your own flock? Make it a matter of prayer beforehand that God will make use of it, not only for their good, but as a lesson to you in your own ministry, if it is intended to be so. Then watch the results." He agreed to do so, and on returning to his flock, delivered with much feeling one of his friend's fervid discourses. The effect was evident, and to him astonishing. It was clear that many in the congregation were deeply stirred by what they had been listening to. At the conclusion of the service he was sent for by a lady, whom he found remaining behind in the church, in a state of considerable agitation. "If," she exclaimed, "my dear sir,

what I have heard from you to-day is true, then I am all wrong!" "My dear madam," he replied with great consternation, "what is the matter? I hope I have said nothing that has hurt your feelings!"

This story sounds like a caricature. I would that I could believe it were so. I fear there are only too many of our ministers who, like that young man, would be equally astonished and equally embarrassed were they to see their preaching producing the effect that it ought to produce; and all this because of our not yielding ourselves to God. We endeavour to make ourselves good preachers, or methodical workers, and forget to believe in that mighty fiat of Divine Omnipotence, "I have made thy mouth a sharp sword," and to claim that it shall be realized in our experience.

What is required in order to render us such efficient instruments in the hand of God? I will name a few of the characteristics of the man whose mouth is a sharp sword, and leave you to fill up the outline. The first characteristic will be *definiteness of purpose.* The man whose mouth is a sharp sword will speak, not for speaking's sake, nor to ease his conscience, but to reach the heart. Whether he is endeavouring to reach and awaken the unawakened, or to feed the Lord's people, he will still direct his efforts to a recognized and definite point. He will leave no doubt on people's minds as to what it is that he desires to accomplish. The second characteristic will be *incisiveness of language.* Our words need not be ungentle nor severe, and yet they may be pointed. It is little use fighting with our sword in its scabbard. How often are we reminded, as we listen to preaching or religious talk, of the aphorism of the French cynic, that "the use of words is to conceal thought!" How often is the message which we desire to convey positively swallowed up in the words in which we convey it!

A third characteristic will be *earnestness.* He who spreads out the gospel-feast before the eyes of a famishing world, and then gives the invitation in such a manner that it is difficult to arrive at the conclusion that he very much desires that the invitation should be accepted, must scarcely be surprised if his breath is wasted. Oh, let men see that you really long for their souls' salvation; that your heart is burning with a holy, fervent zeal; that you cannot afford to let them perish, but that to you eternity is a reality, and the glory of God a consideration of supreme interest! Let them see that you feel that their souls

are in danger; then peradventure they will begin themselves to think that it must be so.

One other characteristic will be embodied in the word *now*. The man who speaks for God will ever remember that "the King's business requires haste." "The Holy Ghost saith, *To-day;*" and he who speaks in the Spirit will speak as the Spirit. How many an impression made by an earnest sermon, or by faithful plain-speaking, is allowed to evaporate for want of things being brought to a point! An old proverb teaches us to strike the iron while it is hot. Too often we wait for it to chill, and then have to endeavour to repeat the heating process, with very unsatisfactory results.

But this is not all that the Lord hath made us. The prophet speaks of the servant of the Lord under the figure of *a polished shaft*, and here we are guarded against an error the opposite of that which I have just been indicating. There are not wanting some who, in their eagerness to deliver their souls, and to be faithful to their responsibilities, outstep the limits of Christian courtesy and tenderness. They have their own blunt way of working for God, and they are disposed to flatter themselves that it is the best way, because it is most in accordance with their own natural dispositions; but the Lord seeks polished shafts for His quiver. No sword was ever so sharpened as were the words of Jesus; and yet how gentle He was, how considerate, how free from eccentricities!

Well but, you say, we have all our natural peculiarities, and surely we must continue to be what nature has made us. Not so, my dear brother. Thou art to be perfected by grace, not by nature. Cut a rough stick from a hedge: if it be tolerably straight, and a spike be stuck in the end of it, it may serve, on an emergency, in the place of an arrow at a short range. But do you ask, What necessity is there for the polishing? I reply, that every little notch, every distinguishing peculiarity, of that rough stick is an impediment to its flight. These irregularities of surface all increase the friction as the arrow passes through the air, while they diminish the possibility of accurate aim; so that, however skilful the archer, the arrow falls short of the mark, through no fault of his, but because of its own eccentricities.

We need not fear for the skill of the great Archer who keeps His saints in His quiver; but we must remember that when we assert our natural peculiarities of disposition, instead of

surrendering ourselves to Him to be polished according to His Will, the fault is ours, not His, if we miss the mark.

We have no right to be content with doing the Lord's work in a "rough and ready," bungling, clumsy fashion, effecting perhaps a little good and a great deal of harm. "He that wins souls is *wise;*" he that seeks merely to relieve his own conscience can afford to do things in a blundering way. What does it matter to him, so long as it is done? But surely if the work is to produce its proper effect, we need much tact, much delicacy of feeling, much tenderness of sympathy; we need to learn when it is wise to hold our tongues, and when it is wise to speak. It is quite true that God may bless our very blunders when He sees they are committed with true honesty and sincerity of purpose, and arise rather from ignorance and bad taste than from wilful carelessness; but that does not warrant us in continuing to blunder, still less in regarding our blunders as almost meritorious, and reflecting self-complacently that it is "*our way of working.*"

Ah, my friends, we shrink from the polishing process; but He who desires to see us so polished that we shall reflect His own glory, not exhibit our own peculiarities, will take care that the means for our polishing are forthcoming.

It is by friction that the arrow is polished, and it is by friction that our little idiosyncrasies and personal peculiarities are to be worn away. This friction is provided in different ways. Perhaps it will be supplied by failures and disappointments, until, like Gideon of old, we are ready to say, "If the Lord be with us, why is it thus with us? and where are all His former miracles?" But do not let us murmur against God, but rather examine our own modes of operation, seeking to learn the lesson which the trial is designed to teach.

Perhaps it will be supplied by the violent and bitter antagonism which our inconsiderate roughness and unwisdom has stirred in the hearts of those whom we seek to benefit. Do not be too hasty in laying the blame of this animosity upon those who feel it; rather ask yourself whether you may not unintentionally have provoked it; and if you feel that you have, do not shrink from humbling yourself to confess and apologise for your error of judgment. All this will help forward the polishing process.

Sometimes it is provided in our common intercourse with others, not unfrequently in our intercourse with fellow-Christians.

As we rub up against each other, and are frequently thwarted and even tempted to be annoyed by the peculiarities of other people (for what we admire or excuse in ourselves we greatly dislike and even resent in others), let us learn to thank God for this discipline, because He has provided in it the means of stripping us of peculiarities of our own, or at any rate of so modifying them that they shall no longer be any impediment to us in our service. Possibly He may subject us to the severest discipline of trial before the work of polishing is complete; but polished in one way or another the shafts must be which He is to use for His own glory.

But once again, *the shaft is polished only to be hidden.* It might seem that when once the process of polishing had been completed, the arrow would be a proper object for display; and here is a peril which even polished shafts are exposed to. There is so much of the beauty of the Lord impressed upon some of His servants, that men cannot withhold their admiration. Christians are lavish of their love, and there are hidden perils concealed under this favourable esteem.

"And some were fondled in the breath
Of friendly voices, and of fame,
Till subtler dangers lurked beneath
A fair repute, an honoured name."

Sharpened and polished, how apt are we to display ourselves, even as the Assyrian axe of old "boasted against him who hewed therewith." "But," says the great Apostle (himself a polished and sharpened arrow), "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."

And so it is that the polished shaft has to be hidden—hidden under the shadow of God's hand—hidden in the quiver—hidden in the secret place of power—hidden as between the shoulders of the Omnipotent! Your attention is not directed to the arrow while it is waiting to be used; it is concealed within the quiver. The eye is not caught by it when it is in the hand; it is hidden under the shadow of the hand. Another moment, it rests on the bow; another moment, and it speeds to the mark. Neither in the quiver, nor in the hand, nor on the bow, nor in its flight, is the arrow conspicuous. The more swiftly it flies, the more invisible it is. Thus the archer wins all the applause, and the arrow is nothing; yet it is by the arrow that he has done his work. And while man is not

attracted to the arrow, the great Archer Himself is. It is upon it that He bends His eye. It is to it that He gives the credit of the victory: "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Yes, there is a special joy in His heart when He can truly say of us, "Thou art My servant. All nature serves Me; but nature has no choice. Thou art My servant in a truer, fuller sense; for thou hast chosen to serve Me, and thou art Mine."

How near we are to His sacred Person when we are thus hidden in God's hand, concealed in His quiver! And how much truer and deeper the joy of such service than the momentary excitement of human applause! And then the thought that it is possible for God to be glorified in us as the archer is glorified in the arrow, that the intelligences of heaven shall gaze down and admire the work that God hath wrought by instruments once so unpromising, and shall praise Him for it; that men on earth shall be constrained to admit that this is the finger of God, and to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus; that the devils in hell shall recognize in our lives the presence of Omnipotence, and tremble as they see the mighty Archer draw us from the hiding-place within the quiver! "Hidden in God's hand!" Hidden from the grasp of Satan. He fain would snatch us out of God's keeping; but his hostile hand can never touch those who are concealed in God's quiver. "No man shall pluck them out of My hand." Hidden from the desecrating touch of the world to which we no longer belong. The world cannot approach under the shadow of His hand. Hidden above all from ourselves—our morbid self-consciousness, our inflated self-esteem, our gloomy self-depression—

> "Oh, hide this self from me, that I
> No more, but Christ in me, may live!
> My vile affections crucify,
> Nor let one low desire survive;
> Nothing in all things may I see,
> Nothing desire or seek but Thee."

I remember once overhearing the remark from the lips of one whom long experience and keen observation had taught more of the subtlety of the human heart than most men ever discern: "Ah, my dear brother, the truth is that we are all full of self; only some of us have the good taste not to show it,

and *some have not.*" The words may appear almost cynical, but a little reflection will show us how true they are.

It is indeed a painful fact that many of us "have not the good taste to conceal it." Men will import two or three *transparent phrases*—such as "in my humble way"—into a most egotistical account of their own performances; or they will give you an elaborate account of what the Lord has done by them; and the effect of these well-worn phrases and modes is not to conceal the big *I* that lurks under them, but rather to act as a magnifying-glass to it, so that it looks bigger than ever, and every one can see it except you who are exhibiting it!

Do let us be careful how we speak even of what God has enabled us to do. Watch your own motives, and be very rigorous with yourself; and if your narrative is to be to the praise and glory of self, disguised under the name of God, desist from your story, and claim that God shall be self's real *hiding-place*, and not its *subterfuge.*

But, alas! how much of self remains even where we have the good taste not to show it? and Coleridge is right—

> "The pride that the devil best likes to see
> Is the pride that apes humility."

How are we to escape from ourselves? Let us listen to the voice of the Re-creator: *I have hidden*, not less than *I have made.* And it is so; for "we thus judge, that if One died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again." Yes, He has hidden us in His own grave; that self-seeking, self-pleasing old man has been crucified there. Let us bring our faith to bear upon this great fact, and claim that that which is true of us in the judgment of God shall be true in our own practical experience. When we detect self asserting himself in our hearts, let us lift our eyes to yonder cross, and reflect that all the fellowship with God, the dignity, the joy which are ours, we owe to the fact that our old self-seeking life is crucified there; and let us ask ourselves, Are we prepared to come out from under that blessed shelter, to leave the hallowed refuge of that tomb, except in the energies of a new and resurrection-life which is a life *not to ourselves?*

And let us ever remember that what we give to ourselves we take from Him. The more self is displayed, the less God is

glorified; and, conversely, the more we lose sight of ourselves, the more His glory will appear. When God can say, *I have made* and *I have hidden*, He can also say *Thou art* my servant, and *I will be* glorified in thee. By-and-bye we too shall be taken out of the quiver, and, "as arrows in the hand of a giant," even so shall we, His spiritual children be, when He shall Himself display us before His Father. "Behold, I and the children that the Lord hath given me." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

"For who by faith your Lord receive,
Ye nothing seek or want beside:
Dead to the world and self ye live;
Your creature-love is crucified.

Your real life with Christ concealed,
Deep in the Father's bosom lies,
And glorious (as your Head revealed)
Ye too shall meet Him in the skies."

Sharpened, polished, hidden. God grant that thus we may enter upon our year's work, and then by-and-bye, when we reach its latest hour, we shall have to thank God that it has not been lived in vain.

XVII.

The Holy War.

"O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."—JUDGES v. 21.

IT seems only reasonable to suppose, if we believe in inspiration at all, that in preserving to us certain portions of ancient history, the presiding Divine Spirit would select those most capable of conveying to us profitable lessons, either by way of example, or warning, or allegorical illustration. And again, when we remember that we are all called to engage in a

spiritual warfare, and indeed, on one side or other, are actually all taking part in this, it seems only reasonable to expect that such records of Israel's wars as are preserved to us should be those most capable of suggesting profitable lessons by way of illustration in our great spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. That this is the case, a careful study of such portions of historical Scripture can hardly leave a doubt, and it is this feature which renders the present narrative profitable, as all inspired Scripture is said by St. Paul to be, "for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness."

Let me first offer a few remarks about this great spiritual war in which, as I have said, we are all engaged. Observe, my brethren, that we are each of us contributing in our measure to the issues of the grand and universal conflict between the forces of good and evil. We are too apt to lose sight of the solemn responsibility that rests upon us in this respect; and just in so far as we forget this our lives will become frivolous and inane. It is the consciousness of this that will give to our lives both dignity of character and loftiness of purpose. To ignore this is to sink to a life of trifling. This conflict is not being carried on directly between God and Satan, but indirectly through the intervention of human agency. The exercise of Supreme Omnipotence might in a moment crush all opposition, but for purposes of wisdom which we may not be able fully to explain, and yet can believe to be explicable, this omnipotent power is not exhibited, and we are called, each of us, to contribute our little towards that grand end which will sooner or later be attained—the subjugation of all opposing forces to the perfect will of God.

And let me point out that with each of us the warfare is twofold in its character. The battle is to be fought both within us and without us. In our personal experience, in our inner life, the forces of evil have to be overcome, while in our relation with others we are called upon to carry on an aggressive war against the spirit and power of the prince of this world. So closely are these two branches of the spiritual conflict connected with each other, that the neglect of either is the failure of both. In vain shall we attempt to attain to personal holiness while we are careless of the spiritual welfare of others, and lose sight of our social responsibilities; and in vain shall we attempt to do the work which God has given us in the world, unless in the spirit of personal obedience to the Divine Will, and

by the exercise of steadfast faith in the power that worketh in us, we are ourselves growing in personal holiness, waxing strong in the Lord, and overcoming the wicked one. He who preaches the Gospel without living the Gospel will ere long be conscious of spiritual leanness. He who attempts to live the Gospel without witnessing to the Gospel will find himself continually disappointed in his attempts to attain to personal holiness. The inconsistency of his outward life will react upon his inward experience, his conscience will be burdened with blood-guiltiness, his communion with God will be broken, and a certain sense of insincerity and hypocrisy in his professions will paralyse his higher aspirations.

In the expository remarks which I am about to address to you, then, I wish you to understand that I do not confine myself to either of these two aspects of the great conflict. The figure suggested may be better suited to illustrate the struggle of God's people with the powers of darkness in the world, and much that I may say may perhaps only be applicable to this. There are other respects in which the illustration may be more readily applicable to the features of the inward life; but as the salient points of the lesson are equally applicable to us in both these elements of our experience, I will attempt to keep both in view throughout, though not always with equal prominence.

This triumphant song commences with a description of the state of things which existed in Israel previous to the grand deliverance which it commemorates, and a woful picture it is that is presented to us. Not less woful is the description of the Church or of the individual soul which has fallen beneath its privileges, and is leading a life of inertness and unbelief. The origin of all the evil which is here described is this, that the people of God had ceased to be aggressive. Instead of taking full and complete possession of the territory which had been assigned to them, and pushing on their career of conquest in the conscious strength of faith, they had allowed themselves to become satisfied with present acquisitions, and had found by bitter experience that it is impossible to hold our own when we decline to go on to acquire and to possess what God has already given us. And, my dear brethren, it is ever here that backsliding and religious degeneracy begins. With us, an aggressive Church will usually be a healthy and also a triumphant Church; and the same is true of the individual soul; but woe to the Church or the soul that pauses in a career of con-

quest, as if sufficient advantage had been already gained! How soon we begin to lose ground when we cease to make progress! How soon we forfeit influence when we cease to improve it!

Most melancholy indeed is the picture. "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?"

Seldom in the history either of communities or of individuals do we see anything like steady and uniform progress in religious life and activity. For the most part there are ebbs and flows. Sometimes the work of God is vigorous and flourishing; at other times a kind of apathy creeps over the minds of men; earnest evangelizing fervour dies away, and with it the eager desire for increased personal holiness. I can suggest no reason for such vicissitudes in Christian experience, nor should we regard them as the normal order of things. As a matter of fact, however, they are too frequent; and this should suggest the warning that the moment when zeal is warmest and love is strongest is perhaps the time when we are in the greatest danger of a spiritual relapse, and therefore require the greatest watchfulness and care. We are then beginning to go wrong when we flatter ourselves that we are getting particularly right. The flood-tide of supernatural power and spiritual blessing which had carried the triumphant Israelites on in a victorious career into the land of promise, sweeping out the old inhabitants before them, and landing the chosen seed in the midst of wealth and security, had subsided, and now things had sunk to a very low ebb indeed. Here we notice an utter loss of all sense of liberty and freedom of action. Israel was driven to sore straits. Safety was only to be found within the walled cities, and not always there. The free and happy country life was a thing of the past. The damsels of Israel could not even go down to the well-side without peril from hostile archers. The travellers could not pass along the highways without risk of violence and robbery. Joy and peace and prosperity had alike departed; and obviously the continuation of such a state of things must have led to complete national dissolution.

Is it not even so, too frequently, in the history of the Christian

Church when things have sunk to a low ebb? In times of spiritual revival men are neither afraid nor ashamed to walk along the King's highway. "The righteous is bold as a lion." He dares to face the child of this world when he is labouring in his Master's service, and boldly confessing his faith in Christ. Religious life at such times cannot be pent up within the walls of stereotyped custom and prescribed routine. You will find Christians meeting with Christians in an informal way, and sharing together the joy and the comfort of spiritual fellowship. Many happy meetings used the Israelites to have by the well-side in their more peaceful days. This in eastern lands was the customary resort in the cool of the evening, and was associated with all the pleasures of rural life. And in happy days of spiritual experience we all know what it is to meet around the fountain, and with joy to draw water from the wells of salvation. But when the Church ceases to be faithful to her Lord, and loses her power,—when the fatal ebb-tide sets in, all these symptoms of joyous liberty pass away. The travellers cease on the highway. Christians become ashamed of their colours—are afraid of making a profession. The informal gatherings, the meetings for fellowship and prayer, are discontinued. The places of drawing water become a scene of special peril. How many a Christian there is who, when he has sunk to an unfaithful and backsliding condition, almost shrinks from entering his closet, because he knows that the bending of his knees before God will be the signal for a special temptation. The worship of God's house is no longer the spiritual delight that it once was. No sooner has he entered it than the noise of the archer's bow is heard, and the wandering thought, the worldly desire, like arrows from the quiver of a hidden foe, wound his conscience afresh, and he leaves the house of God less happy and more condemned than he entered it. A deadly coldness creeps over the Church. Where is the warm sympathy, the true love, which used once to characterize believers in their intercourse with each other? Where is the hearty grasp of the hand and the burning word about Jesus? Where is the readiness to seek counsel and help, or to give it as occasion might offer? The greeting now is stiff and chilling. It is as cold and formal as that which passes between men of the world; and brother is separated from brother by a wall of frigid and impenetrable reserve. It is at this point of spiritual degradation and rapidly approaching ruin, that the

tide, if we may so speak, turns. The cry of His faithless people reaches the ear of a faithful God, and He begins to undertake for them.

Observe that the first hopeful sign in this record is the manifestation of a disposition on the part of the Israelites to prefer conflict and peril to stagnation and national bondage and death. They seemed to have been roused to a spirit of discontent, and this was followed, on the part of some at any rate, by a determination to shake off the alien yoke, or perish in the attempt. Do I speak to any who, like them, are discontented with present experiences? Let me point out to you that this in itself is not a bad sign; only take care that you do not become *contented with your discontent.* There are some believers who, it seems to me, never get beyond this point. They are always crying out against themselves, and yet, I cannot help thinking, derive a secret and false comfort from the fact that they think so badly of themselves. Discontent is useful when it leads us to apply to the Strong for strength. It becomes an idle waste of sentiment when we adopt no means to remove its cause.

On this memorable occasion, when a Divine influence was pervading the nation, and men's hearts were being stirred to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty," all did not allow themselves to be similarly affected, and I am afraid it is too frequently so still. It has often fallen to my lot to witness seasons of visitation which have occurred in various localities, and I have observed how there have ever been some among the Lord's people who have taken the tide at its flood, and have been carried on to higher reaches of faith and devotion, while there have been others who, at the very moment of visitation, have conferred with flesh and blood, and, Esau-like, have bartered their blessing for some trivial, carnal consideration.

Let us now endeavour to learn a lesson from the record of the action of the various tribes of Israel, and the prominent places and persons mentioned in this narrative at the time of this national deliverance. In reading over this song, you will observe that some are described as taking an active part on the side of God, and some as practically assisting the foe by their absence from participation in the strife. But on closer observation you will notice that there is a sort of graduated scale leading up from total indifference to full and heroic devotion.

In the centre of this scale, and occupying what at first

appears to be a sort of middle course, stands the tribe of Reuben. Could such a thing as actual neutrality have been possible under the circumstances, the men of Reuben would have represented such an attitude. But under the circumstances it was impossible. No member of the favoured race could be actually neutral when his brethren were struggling for liberty and life. Not to assist was to oppose. To look on coldly was to help the foe. Still more is this the case in the great spiritual war of which I speak. It is a truth that needs to be most forcibly and emphatically stated, that between God and Satan, the powers of good and of evil, it is not possible for us to occupy a middle or neutral position. Yet how little this is realized. Few would dare to affirm that they are consciously fighting against God. Few even like to admit the thought that this is so; yet the language of Christ upon this point is clear and unmistakable, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." There is no such thing as neutrality in the spiritual war. Not to yield our hearts to the influence of the Holy Spirit, not to be bold in the name of Christ against every foe, for our Father and our God, is to yield our hearts to be garrisoned from hell, and our members to be employed in the service of the evil one. Ah, this middle way! Many a life has been lost in the attempt to discover the north-west passage; but who shall say how many a soul has perished in the attempt to discover this middle way of spiritual compromise? and yet it is still undiscovered, and must remain so as long as God and Satan, sin and holiness, are mutually opposed.

But let us notice, first, those who flatter themselves they occupy some such middle ground. "*For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.* Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." The tribe of Reuben, as you will remember, occupied the fertile pastoral country on the wilderness side of Jordan. They had played a faithful and a brotherly part in the conquest of the land of Canaan. Having already taken possession of their own territory, they had crossed the Jordan with their brethren, and had joined with them in the conquest of Canaan. Should they repeat this line of conduct now, when the standard of liberty was once again raised, and their brethren were once again upon the battle-field? The river Jordan flowed between

them and the dreaded chariots of Sisera. For themselves, they had nothing much to fear, so long as they were quiet and neutral. To join their brethren in the field was to bring down upon themselves the certain animosity of the Canaanites. To succeed was to gain nothing for themselves: to be defeated was to lose all; so the children of Reuben had "great searchings of heart." There were times when a nobler impulse pressed them towards the battle-field. They saw their brethren gathering on the opposite bank. They heard the sound of the trumpet and the noise of war. Would they not arise and join them? Could they be indifferent when the very existence of their nation was at stake? But against this higher impulse had to be set considerations of worldly profit and loss. "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" It was this fatal sound that decided them. It was with them as it so often is with us—the nearer the temptation, the more powerful it becomes. Had they marshalled themselves for war, and left their homes, the bleatings of the sheepfold would never have reached their ears, and the higher impulse would have prevailed; but as they lingered vacillating by the sheepfolds, the nearer attractions of home and prosperity proved too strong. The great opportunity passed away, leaving an indelible stain on the history of the tribe. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Were they happy? A double-minded man is never happy. Unstable in all his ways, he can neither enjoy the world nor God. They might escape danger, but they could not escape the "great searchings of heart." Their conscience smote them, even while their worldly prosperity continued. They lost the power to enjoy what they had sacrificed their character to retain. Ah, how many Reubens have we still in the Church of Christ! Men who make fair promises under the influence of a momentary excitement or a higher emotion, but whose hearts are not fully surrendered to God. They grasp after the good things of the world, and love them. They seek the good opinion of their fellow-men, and love it. If a Christianity can be discovered which shall cost them nothing, which shall not even lower them in the estimation in which men of the world hold them, such a Christianity they are ready to accept; but the Christianity of the manger and of the cross, of Gethsamene and Calvary, they shrink from with ill-concealed aversion. They set themselves the problem of discovering, or, if necessary, of inventing a

religious system which shall comprise alike the luxurious selfishness of a Dives with the future rewards of Lazarus, and the result of it all is constant and invariable misery. The "searchings of heart" cannot be escaped. The world cannot be fully enjoyed, and all pleasure in the service of God is at an end. Brethren, if any of you desire an infallible *recipe* for misery, I can give it you in a single sentence: Become a half-hearted Christian. Of all beings under God's heaven, these are they who enjoy life least, nor can I conceive that their enjoyment will be enhanced hereafter.

Let us proceed, passing down the scale. "*Gilead abode beyond Jordan.*" We hear of no irresolution in this case. It is possible to be unfaithful to recognized duty until duty is no longer recognized. Ill is it with those who comfort themselves in a life of unfaithfulness by averring that their hearts do not condemn them. If the misery of such is less, it is because their danger is proportionately greater.

"*Why did Dan remain in ships?*" I dare say Dan could have given what might have seemed to himself a very sensible answer. Surely it would never have done for Dan to lose his commerce. Surely it was most important that he should retain his mercantile position. To leave his ships and go to fight the Lord's battle in the field would have been to turn his back upon his most obvious interests. He had no men to spare; no time to spare; no money to spare. Far too busy were the Danites to think of their brethren in the field. It mattered not that national liberty and religion might be lost, so long as Dan retained his ships. Go to the streets of one of our great towns, and you will see the same thing re-enacted. Men running to and fro as though life were at stake in every effort, toiling at their business all day long, and when night comes too wearied to think of spiritual things. They have too much to do—are far too busy to think of the business of life! 'O God, it is a melancholy thing to see those whom Thou hast made to glorify Thee here, and to glorify Thee for ever, living without a thought for their souls, and one after another passing away into the unseen world for which they have made so little preparation! Why, O Reuben, abodest thou among the sheepfolds? why, O Dan, remainedst thou in thy ships? How imperious, and yet how unanswerable, is this "why" even now! How much more so will it be when it proceeds from the lips of the Judge!

Why! does he not know that his ships are doomed sooner or later to fearful shipwreck? Dost thou not know, O lover of the world, that the day must come when thou and thy darling idols will have to part? What profit on thy dying bed to remember that thou hast laboured here for that which thou canst not carry with thee? Thou hast enlarged thy barns, increased thy merchandize, raised thy family in the world, and left thy children in prosperity; and now the sentence falls upon thy trembling soul, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Poor consolation under the sentence of doom to remember that thy coffers are full while thy soul was starved.

Asher continued upon the sea-shore, and abode in his breaches, or, as you will see in the margin, "in his creeks of the sea." Occupying a strip of territory along the coast, it was easy for Asher to fortify his secluded towns, and thus to bid defiance to any inland foe. The sea was open before him, and his commerce with the Phœnicians would supply him with all that might be required. What need to trouble himself about others? It has been charged against Christianity that it produces selfishness. The charge argues ignorance of our religion; but if anything could lend colour to the charge, it would be the conduct of some who profess to be Christians. The man that sets himself to calculate how little religion will take him to heaven, and having ascertained what he considers to be the minimum, selfishly confines himself to that, may merit the title of selfish, but can he claim that of Christian? "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" and where His spirit is present, it will lead to the same self-sacrificing devotion as characterized the career of the Master. No follower of Christ will think of going to heaven alone.

But there is one locality upon which even graver and sterner condemnation rests. The names of Reuben and Gilead and Dan and Asher are shadowed with infamy, but upon Meroz alone is the direct and bitter curse pronounced. "*Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.*" I have often asked myself the reason of this terrible sentence. It occurs to me as probable that the city of Meroz may have overlooked the battle-field, and from their battlements and towers they may have beheld the servants of the Lord go forth to

war. They saw the tide of battle swaying hither and thither; they heard the din of mortal conflict. An opportunity the most glorious they could have desired was offered them. By one bold effort on their part they might have decided the event of the day; and they were content to look coldly on from their security, ready to sympathise with whoever might be victorious—what mattered it to them? They had no interest at stake. I can imagine how Deborah may have watched them from a distant height, expecting every moment their timely intervention. Still in vain her eyes were strained, in vain her hopes excited. The eventful hours rolled away, and the opportunity passed from them for ever. The battle was won, and they were accursed. Are there not moments in the lives of most of us when special opportunities of coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty present themselves to us? We occupy for a moment a position of vantage. A decided act may be productive of most blessed results. Woe to us if under such circumstances we confer with flesh and blood! The opportunity which might have been fruitful of blessing becomes the occasion of a curse; a door may be shut in our face which years of repentance shall not avail to open.

Let us turn to the ascending scale. At the bottom of the list of those who distinguished themselves on this occasion stands the name of the tribe that ought to have been at the top. "*Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek.*" Ephraim was at this time the most powerful of the tribes, and ought to have been the leader in the effort to secure national independence, whereas he plays only a very subordinate part. It is a very common thing to hear people assert that they trust they have the root of the matter in them—the root of hatred of sin and love of God. So far, so good, but surely we want something more than this. The agriculturist requires something more than roots, although nothing can be done without the root. If I desired to make a purchase from a nursery gardener, and he were to point me to what seemed to be a vacant plot of ground, and were to press me to purchase some hundred of plants under the assurance that the roots were duly concealed beneath the earth in that particular spot, I confess I should feel but little drawn to the bargain. Still less attractive, however, would the proposal be, if, on visiting the same place two or three years after, he were still to offer me a similar assurance. I am afraid I

should conclude that the roots had turned to rottenness. Are there not too many Christians who from year to year have nothing with which to console themselves except the persuasion that the root of the matter is in them? If the root does not bring forth branches, and leaves, and fruit, I venture to suggest a doubt as to whether the root is in them at all. Development may be slow, but some surely there must be. We do not despise the day of small things, but let us not be satisfied with it.

"*Out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.*" A friend remarked to me the other day, "I don't see how we can do without commercial Christians." Somewhat astonished at the phrase, I inquired his meaning. "Well," he said, "it seems to me as though spiritual work could hardly be efficiently conducted without the assistance of some whose special gift lies in doing work that most people would regard as secular, but which to them, very probably, is really spiritual—Christians who have the faculty of organization, who will even condescend to keep accounts, who will undertake the disposal of charitable offerings, or in other ways make themselves generally useful." I believe he was right. Such gifts as these may be, and I hope often are, consecrated to the Divine service; and he who exercises them may please the Master as well as he who directly labours with souls. Only let us see to it that such work is undertaken in the true spirit of Christian devotion, and to please Him whom we serve, not gratify our own natural proclivity, acting as much in the spirit of prayer as if the apparent character of our service were more definitely spiritual. We too need governors; and though it may sometimes be a thankless part to rule, let us remember that in this also it is possible to forget self, and so to exercise our gift that God shall rule through us.

"*And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley.*" The fortunes of the tribe of Issachar were so closely connected with the person of Barak, that the mention of the tribe suggests a further remark about its leader. Barak began by finding himself weak, and ended by finding his strength perfected in weakness. At his first call by Deborah his reply was a very ambiguous one: "If thou wilt go up with me, I will go; and if thou wilt not go up, I will not go." What right had he to make his patriotism dependent upon the line of conduct

pursued by another person, and that person a poor frail woman? Yet how many Christians are there who begin like Barak—Christians who, like "*Mr. Ready-to-Halt*," can never do without crutches, or think they never can till the time comes when God knocks the crutches away, and when we find that the crutch is gone we have to "lean upon the arm of the Beloved." Deborah does go with him, but not into the battle. She could not accompany him there. When the time for action arrives, Barak and the sons of Issachar have to go on foot into the valley. And it is worthy of remark that "*he was sent on foot.*" He who had sheltered himself, as it were, behind the prophetess, found in her directions an imperious call which severed him from her protection, and sent him into a scene of most extraordinary danger. It was in the valley that Sisera could exercise his full power. On the high places his chariots could scarcely act, but down in the valley those nine hundred chariots of iron would sweep like a storm of destruction, crushing down everything in their onward course. This avalanche of hostile power Barak had to meet on foot. It was no mean trial of the man's courage and test of his faith. In that moment of emergency Barak must have learned the lesson that his strength lay, not in Deborah, but in Deborah's God; and so he went on foot into the valley, and "then were the horses' hoofs broken by reason of the prancings—the prancings of the mighty ones." Even as the tide of onset approaches, the breath of God sweeps back the foe; the hostile chariots are piled one upon another in irretrievable confusion, and Barak discovers that the danger which threatened him most fiercely is proving the means of his safety. How often will it be so with us, if we are only content to go on foot into the valley! How many an undertaking which seems at first so formidable that flesh and blood quail, loses all its terrors when once we advance to meet it with the calm courage of faith! Only let us loose ourselves from all human confidence, and fall back upon the blessed assurance, "Has not the Lord God gone forth before thee?"

"Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field." These are the warriors whom God seeks,—men who will turn their backs upon every lower consideration, and give themselves over to the Divine will,—true soldiers of the cross, who are not afraid to follow their Master, even though it should be through the shadows of Gethsemane, or up to a blood-stained

Golgotha. Our lives may not have to be sacrificed now as they would have been three hundred years ago, yet God forbid that the martyr's spirit should be extinct amongst us, or the martyr's crown denied to us. It is possible to suffer for Christ and with Christ, even though our bodies may not be dragged to the stake. "If we die with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign." The Lord has His true followers still, though some may tell us that the days of Christian chivalry have passed away. Weak they are, and they know it: but they have not gone a warfare at their own charges. "Not by might, nor by power," but by His Spirit, they pass from strength to strength, putting to flight the armies of the aliens. They may have their hours of trial and darkness, but even these shall be turned into light, and by-and-by it will be all glory, when "God shall wipe away the tears from all their faces;" and as the end of their work draws near, and they look back upon the battle-field, while the dew of death is standing on their brow, and the glories of the eternal world are dawning upon their view, they will discover that "the stars in their courses" have been fighting for them—that the river of time has swept away their formidable foes; and, not in the spirit of self-complacency, but with overflowing gratitude for the triumph of Divine grace, they will join in the shout of victory that shall never die away, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

Two characters more deserve a moment's consideration, and both are women. It was to a woman that Israel owed her first efforts after liberty on this occasion. It was to a woman that the death of the oppressor was due. The record of Deborah the prophetess shows us what God can do with a willing instrument. She might easily have argued that it was not for her, a weak woman, to undertake to liberate her country, but she knew what it was to walk in the Spirit, and to be led by the Spirit; and under the power of the Holy Ghost she foresaw the victory already gained, even when the bondage was heaviest. Her eyes were opened. She heard a voice exclaiming, "Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" and she went in this her might. Do not let us begin by telling the Lord what He cannot do by us, but rather by asking Him what is there that He cannot enable us to do.

And now a word about Jael. It seems difficult to understand at first how so high a eulogium could be pronounced

upon one who seemed to have been guilty of an act of flagrant treachery, breaking the most sacred laws of hospitality. For my own part I cannot believe that that blessing would ever have been pronounced had the apparent treachery of Jael been deliberate and designed. Rather, it seems to me, that she met Sisera with sincere professions of friendship, or at any rate with common feelings of humanity towards the fallen and deserted man. In keeping with this view is her treatment of him up to the moment when he lay sleeping in her tent. Now as she contemplated him lying there in her presence—the cruel and blood-thirsty enemy of the people of God—as she thought of all the foul wrong and the fierce tyranny in which he had been the principal agent, and of the misery which he might yet inflict, if his fortunes were repaired, an irresistible impulse suddenly seized her mind and nerved her arm. It was no slight undertaking for a solitary woman. Full well she must have known that failure was death. But a power greater than her own steadied her hand and gave strength to the blow; and just as the gravest curse rested upon Meroz for the loss of an opportunity, so the highest blessing is pronounced upon Jael for an opportunity improved, because she availed herself of one. And even so will the Lord give Sisera into the hand of a woman still. The weak things of the world are still designed to confound the mighty; only let those who are weak be ready to grasp an opportunity, trusting to God for supernatural strength commensurate with the undertaking.

Now, have we learned our lesson? To which of these various classes do we belong? Oh, may God give us grace to be thorough—offering to Him the unconstrained service of true devotion. Then, while "all His enemies perish," we who love Him shall "be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

Do I speak to any to-day who know and feel that they are amongst His enemies? Come and gaze for a moment at this fallen man;—the fatal nail is in his forehead, the mighty arm which had so often hurled back the foe lies powerless in the paralysis of death. O Sisera, where are thy nine hundred chariots now? where are thy deeds of valour and thy military skill? So shall all Thine enemies perish, O Lord.

God-resisting sinner, in spite of all appearances thou art fighting on the losing side. Cast away thy hell-provided weapons, thy empty pride, thy hollow scorn of sacred things, thy impious profanity, thy worldly ambition—those chariots of

iron with which thou wagest war against the powers of heaven. Dost thou not see that for thee too the hammer and the nail are prepared, if thou continue thy mad hostility? Judgment, righteous judgment, lies behind the mercy that thou art now so wantonly despising. Listen, the word of doom has gone forth: *So* let all Thine enemies perish. *So*—that means *unexpectedly*, while they are promising themselves peace and safety. *So*—that means *shamefully*, when the sneer of false pride has been exchanged for the blush of everlasting contempt. *So*—that means *miserably*—stripped of all the gaudy pageantry of earth distinction, stripped of pleasure, of dignity, of wealth, of friends, of all,—bankrupt, disappointed, broken-hearted,—*so* it is that the sinner perishes. *So*—that means irretrievably; no second chance, no fresh opportunity of fighting the battle of life, and fighting it now on the right side. Ah, be wise while yet there is time, "Agree with thine adversary quickly." So shalt thou too become one of Jehovah's warriors, and through His mercy in a dying hour be able to sing with triumph, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

XVIII.

The Lord is there.

"The Lord is there."—EZEKIEL xlviii. 35.

BETWEEN the fruits of natural and of revealed religion there will always be considerable apparent resemblance. The amiability and generosity of the natural man will not be distinguished by the superficial observer from the charity of the Christian; nor are we called upon to disparage, as some schemes perhaps too lightly do, that which is beautiful and excellent in natural morality. I have little sympathy with that Christian whose own experience has not enabled him to enter into and understand the feeling of Him who, when He gazed upon that young man of old, and listened to his honest

assertion that from his youth up (so far as he understood them) he had kept the commandments, although better able than any other to discern the inward defect of which the young man himself was unconscious, yet found a place for him in his heart's love—"Jesus, beholding him, loved him." At the same time, while there may be much in the unrenewed heart that is lovely and attractive, we must not shut our eyes to its true state before God, or refuse to recognize the radical deficiency which runs through all systems of natural religion or morality. We may love, we may even admire, but if the heart be really unrenewed, we must own the melancholy fact—the Lord is *not* there. The religion revealed by God, on the other hand, differs from all human systems just in this respect, that it opens up new and amazing relationships between God and man. Throughout the whole Bible, but more especially in the New Testament, expressions constantly recur which indicate spiritual experiences, arising from these relationships, of which natural religion knows nothing at all, but which are of the very essence of the religion of God. Of this we have a striking instance in the subject before us. Again and again, throughout the Word of God, we have it directly asserted, or incidentally implied, that God dwells, by His Holy Spirit, in the hearts of true believers, and that He dwells in them to form within them the New Adam, to develop the nature and spirit of Christ. "Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," and "Christ is in us, except we be reprobate," and the mystery of our calling is "Christ in us the hope of glory." Now, my dear friends, the question must surely have suggested itself to every thoughtful mind amongst you, Do these words mean anything? can they mean what their natural sense implies? or are they simply high-sounding flights of Eastern rhetoric? I must confess to you frankly that if I did not believe them to be full of meaning, and that meaning a practical reality, I would burn my Bible and have nothing more to do with revelation. If the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within my heart be not a matter of *actual consciousness*, kindling new emotions, arming me with new powers, opening up to me a new world, it ceases to be anything but a pretentious phrase exciting aspirations which cannot be gratified, and I would rather be without it. I can explain the entire phenomena of ordinary morality without any such violent assumption; and, as I hate words without meaning, my feeling must be—Take them all away; I

don't want to hear a jargon of supernatural phrases, when there are no supernatural facts with which to associate them. Let me elaborate a system for myself, and exchange Christ for reason, and religion for ethics.

But blessed be God, my friends, it is because I do believe that these assertions represent real facts, and these facts of our consciousness, that I am here to speak to you to-night; and, before I go further, I must press on you the question, Can it be truly said of your heart, "The Lord is there"? Does your religion consist only of doctrines and observances, or has a new power entered your soul? and are you conscious of a reverent and sacred intimacy with your Divine Guest? What is religion without this? Take away my Lord, and earth becomes a dreary desert, time a cruel taskmaster, and eternity an abysmal gulf of horrible gloom. Vainly my soul exhausts itself with aspirations destined never to be satisfied. Society cannot prevent me from being solitary; prosperity cannot ease my woe; existence itself becomes an intolerable burden; and, after the wearisome and aimless journey of life, there remains in death but a step in the dark. Oh, let me entreat you not to rest until you can joyfully answer this question, and bear witness, from your own experience, "The Lord is here!"

But, as it is true of every real Christian that the Lord is there, so it is the law of the life of the unrenewed that the Lord is not there. The man of the world awakes in the morning with no sense of the presence of his God; he may hurry through some form of devotion, but the Lord is not there. The world rushes in with all its thronging cares and busy excitements, and the battle of the day is fought, but the Lord is not there; and when he lays his head on his pillow at night, while he forms his schemes for the future, or congratulates himself on the past, it still remains true, the Lord is not there. The day of pleasure comes, but He who visited the marriage feast in Cana has no invitation to share the sinner's joys. The day of sorrow takes its turn, but He who wept at Lazarus's grave is never summoned to comfort with the divine tenderness of His sympathy, or to turn the sorrow into joy. Years roll on, and the life without God draws towards its close; human nature loses its charms, the affections become paralyzed, the genial enthusiasm of youth is a dream of the past, the barren routine of habits has fossilized the higher faculties of the soul; but while the transient loveliness of

humanity fades away, the sad truth still remains, "the Lord is *not* there." And when the last scene comes, there may be weeping friends around the bedside of the dying sinner, and some may speak of the kindliness of his disposition, and some may tell how he ever did his duty to wife, and child, and friend; but the curtain falls upon the last scene in the sad drama of a wasted life, inscribed with the melancholy sentence, "The Lord is not there!" And follow his receding form, if your inward sight can penetrate so far into the dreary regions of eternal hopelessness, and as you gaze with horror into the blank solitude into which he plunges, can you not catch that distant cry of agony which wanders like an everlasting echo through the deep night of hell, "The Lord is not here!" "The Lord is not here!" For what is hell, in the essential mystery of its woe, but the severance of the human soul, complete and irreparable, from the one centre of all life and happiness—God? Even now the sinner's state is only tolerable because God is, in some sense, present to him, "giving to him rain and fruitful seasons, filling his soul with food and gladness;" but then even this must be withdrawn, and the bitterest cry of human despair will be, "I am shut out of the sight of Thine eyes!"

Gladly I turn to the other side of the picture. The prophet Ezekiel had been gazing at a wondrous revelation of future glory, and doubtless the mystic temple and city in every point of their elaborate details had been full of interest and instruction for his delighted soul; but, as we raise the corner-stone only when the rest of the entire building is completed, so it was reserved for the last word of the Divine Interpreter to touch the deepest chord of joy within the prophet's heart, and, as it were, to put the crown of glory upon the entire description in those marvellous words which I have read to you.

We cannot doubt but that, in a further sense than we at present experience, those words will one day be fulfilled; at the same time, the blessed privileges to which we are heirs under this dispensation justify us in applying the description, and above all the crowning words, to the Christian Church. It, too, is a new Jerusalem that has come down to earth out of heaven, and its greatest glory is that "the Lord is there."

There have been many noble systems of philosophy elaborated by human genius, many pompous theologies adorned by gorgeous ceremonials; it was reserved for the

creed of the fishermen of Galilee to exalt humanity, and to revolutionize the world; and it did it only because "the Lord was there." It was in this power that the earliest pioneers of the Gospel went forth on their apparently chimerical enterprise, and of their efforts it was recorded, as that which made them truly glorious, that "the Lord worked with them." He was with them in the synagogue, and with them before the Sanhedrim; with them in the upper room, and with them in the dungeon; and they went forth and conquered in this their strength. And, Christians! if we would conquer, it must be in the same power. God with us—the Immanuel of our faith must be at once our Captain and our weapons of war; and in our trying day this is what we, who are all called upon to fight under His banner, more and more feel the need of.

But yet more personally. Eighteen centuries ago, this earth could boast of many a noble palace and stately mansion. There were the royal abodes of the Cæsars and of the Herods, where there was everything to attract the eye and to captivate the taste; but as we gaze back upon that distant age, it is only over one lowly habitation that we see the angels gathering. The stable of Bethlehem attracts infinitely more attention from the eyes of heaven than the court of Augustus; and the mystery is explained as each angelic visitor, pointing with reverent awe to the venerable shed, exclaims in marvelling adoration, "The Lord is there!" The carpenter's shop was doubtless a very shabby abode, but how dear to the memories of heaven, because "the Lord was there"! And could any good thing come out of Galilee? yet what spot of earth save one so everlastingly honoured, because "the Lord was there"! And I believe there is many a man here to-night, perhaps little noticed by his fellow-men—it may be, humble in his outward circumstances—it may even be, with little or nothing in his natural character to commend him, both morally, as far as his past life is concerned, and personally as unfit to receive the King of kings as erst the stable in Bethlehem—yet are the angels gazing down in wonder on that unworthy heart, and the whisper of their astonishment swells up into a joyous acclamation that thrills through the very presence-chamber of heaven, "The Lord is there!" Yes! He may be as yet but the Infant of Bethlehem, so to speak, and years may pass away before He holds that position of full supremacy within thy heart which thou desirest that He should assume, but, blessed be God, He

is there! and in that thou hast the guarantee of a power capable of raising thee to future holiness and ultimate glory.

And through the long journey of life this remains the distinguishing glory of the Christian. He may have many falls and infirmities; in some respects he may even contrast to disadvantage with the better specimens of worldly men; yet you will find something within him that ever causes him to triumph in spite of his frailties, and every now and then a something of glory gleams forth through all the weakness of the flesh, which seems to tell us "the Lord is there." Look at yon lowly cottage; it bears every sign of poverty, and the poor man knows not where the next crust is to come from: yet on his face is the impress of a calm, deep peace, which can be explained only because the Lord is there. Look at that young man in his office; he is surrounded by those who scoff at his religious profession, and he hears frequently enough such words as *enthusiast* and *fanatic;* but see him when the opportunity comes, and he finds one of his persecutors alone, and when he pours forth, in the fulness of his first-love, the tale of the mighty change that has been wrought in him, what gives the simple testimony such power that the hard-hearted opposer flinches and trembles, if he do not yield altogether? It is not the force of human eloquence—it is that the Lord is there! And when the work of grace has advanced, when by a life of holy self-denial and cross-bearing the old man has been crushed, though not altogether eradicated, how divinely fair the image of Christ that begins to be displayed! The ardent charity, the fearless faith, the hope that blooms with immortality, the unfeigned humility, the heavenly mind that seems no longer to belong to time, but to breathe the atmosphere of eternity—how each of these in the warm glow of their celestial beauty, so different from nature's negative morality—seems to proclaim, the Lord is there! And when life draws towards its close, the Christian, looking back, sees this above everything else as the prominent feature of his past life. "The Angel that redeemed him from evil" has even been with him, and he has come up through the wilderness leaning on the arm of his Beloved. And when death gives the last call, it is to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

The valley of the shadow of death is a dark place; but oh, how full of glory does it become when "the Lord is there"! And then the waking up! When "the veil over all nations"

shall be torn away, and death swallowed up in victory, and when the first and fairest Object on which our sight shall rest shall lead us to cry with even greater rapture than did the beloved Apostle of old, "It is the Lord!" And we shall gaze and gaze, and still continue to gaze, satisfied and yet insatiable, upon Him whom we love, throughout all eternity. And what is the glory of heaven? Not the gleaming walls, nor the gates of solid pearl; not the golden harp, nor the crystal sea, can satisfy the deep cravings of my soul; but the redeemed from among men, the firstfruits unto God, "*shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth*," and the name of the Bridal City shall be called from that day forward, "The Lord is there!" In this prospect my spirit rests, and the cry of my heart is, May God prepare us for it! Oh, you whose hearts have never yet received Him, behold, to-night He stands at the door and knocks! Open, I entreat you, without further delay, and let it be written upon the lintel of your door to-night in characters of blood, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, "The Lord is there."

XIX.

The Broken Altar.

"And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down."—1 KINGS xviii. 30.

THIS repairing of the broken altar of Jehovah was not the least interesting incident in this memorable historic scene. The thing, no doubt, was done deliberately, and was a carrying out of a purpose that was present to the mind of Elijah when he, of his own will, decided on Mount Carmel as the scene of this memorable conflict. The place was already hallowed by sacred associations. There had been, of old time, an altar of Jehovah on the summit of this hill. Thither, no doubt, "the tribes had gone up." There, in the calm of eventide, the pious Israelites of old were wont to offer up their worship to the one true God, before the abominations of Baal, and the idolatrous worship of Bethel and Dan, had been intro-

duced into the nation's history. Elijah, in selecting this place for his conflict with the powers of darkness, desired, no doubt, to bring prominently before the mind of the Israelite that his work was a work of restoration, not of innovation; that he was standing up for that which was as old as eternity, because it was as old as God; that he was not recklessly introducing a new and unorthodox state of things, but deliberately identifying himself with the religious life of a bygone age.

We do not know anything of the history of this "altar." Possibly it may have been erected in the earlier, purer days of the commonwealth of Israel. It may have been on such an altar as this that Samuel conducted those sacrificial rites of which we have such a graphic account in the record of the anointing of Saul to be king of Israel. Or possibly this altar may have dated from a still earlier period. The special mention here of the name Jacob suggests the thought that possibly this altar may have had a patriarchal origin. On this very spot the first father of the Israelitish family may have worshipped the God of Elijah. Be that as it may, the place appears to have been free from all association with the apostate church of the day in which Elijah lived. It had not been desecrated by the service of Baal. Hence, as Elijah restored that ruined altar, there was something marvellously significant in the act. As if he would have said, "I am, by my action, as well as by my word, bearing witness to the identity of the faith I profess with that which belonged to our first father, and to the changeless character of the God whom we both have recognized and loved."

Now, my brethren, the work which the prophet Elijah had to do in his day, requires to be done in our own. We find it prophesied in the last of all the Holy Spirit's revelations in the Old Testament—that "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"—Elijah should again be sent. Let us refer to the passage for a moment. It is the last verse but one in the Old Testament, Malachi iv. 5, 6: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." We are all aware that this passage has received a partial fulfilment in the mission of John the Baptist. "If ye will receive it," says our Blessed Lord, "this is Elias, which was for to

come." At the same time, surely that fulfilment can only have been partial. For observe, this mission of Elijah is represented as occurring "before the coming of *the great and dreadful day of the Lord;*" and the object of this mission is not spoken of here as the introduction of the Christ, but the "turning of the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." This was precisely the work which the first Elijah actually did; and it was in harmony with this purpose and design of his ministry that he re-erected this broken "altar."

What was he saying when he gathered together those ruined stones, and restored the fabric that had fallen down? In a certain sense, he was "turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers." He was bearing witness, in his own person, to the presence of the same spirit in him as animated the founders of the Israelitish commonwealth, and he was thus endeavouring to stamp the moral characteristics of the earlier worshippers of Jehovah, in connection with the ancient theocracy, upon their very degenerate offspring; and still more obviously to call back these apostate ones from a creed which was positively demoralizing and injurious, to that worship that had been the glory and crown of their forefathers.

Now, my brethren, what do we want in our own day? Precisely the same work, it seems to me, as Elijah undertook and performed; and I venture to hope we are beginning to observe, in our own experience, in this highly favoured period, something that appears like an actual fulfilment of this prophecy. If "the spirit of Elijah" is again to be manifested amongst the sons of men, before that great and dreadful day of the Lord, and that final end of human history, towards which all is leading up,—then the work will be of this character: there will be a re-assertion of the old, as opposed to Satan's innovations;—"the heart of the fathers will be turned to the children;" and the solid piety of primitive times will be stamped upon the lives of their children, making them true and loyal to Christ, and offering the strongest contrast to that poor travesty of apostolic faith and practice which is too generally exhibited in our day, under the name of religion; and "the heart of the children will be turned to the fathers:" men and women will be disposed to inquire—"Is our Christianity the Christianity of Christ? Is it the Christianity of Pentecost? Does it produce the fruits that were produced in the early

ages?" And by such inquiries men will be led up to the discovery of the secret of a really holy and God-glorifying life.

Before proceeding to consider the incident, let me dwell for a moment upon the analogy suggested between the condition of Israel at the time of Elijah and the condition of Christendom in our own day. Elijah had to face, in the first place, the open and professed opponents of true religion—the prophets of Baal; just as we in our day have to face those whose evil heart of unbelief has turned aside from the living God, and who have substituted some form of nature-worship for allegiance to Jehovah. We live in an age of materialism, an age in which men, beginning by doubting the existence of God, end by denying the existence of their own souls. Some of these are earnest and honest, it may be, in their convictions; and some are apparently led captive by their own conceit, or goaded on by a desire to obtain influence among the irreligious masses to whom materialism offers a refuge from the reproaches of conscience. Then there are those who profess indeed a religion, but who have their own views of it, and whose religious teaching and systems contrast strangely with the simplicity of the Gospel. Even so in Elijah's time were there the priests of the grove,—professed but false prophets of Jehovah; men who formed a compromise, or who thought they had formed a compromise, between the claims of Jehovah and the idolatrous instincts of the nation.

Then there was the thoughtless, careless multitude, swayed hither and thither by any wind of doctrine; now ready to crowd the temple of Baal, and now to shout, "The Lord, He is God." It is here that our severest conflict lies. The *vis inertia* of ignorance and carelessness, of practical atheism, is a more serious obstacle to the progress of the Gospel than any amount of hostile speculation. Then there were, in those days, the hidden servants of God, the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. It was intended to be a comforting thought to Elijah, and it may in some sense be a comforting thought to us, that possibly these hidden ones do exist. Yet how bitterly Elijah must have felt their want of moral courage! Why were they hidden? How came it to pass that he did not know even of their existence till God revealed it to him? Seven thousand! What a goodly company, had they made a stand for God and for the right! How they might have sustained the prophet in

his conflict against the powers of evil in an idolatrous age! Where were they at Carmel? How came it to pass that no voice from among the seven thousand was raised to cheer Elijah in his solitary conflict? How little the Church of God owed at that time to these seven thousand hidden ones! how much to the one brave heart that had the courage of his faith! And we have our hidden Christians now—too many of them. Would to God we would cease to seek for comfort in the thought that it is possible for a man to be hidden, and yet a Christian! We should do more wisely if we reflected that we are taught by the lips that never lied, that the position which God has assigned to each of us is that of "lights of the world," a city set upon a hill that cannot be hid. What Christian soul has a right to keep his light under a bushel? In contrast to all these stands the figure of one solitary man given over into the hands of God—an instrument that God could use because he was utterly yielded into His hands. Brethren, it is prophesied that in the latter days "they that know their God shall wax strong and do exploits." Oh that a holy ambition may seize upon us, not to win the admiration of men, not even of our fellow-Christians, but to quit ourselves as soldiers who are not ashamed of their Master, nor afraid to fight under His standard!

Observe more closely the nature of the stand that Elijah took, and the character of his act when he repaired that altar. It would seem as though by that act he bore witness to considerations which required to be brought to the very forefront, and thrust upon the attention of his contemporaries; and, believe me, in our own day we need a similar witness.

In the first place, he bore witness by the restoration of that broken altar, it seems to me, to *the changeless character and modes of conduct which belong to the everlasting I AM.* Men are too apt to think of God as though He were fickle and changeable, and to forget that "in Him is no variableness, neither any shadow of turning."

I have no doubt that the theologians in Elijah's day may have pleaded, with specious arguments, for the worship of Baal, "It is only an improved form of the worship of Jehovah. God may be worshipped under various titles. Attention may thus be called to various attributes of the same Being; fresh revelations may be made of Himself, or fresh developments of the original revelation in process of time. Such a discovery is known as *the worship of Baal;* and these new rites represent

the particular aspect of truth to which attention is being called at present. This new view of the Divine nature has to be mastered by all who are anxious to obtain theological information." So it would be that the worship of Baal intruded itself more and more into the habits of thought and feeling prevalent amongst the contemporaries of Elijah, until at last Baal's religion became the recognized religion of the state; and the worshippers and priests of Baal the duly recognized leaders of public religious opinion.

Such was the state of things when Elijah arose, standing alone upon Mount Carmel, facing those earnest—for they were in earnest—those powerful, yet those deluded and blood-thirsty men. And to what is it that he makes his appeal? To the unchangeable character of Jehovah. As though he would say, "At this very altar, surrounded by this very scene that meets our eye, on this thrice-hallowed spot, our fathers worshipped the changeless God. To that God I bow my knee; in that God my heart reposes its confidence; to that God I appeal."

What was the character of this God? What was His mode of conduct? He was recognized by Elijah as a *miracle-working God.* We believe, all of us, or at least profess to believe, in a miracle-working God of eighteen hundred years ago. We do not find it very difficult to admit that, eighteen hundred years ago, that miracle-working God manifested Himself in the Church of that day; that He shook the house where the disciples were assembled together; that the flashing forth of the fire from heaven at Pentecost on their consecrated heads was the token that He sent forth these men armed with supernatural credentials, that they might shake the world, and produce the most astonishing moral revolution that has ever been known. Some have even doubted this; but I assume that those to whom I speak have very little difficulty in believing in a miracle-working God of eighteen hundred years ago. But Elijah believed in a miracle-working God of that day and that hour. He was still "the God that answereth by fire." He takes twelve stones, and rebuilds the altar to the God of him who, first called "Jacob," wrestled with the miracle-working God till he won the new name of "Israel": "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed." The reference to the new name given to the patriarch suggests no

less than this; and no less than this is required in our own day, a restoration of the belief in a miracle-working God, who is able to answer by fire.

Friends, we live in "a day of rebuke and blasphemy;" a day when, with every fresh discovery of science, men are only too keen to discover arguments against revelation. Not that science is really opposed to revelation, but that a rash assumption of knowledge too often suggests such an opposition. And in this day, what is the triumphant answer that the Church of Christ returns to her foes? We may strengthen ourselves with other considerations, but the more faith we have in this answer, the more power we shall have in our conflict with the unbelieving spirit of the age on the battle-field of life: "*The God that answers by fire, let Him be God.*" The power that shook the house on the day of Pentecost, that gave those simple men that went forth as pioneers of gospel progress such irresistible force in carrying the glad tidings to the ends of the earth, that power, thank God! exists still, and is being exerted in our own day. Look around you, use your own powers of observation, and see the work of the same miracle-working God! that which cannot be achieved by educational reform, or sanitary regulation, or social progress, is being done by what men call "the *effete* Gospel," a Gospel, I thank God, that is *not* effete, because it is instinct with the power of an everlasting life, and reveals an unchangeable Jehovah. Men who once led lives of debauchery and demoralization, stand before us with their fetters broken, themselves free; men whose lives were once a disgrace to the society in which they mingled, have become positively useful, in the highest sense; instead of a curse, they have become a blessing; and this not as the result of gradual improvement, or the slow progress of the persevering battle with evil of an earnest will, but as by the finger-touch of the Most High! by the supernatural power which has raised them from being the slaves of vice, and the captives of sin; and set them on high, capable of living to His glory.

These are facts. Every one can see them if he will use his observation; and the man who does not acquaint himself with them incurs a grave responsibility; nay, more, a very large amount of moral guilt; the man who shuts his eyes to them should take heed lest he be found guilty before God Almighty of wilful blindness.

But you, Christians,—you, whose belief in the Name of

Christ, is a reality,—believe in "a God that answereth by fire," a "miracle-working God," in the dear old-fashioned religion of the Old Testament, as well as of the New; believe in the God who manifests His almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and forgiveness, a power that is supernatural in its character and operation.

Yet again, in repairing that altar, Elijah *bore witness*, not only to the eternal changelessness of Jehovah, but also to *the identity of the spiritual life in every age and under every diversity of circumstance*. Of course, the phenomena connected with spiritual life,—the presence of the living God in the human soul,—will vary according to the varieties of external circumstances; but the thing itself will always be the same. My friends, we require to recognize this; spiritual life, in every age, in whatever form it may manifest itself, springs from the same source—the Divine presence within the human soul; and because it has its origin in God, therefore its character must necessarily be identical. Prophets and patriarchs might have worshipped at that "altar" in olden times, but circumstances had changed. A new religion had been set up by the state. Around Elijah stood those who professed to be the orthodox representatives of that faith. It was backed by the power of the court, and by the authority of Jezebel. Amidst these loud pretensions to religion, Elijah sees nothing that he can recognize. Why? Because spiritual life is absent from these men. They have the paraphernalia of worship; they are much in earnest about it. They spend one whole day in zealous but futile shoutings to their god; "they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them;" but all their earnestness failed to command the prophet's sympathy or respect, because spiritual life was not present there.

You will hear it very frequently said that the kind of work that is being carried on so prominently in our own day—the work of the conversion of human souls from darkness into light, from the power of Satan unto God, is "a modern innovation." "The thing was never heard of till John Wesley started it, comparatively, a short time ago; then it died out, and people saw what a failure it was! And now, in very recent times, people are endeavouring to resuscitate it. The waves of religious excitement, which have from time to time swept over whole populations, have now burst upon us in the religious

extravagances of revivalism." That is the way people talk about the kind of work that is distinguishing, I think I may say, our own age. To which I reply, the innovation lies, not in the manifestation of spiritual power, but in the setting up of something else as a substitute for spiritual vitality; the innovators are those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power.

If you and I had consulted the prophets of Baal at that time, they would have spoken of Elijah as an innovator. "Our religion accommodates itself to the genius of our day. The thing is fairly settled. There are but seven thousand men in all Israel who believe in that abandoned and exploded religion." They would fain have represented Elijah as a sort of reckless innovator, trying to introduce all kinds of novelties; a disturber of the people. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" was Ahab's greeting to him. If we could only get this Elijah out of the way, then we should be able to carry out our own ideas with decency and propriety; but he is a constant source of trouble, this daring revolutionist!

Now, as if to answer that accusation, when he stands on Mount Carmel, what does Elijah do? Does he hew out for himself fresh stones, and forthwith erect an altar that shall be memorable from that time forward as the handiwork of the great Elijah? No! but, as though he would say, "I am not a creator, but a restorer—my mission is to rebuild what God has erected, not to erect for myself—creative power belongs to God alone"—he gathers those time-honoured stones together, covered as they were, it may be, with lichen and moss, those relics of a religion that men said had passed away; and with them he built an altar. He might well have pleaded, "I am no innovator. Ye are the real heretics, the true schismatics, though you have a majority on your side, and it seems as if I stood alone, and were trying to upset the existing order of things,—a sort of religious radical, or something worse. Yet I appeal to the facts of history, to the character of a changeless God, and also to the identity of spiritual life in every human breast that possesses it, be he an ancient patriarch or a modern prophet, and I can recognize nothing else."

Such seems to me to be the position that earnest soldiers of the cross may assume in our own day. Let it not be said in our own day that we are "creatures of innovation." Let every Christian, whether he be a minister of the Gospel or not,

take his stand on the facts of sacred history. What do we claim? Nothing but what existed in apostolic times. What do we expect? Nothing but what St. Paul expected, when he went from land to land with the Gospel of the grace of God on his lips. What do we see? Nothing less than the same results in kind, though not perhaps in degree, that St. Paul witnessed, when he went forth from place to place, flashing forth Gospel light upon one darkened region after another, and by the power of the truth revolutionizing human character, sweeping away those colossal forms of heathenism which had so long overshadowed human history, and gathering His alienated children around the Person of the invisible God.

Such is our blessed mission now. "But," do you say, "things have ceased to be so with us. Religion changes its form as times change, and our wisdom lies in accepting such modifications." A gentleman said to me not long ago, "Unless you Christian men devise some more refined form of Christianity, something that shall less offend human thought and feeling, something that shall more thoroughly commend itself to the taste and cultivation of the age, you may be quite sure that Christianity has only a few years, or at most a few centuries, in which to exist." To which I reply, "There are not wanting systems of refined Christianity, nor are there wanting inventors of that commodity; both are plentiful enough. But what do these 'refined forms of Christianity' actually effect? Can those who are their disciples use the language of confidence, as the holy Paul did, when he exclaimed, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth'? Do these various 'refined gospels'—(for as there were 'gods many and lords many' in the time of St. Paul, so are there gospels many, and improvers of the Gospel many, in our own day)—do these various 'refined gospels' produce a sensible effect? Have they an evident and miraculous influence upon the lives of poor sinners brought into contact with them? I leave those who are the inventors of these 'refined gospels' to answer the question. Honest men, as some of them are, they must admit that while their 'refined gospels' have much that is sentimental about them, when applied to the test of making a bad man good, they break down altogether; and the bad man remains bad; the chains of hell are still upon him; his will is still paralysed, his affections still corrupted; and

the whole man continues the bond-slave of the tyrant-power of evil!"

Thank God, *we* are not innovators. We appeal to the eternal, changeless life of God in the human soul. And, before we go further, let me ask, Have you got it? Is your religion of a fashionable type?—for there is such a thing as "fashionable religion." Is your religion a thing that is recognized and patronized by society? Is it a conventional phantom? or is it an actual burning reality, instinct with the life of the Spirit of God? Which is it? Has it introduced you into the presence-chamber of Deity? Has it revealed to you the Invisible? Is your heart at the present moment in possession of a power to which otherwise it would be a stranger?—a power which enables you to grapple with, and overcome, the sin of your nature, and to fight against evil in the world in which you live? If it is not, I beseech you, "restore the broken altar;" get hold of those moss-covered stones; revive that which is dead in your own personal experience, by calling in the Lord of life; grasp that which God designs you to enjoy; and do not allow yourselves to be deluded out of the substance by Satan's vain display of the shadow.

Yet once again. Elijah's "restoring of this broken altar" not only bore witness to the changeless character of Jehovah, and the identity of the spiritual life of God's people, in every age; it seemed also to bear witness to the *unity of spiritual life in the hearts of all his contemporaries*, whatever their name or ecclesiastical conditions might be. Observe, he is standing in the presence of Ahab, king of the ten tribes,—Ahab, who represented in his own person (shall I say?) the schism between Israel and Judah. Yet when Elijah rebuilds this altar, how does he do it? "He took *twelve stones*"—*not ten*—"according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built an altar in the Name of the Lord."

Now, my beloved friends, if "the spirit of Elijah" is really being poured out upon us, it will already be bearing witness to this, as well as to the other truths of which Elijah was the apostle. What did he mean by building those "twelve stones" in the presence of Ahab? His action seemed to say, "The family of God is *one*. You may split it in twain,

or divide it into twelve pieces, or subdivide it into a hundred fragments; still, in God's eye, it is *one*,—one altar, though broken; and we must recognize that unity, if the fiery answer is to descend.

Dear brethren, in our own day, the family of God is strangely divided. I do not hesitate to say these divisions have their origin in the carnal mind within the Church of God, and that they have been fostered by human selfishness. As a matter of fact, these divisions do exist; but if, in these last days, we are to have an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Ghost,—if there is to be a restoration of the broken altar,—if "the God that answereth by fire" is to give that answer which we so much need, there must be a recognition of the oneness of the family of God. We may have different names; we may be divided from each other by ecclesiastical barriers; but the unity of the Spirit is something more real than external connection or organization, however important these may be. Ecclesiastical divisions may be very necessary under present circumstances, owing to the sins of the past and the infirmities of the present; differences of opinion, and varieties of predilection, may or may not be swept away as light and love increase; but even now one thing is clear, that if we really belong to the Lord Jesus Christ we have more in common with each other than all about which we may differ. Those who are "one in the Lord" have a unity which is real and essential; it arises from the presence of the same life within the souls of all who are the Lord's.

What is the union that is recognized in the Word of God? *Primarily*, "the unity of the Spirit." "Endeavour," says the Apostle, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv. 3). It would seem, in our own day, that there is a strong movement in the direction of unity, assuming various forms; but I cannot help fearing lest Satan, who is always eager to pervert a good thing, and to turn a right disposition into a wrong direction, should lead men to think that this unity is to be attained by attempts at external combination, and to ignore the one true basis of union—fellowship in the Holy Ghost.

My friends, let me ask, Who are the real schismatics? It is an important question, a very definite inquiry, and one we had better face. If the essential bond of union between man and man in this Christian dispensation is the presence of the Holy Ghost in the human heart, then the real schismatics are those

who have least of this Divine Presence. In proportion as we are less under the influences of the Holy Spirit,—the less He controls our thoughts, the less He lives in our lives, the less He works out His will in our character,—in the same proportion are we the authors of schism in the Church of God.

It must be so, if we reflect for a moment. What has been the great cause of schism in the Christian Church? The presence of the carnal mind. It was so at Corinth, and has been so throughout all Church history. What is the presence of the carnal mind, but the absence of the spiritual mind? The carnal mind may be revealed in "the Church" on the one hand, or in the "Dissenting Chapel" on the other, but I say that just in proportion as the carnal mind is revealed, and the spiritual bond ignored by any of us, so far are we the necessary authors of schism in the Church.

But you say, "As a matter of fact, it is not so. Unspiritual men are not only, and not always, the authors of division; on the contrary, those who are regarded as spiritual men not unfrequently have been the actual perpetrators of division." Yes; but whose fault has it been that the spiritually-minded have been, as it were, thrust out of external communion with those with whom they originally consorted? That is the inquiry we have to face; and I venture to say that the fault must always and necessarily lie most with those who have had least of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of actual fact, no doubt there has been a want of spirituality on both sides. I do not mean to say that there was no spirituality in the English Church, or that there was nothing but the influence of the Holy Ghost amongst the Nonconformists at the time when they separated from her communion; but I mean to say we must be very careful how we use the word "schism." It is bandied about now very freely; but the only true criterion of schism is its relation to the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Show me a man who is altogether and absolutely led by the Spirit of God, and I will show you *the orthodox man*, the man whose conduct and convictions represent the only trustworthy standard of Christian belief and practice; and we become more or less schismatics just as we fall below this ideal; the most pronounced schismatic being the man who ignores this standard altogether, for whether such a man leaves the communion of a national church, or remains within it, it is still obvious that he must be an actual cause of schism in the Church of Christ.

What, then, is our duty? We cannot right ecclesiastical wrongs; we cannot restore the unbroken external unity which once existed. What can we do? My friends, we can recognize the unity of the spiritual life in the heart of every one that has it. I do not know whether all whom I address belong to the Church of England. Possibly some do not. I want to say to all, whether you belong to our own beloved Church, or those denominations which are called Nonconformist, if you desire to see "the answer by fire" come down upon the sacrifice, make it the law of your life to recognize the presence of the Spirit of God in the human heart, as far as you can discern it, as the basis of real union. You may value your own Church (I do not believe any one values it more than I do), and the actual advantages attaching to it, but remember *life* is the first great consideration, and *life* is the first great bond of union. And in proportion as we recognize this, we shall step over our boundaries, and our distinctions will cease to contract our sympathies; but while we still value that which we think is most according to the will of God, the substantial bond of brotherly love will prove stronger than all opposing forces; and while the "brethren dwell together in unity," God, looking down upon so "good and pleasant a thing," will be constrained to recognize the claim which the Church addresses to Him: the fiery answer will be given, and "there the Lord will command the blessing, even life for evermore."

But again, dear friends, Elijah, in this solemn significant act, bore witness also—as it seems to me—to *the identity of spiritual worship in every age.* It was an act of worship; and it comes out all the more strikingly by force of contrast with the worship of these priests of Baal. Scripture always teaches most forcibly by contrast. What was their worship? Most exciting it must have been. Nobody could look on, I should think, without being stirred and impressed by the whole spectacle. Well, Elijah did—because he knew it was unreal. There was much earnestness and enthusiasm, of so extraordinary a character, that the worshippers seemed to lose all control over themselves, suggesting to our minds that there may be a great deal of enthusiasm, and apparent earnestness, in what is called "worship," and yet there may be no real worship at all. There may be much that appeals to human sentiment, taste, and feeling; and yet God may be all the while ignored. I fear that there are only too many illustra-

tions of this in our own day. Men fancy they are in earnest, not because they are so, but because their feelings are excited. Our feelings may be wrought upon while listening to an eloquent discourse; but that is not worship. The sonorous tones of an organ, or the sweet strains of human voices—joining in some thrilling hymn—may greatly affect us; but that is not worship. There is no reason why hymns should not be properly sung, and our service conducted in as orderly and decent a manner as possible; but that is not necessarily worship. To have my feelings stirred by sensuous attractions, or by an eloquent appeal, or a touching sentiment, is quite a different thing from spiritual worship.

Look at Elijah. Behold the calm, quiet dignity of the man. There were seven thousand men in Israel that had "never bowed the knee to Baal;" but these men had never testified to the importance of spiritual worship. They were "hidden ones." Even Elijah knew nothing about them till God told him of them. And there are too many Christians now who give so little testimony in our own day, that positively you have to be told that they are Christians before you would know it. Is it not so? You would require to have it chalked on your back that you are a Christian before anybody would suspect you of being one!

But Elijah stands before us as one who is not satisfied with negation. Spiritual religion must be restored. "But why not do it privately?" Nay, it shall be done before the eyes of Israel's teeming thousands and of Israel's king. So he rebuilds the altar that was fallen down. I thank God that the minds of men in our day are being drawn towards the subject of worship, and I thank God that there is a certain party in our own Church whose special work it seems to be to witness to the importance of worship. I do not stand here to criticise my fellow-Christians, or fellow-labourers in the English Church; but as a minister of Christ I feel bound—while thankfully recognizing anything that leads us to an acknowledgment of an important truth—to bear my testimony to the supreme importance of that which is essential to the truth thus witnessed to. It is important that worship should be witnessed to; but it is of paramount importance that worship, in order to be acceptable to God, should be *spiritual*—the worship of "a God who answers by fire," by men who expect such an answer.

Behold the calm dignity of Elijah in his approach to God.

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel." This was prayer, and *prayer* is not always *worship*, but this was a prayer which was instinct with the spirit of worship. Why? Because the man was very "jealous for the Lord of hosts." It was this that occupied Elijah's mind, and stimulated his desires, and strengthened his faith,—this holy jealousy for the character of a God whose yoke had been repudiated, and whose law had been broken. So he goes on to say: "Let it be known this day that Thou art God." That is true worship. When we enter the sanctuary with the earnest desire that it may be known, *by our very worship*, "that the Lord is God." In how few congregations is this the case! In how many instances do we go through our service in such a way that a stranger coming into our church would conclude that the last object we had in view was to obtain a demonstration that the Lord is indeed God; or that the spiritual glory of the Shechinah might blaze forth upon our souls, brightening our very faces with the reflection of Divine light and joy. This is spiritual worship, when we lose sight of ourselves, and become absorbed in the contemplation of the Divine glory, and a holy jealousy for the manifestation of that glory burns within our nature. Then do we become worshippers indeed.

Further, he worships best who addresses God most in the spirit of expectancy. "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Again I say, listen to the calm dignity of faith in those expectant tones: he stakes all on the assurance that this God both hears and answers. And even as he prays, the fire flashes down from heaven, and the sacrifice is consumed!

Oh for a restoration of such worship as this! By all means, let worship be as impressively conducted as possible; let it be, if you will, attractive and beautiful—we cannot offer anything too good to God; only let us see to it that the manner of the offering do not become a distraction; but let it be the worship of a living God, whose presence we recognize, and whose power we expect to be displayed. Let there be a personal expectation on the part of every worshipper that "the answer by fire" shall come down on God's side, as well as the sacrifice of prayer and praise be offered on ours, and then how different will our service become!

One thought more, and I draw to a close. Though perhaps the consciousness of it may scarcely have occurred to his own mind, Elijah was also silently *witnessing*, by the rebuilding of that altar, *to the identity of the law of spiritual service in every age.* What is that law? It has been more fully revealed under the Gospel dispensation than it was from Sinai; but it has existed, I believe, from the very first. It is the *law of sacrifice.* He is about to offer a sacrifice, and as he "lays it on the altar," was he not giving a kind of typical representation of his own position at that moment? Many of us have learnt the first half of the lesson of the law of sacrifice. We have learnt the blessedness of pleading the merits of the world's great sacrifice. We have learnt the preciousness of the blood. We dare to approach into the holiest place because we know the blood has been sprinkled there. We plead the finished sacrifice. The man who comes in the spirit of self-confidence—not recognizing the necessity of sacrifice—that man may take away his gift from the altar. No Cain's sacrifice can, under any circumstance, be acceptable to God. We must come *with the blood*, or not at all. But that is only half the truth. Jesus Christ "*died for all*," St. Paul says. That is half the law of sacrifice; or rather the first great manifestation of it. What does St. Paul go on to say? "That He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again." That is the second great manifestation of the law of sacrifice.

Now Elijah stood before Israel as a representative of this principle. He was indeed a "living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1). His life was in his hand. Against him was arrayed the antagonism of the entire nation. Those bloodthirsty priests of Baal are gazing at him with cruel eyes. Ahab's fickle will was nothing to rely upon. Obadiah cannot save him from the animosity of a Jezebel. What is he to do? He had counted the cost. "God is the Lord, who hath showed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." That was the law under which Elijah lived. He stood there, ready to do and dare anything, if only he might perform his Master's will. Observe, this was the character of the man during the whole course of his life. What did Elijah live for? There would have been no difficulty in answering that question. If we had been Elijah's contemporaries, and had been asked, What does Elijah live for? the answer would have been a single

word—"*God.*" Supposing I were to go to your nearest and dearest friend, and ask what you live for?—if he spoke the honest truth, would not the answer be, "I am not sure what most, but certainly for a variety of things." "That young Christian lady lives a good deal for pleasure; a little for going to church; a little for domestic employment and enjoyment; perhaps a very little for literature, and a good many other things." That man, what does he live for? "Most of all for his business; next, for his family, and so on." A great many things worldly Christians are living for. Elijah lived for one; the purpose of his life was "God." We want that "altar" restored, my friends,—the "altar" of pure, loyal, heart-devotion to a living, changeless Jehovah.

I thank God that in our day He seems to be moving the hearts of His people to feel their personal responsibility in this respect. Men and women are coming forward to offer themselves up to God and His work in lives of self-denying labour and devotion to Him who has "given Himself for us." And whatever our position or our circumstances may be, whether we are able to give ourselves right over to God's service in a life secluded from other occupations, or whether we continue to live as members of a family, surrounded by the necessary employments which take up so much of our time—yet, if we are really Christ's, we cannot escape from the most binding obligation, to give ourselves over to Him who died for us. Father! you may live for God in your own family;—*but live for God.* Mother! you may live for God when you are training your own children;—*but live for God.* You, whose lot is cast in society, you may live for God when paying visits to friends; but I beseech you *live for God then.* How many of us have a distinct secular and religious life! We put on the religious life when we go to church on Sunday, or when there is any great religious stir in the neighbourhood. Are there a series of religious services about to be held? You put on your religious apparel then, and come to them in a proper frame of mind. Then when these are passed, you doff your religious clothing and put on the garb of a citizen of this world. St. Paul did not act thus. "One thing I do," he says. Nor did Elijah. For God he lived; in God his life was contained. And let us, if we seek to win the crown, and if we recognize the supreme obligation that rests upon us by virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus, adopt this as our motto—"*One thing*

I do." To this consecrate all your energies and force of character—your talents, your time. Is it not a life of "splendid purpose"? Do not let us turn aside from it as though it were beyond our reach. Why should we not attain to this rule of life? Is not the power of the Holy Ghost sufficient to raise us to this level? Shall we "limit the Holy One of Israel," and say, He who inspired devotion in the first century cannot do it in the nineteenth? Nay, but as the light streams into our souls, let us "bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar."

From many different quarters in our own day a wistful eye is turned back upon the primitive ages of the Christian faith. It is well that the hearts of the children should thus be turned towards the fathers, but do let us endeavour to have a clear appreciation of what it is of primitive times that we should desire to restore. There are not wanting some who would have us lay aside time-honoured forms and symbols which have associated themselves in the course of the ages with our faith, and return to the bare outline of primitive simplicity. Surely this is not what we want. It is surely more than possible that the Church may have gained in point of form and colouring, so to speak, in the course of the ages; and to strip ourselves of these might be to incur an actual loss. Only let us see that our forms and methods of worship are such as do not militate against gospel simplicity.

There are others, again, who would have us lay aside the fabric of doctrine which has been elaborated by theological discussion in the course of Church history. Here, too, we have little to gain, and possibly something to lose, so long as we endeavour jealously to test our fabric of doctrine by reference to original revelation. What we do want is a return to primitive piety. In those early days men who had attached themselves to Christ had to be prepared to leave all things for His sake. The altar was erected within their hearts, and they themselves were consciously offered there.

Oh, brethren, do I speak to any this morning within whose nature the altar of the Lord has been allowed to fall into ruin? There has been so much of self-worship, so much subtle idolatry—the groves have flourished, and the prophets of the groves have been multiplied. Self-seeking, self-pleasing, an easy, luxurious life, worldly conformity, self-indulgence—have these become the characteristics of your experience? If so, the

lesson of our text is for you. In the name of God, rebuild the altar that is broken down; restore the ruined fane; and claim that He who answers by fire shall reconsecrate that which the flesh and the world have defiled.

One solemn word, and I have done. I dare not close my address this morning without contemplating something that strikes me as more than a possibility. I have spoken to real Christians throughout my entire sermon; but are there not some here within whose heart there is at this moment no consciousness of a Divine life,—who feel they are separated from God by sin and unbelief? What is your condition? It is like that of the land of Israel of old. You are sunk in spiritual idolatry, though you are not indeed worshippers of Baal. Yet have you gods of your own, little and great, whom you have manufactured for yourselves: but unto the true God —the God of your being—you know that you do not bow your heart in homage!

To you I want to say a few words. Your past may have been frivolous, worldly, sinful. You may have been flitting from one pleasure and folly to another, as though life had been one protracted joke. It is even possible that you may have plunged into a course of vice; at this moment your heart may be upbraiding you with your own folly and guilt, and you may have a terrible apprehension of coming doom.

As with Israel of old, God's judgments may be gathering round you, and the famine may be sore in the land. Yet I dare to say that within that fallen nature of yours, blighted with sin, darkened by sorrow,—within that apostate heart somewhere or another, hidden beneath the weeds of worldliness or vice, there may yet be found *a broken altar and a desecrated shrine!* It is there. You have almost forgotten its existence. Yet it is there—a latent desire, a disused capacity, a relic of the Divine, a mysterious something which God can erect in accordance with His original design. Some poor crumbling ruin of what should have been the temple of the Most High. Oh, mournful spectacle! the fane is desolate; no incense ascends, no voice of praise is heard. Yet, thank God that the ruins are there, and that the Great Restorer is in our midst. This moment, the invisible Christ—a greater than Elijah—is here, though you recognize Him not. He is here to do Elijah's work. Down to the depth into which you have fallen, He has followed you to draw aside that dark veil

of unbelief that has so long been over your heart. He is here to overthrow His great rival, and to erect within you an altar to Himself. Over the arid plain of your sin-stricken nature His Spirit's influence may be yet but as the "little cloud like a man's hand" rising on the distant horizon; but if you will recognize His claims, if you will own Him with the cry from the depth of your heart, "The Lord He is God!" that little cloud shall increase, and increase, and increase, until the heavens shall be big with "showers of blessing," and the teeming rain of God's own mercy shall stream down upon the once dry and parched soil, and that heart of yours shall "blossom as the rose;" and within it—once the abode of all impurity—shall be erected an altar for real and spiritual worship, on which the fiery answer shall descend, revealing the glory of the invisible God.

XX.

Christian Unity.*

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."—PSALM cxxxiii.

THE general desire for unity so widely prevalent, and exhibited in so many different quarters, must be regarded as one of the most hopeful signs of our time. Men seem to be learning practically, at length, what has ever been admitted in theory, that "unity is strength." The most prominent changes which have taken place recently in the history of nations have all tended in this direction. Many now living can remember the time when the great German race was of little power in the counsels of Europe, owing to its being broken up into a number of small nationalities; while Italy was still more weak,

* Preached at the opening of Christ Church, Westminster Road; built for the Rev. Dr. Newman Hall, instead of old Surrey Chapel.

on account of similar division. We have lived to see a united Germany, and a united Italy, and, I may add, a reunited America. And at this moment the movements in the East, which are attracting so much attention, may be paving the way for some great unification of the Sclavonic races in a future not remote. In ecclesiastical circles the same tendency may be detected. We have been hearing for some time past of proposals for the union of churches which have hitherto been regarded as mutually antagonistic. If we feel precluded from sympathizing altogether with these aspirations, it is not because we deny the desirability of the thing aimed at, but rather because we apprehend that under present circumstances the end—*Unity*—could only be gained by the sacrifice of *Truth*, and this is too dear a price to pay for any supposed benefits. It seems to us, also, that while the end which this movement has in view—namely, external unity—is one of no small importance, it is *not* certainly in externals that unity is most to be desired. In other words, we are strongly persuaded that unity, to be a real blessing, should begin within, and develop outwards, and that ecclesiastical connection without spiritual sympathy would be a very doubtful gain. At the same time we gladly recognize the desire that is witnessed to as one among the many hopeful signs of the times. The most satisfactory development of this characteristic of our day is to be found in the inward desire after closer relations with each other which exists within the hearts of true and earnest Christians of various ecclesiastical communions, and is frequently in one way or another finding its expression. We are beginning to feel ashamed of the coldness and suspicion and jealousy which have separated Christian brethren from each other in bygone times. We feel that something more is needed than that we should all learn the lesson of toleration. Toleration may be enough for the politician, but the Christian feels that he is called to love. Some of us are, I hope, beginning to feel suspicious and cold and jealous towards all that fosters suspicion and coldness and jealousy amongst brethren, or that seems to offer an obstruction to the warm and close relations of Christians to each other. The essential unity of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity has long been recognized as a theological truth, and freqnently witnessed to in theological treatises, and sometimes in our pulpits; but we have to consider the question, Can we not do something more than we are at present doing

to demonstrate this unity to the world? It was evidently the mind and will of the Master that the unity should be something capable of being outwardly expressed and observed; for He speaks of our love one to another as that which was to be the proof to the world that we are His disciples. Nay, further, He speaks of our being perfected in one as the means whereby the world was to be convinced of His own divine mission: "I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me." Now, however much weight may attach to the doctrine of the unity of all true believers in Christ Jesus with those who belong to that class, it stands to reason that it will not be a powerful argument with the world so long as we continue to stand aloof from each other in all those outward relations which come under the common observation of mankind at large. The world cannot recognize that which is purely and simply spiritual—perhaps we ought to add, it would not be justified in recognizing that as a spiritual reality which does not lead to outward and practical results. It is therefore high time that we faced the question with an earnest desire to obtain a reasonable answer—How may we practically promote a substantial unity among all those who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity?—such a unity as shall be a witness to the world of the reality of the love which binds us to each other, and of the actual existence of one common life within the persons of all who are the sincere and true followers of Christ? Now we may be led towards a true estimate of what can be done in this direction by considering for a few moments what cannot be expected. I am disposed to think that many have been led to lose interest in this subject, and to give up the idea of any considerable manifestation of Christian unity as altogether Utopian, because they themselves have either attempted or expected too much. Finding how impossible it was to gain all that they desired, they have too easily come to the conclusion that no progress at all could be made under existing circumstances, and thus have ultimately contributed in their degree to the perpetuation and extension of our divisions. It will therefore not be time thrown away if we spend a few moments in considering what it is that we may not expect, even for the sake of attaining so good a thing as Christian unity.

First of all, let us lay it down as most certain that *it is absurd*,

and even wrong, to suppose that each particular denomination should surrender its prominent witness to the specific truth for the sake of which we may almost say it exists, or in any way diminish the strength and emphasis of its testimony. It is not, it seems, too much to say that each particular denomination, or at any rate those which are most prominent in our land, have been called into existence in God's providence in order to bear witness to, and to call the attention of the Christian public to, some specific truth which was in peril at that particular time of being overlooked and lost sight of. It is in this light, at any rate, that I for my own part read the history of modern nonconformity, and I believe that the same was to a very considerable extent true of those ancient sects which in a more remote age bore in common, though they did not always merit, the title of heretical.

Let us glance for a few moments at the truths which are prominently witnessed to by those religious bodies with which we are most familiar, and which are at present occupying an attitude of dissent from the national Church of this land.

First, there are *the Presbyterians*, who, as it seems to me, were called into existence to witness to the right of the Church to corporate action, as opposed to an impotent submission to State control or episcopal tyranny. It can hardly be denied by the careful student of ecclesiastical history that at the time when Presbyterianism became the religion of Scotland there was exhibited on the part of certain English prelates a very strong disposition to become that which the Apostle warns the bishops of his day not to be—"lords over the Lord's heritage." Against this disposition, which, had it not been checked, might have brought ecclesiastical life in these realms under the control of a most grievous form of despotism, Presbyterian bodies stoutly protested. And when we of the Church of England congratulate ourselves upon the very modified control which is exercised over the clergy by their spiritual leaders, as I am sure most of us do, we should not forget how much we owe to the firm stand made by the Presbyterians against the exaggerated claims of Episcopacy.

Or let us look at *the Congregationalists.* Here we have a witness to the right of each separate congregation to manage its own affairs, as opposed to existing abuses of Church patronage and the possible tyranny of synodal organizations. When we consider how very little the rights of the congrega-

tion are considered in the existing system of the Church of England,—how the appointment of a minister to a congregation may be made at the caprice of a government official, or a private patron, or a partizan bishop, without the slightest reference to the feelings or convictions of the members of the flock,—we surely have cause to be thankful that a large and powerful body should exist amongst us whose characteristic as a body is a continuous protest against such imperfections of administration. If we suppose, as some of us may, that the Congregational power is open to grave abuses, and requires in some way or another to be modified, this does not render it less necessary that its claims should be powerfully witnessed to, until such time at any rate as we of the Church of England are disposed as a body to accord them due consideration. The strong, possibly the extreme, position adopted by that body in this respect forces all the more prominently on public attention a lesson which we of the Church of England prove ourselves singularly slow to learn.

Or turn to *the Baptist community*—their witness is not less distinct and intelligible. We have much reason to thank God for the strong and unequivocal testimony which they as a body bear to the fact that no external sacramental ordinance, however august in its character and exalted in its symbolism, can possibly be of any real and lasting spiritual benefit to the soul, unless there be true heart-faith on the part of the recipient, grounded and fixed in Him through whom alone the ordinance can derive its value. Can we in the Church of England afford to do without this testimony? In a time when the theory of baptismal regeneration *ex opere operato* is made the foundation for what I cannot otherwise describe than as a mechanical system of theology in which Christ's operations of grace are represented as being as closely connected with certain religious forms and phrases as the magical power of a sorcerer was understood to be connected with specific incantations, we surely need bold and vigorous testimony to the great truth, that "without faith it is impossible to please God;" and that no religious ordinance, however sacred, and whensoever performed, can render it possible for us to evade those spiritual experiences of repentance and faith by which alone the soul can enter into the conscious enjoyment of God's peace and love.

It is true that many of us believe that the Baptists are wrong in their mode of witnessing to this great necessity,

believing as we do that we have sufficient justification in inferences from Holy Scripture, and in the usage of the primitive Church, for a course of conduct opposed to theirs; but the fact that their mode of witnessing to a great spiritual necessity does not commend itself to our judgment, seems to give increased emphasis to their testimony, and to press it upon the attention of the Christian public in a manner that its supreme importance demands.

Or let us turn to the great *Wesleyan communion*, which, coming into existence only some hundred years ago, has spread with marvellous rapidity over both our own land and the American continent. We have not far to go here in order to discover the great truth to which this body is an eloquent and forcible witness. The necessity of the conversion of the human soul to God was the cardinal truth of John Wesley's teaching, and this his followers for the most part continue to preach, if not with equal success, at any rate with equal definiteness. I thank God that within the Church of England the word *conversion* is no longer looked upon with the same amount of suspicion, nor the thing which the word signifies looked upon with the same contempt and scorn, as in John Wesley's day. Men of the two great parties in the Church are now equally in the habit of preaching conversion, though it may be an open question whether all mean the same thing by the term. But who shall say how much this state of things has been brought about by the continued and unswerving testimony of the great Wesleyan body throughout one hundred years of active and vigorous evangelizing work? Nor can we afford to lose the testimony even now, without serious peril to the Church of England herself, and to the cause of Christ at large.

Or let us consider that body which in a darker age was for a time the centre towards which some of the most spiritual and earnest of our land were drawn, and from which have emanated some of the most remarkable efforts of Christian philanthropy and benevolence—the *Society of Friends*. Incapable though many of us may be of understanding the attitude which its members assume towards those religious ordinances which have been clearly instituted by Christ Himself, yet who can fail to see that the testimony of this body to the necessity of spirituality, as opposed to mere externalism, was most urgently required in the cold, worldly age in which the Society came into existence? And do not we still need to be reminded of

the supremacy of the Holy Spirit within the Church, and of the presence of His direct and mighty influence in the human heart, as distinct from, though not opposed to, His indirect operations upon our nature through constituted order—through form and symbol? I greatly fear that there is no such distinct testimony in our own Church to the all-important truth—"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," as might render the testimony of the Society of Friends, so far as we are concerned, wholly superfluous.

Or let us consider another body, (if I do not offend them by describing them as a body at all,) which has more recently come into existence, and to whom we cannot concede the exclusive use of the title "*Brethren*." Surely they too have done good service in witnessing to the use by the Divine Spirit of each individual member of the spiritual Church, and to the wrong which we do both to the Spirit and to the Church when we deny any single member the right to exercise his own functions, or to employ his own gift, to the glory of God and the benefit of the congregation. I may say that what the Church of England has done for national churches, as opposed to the pretensions of Rome; what Presbyterians have done for corporate church life, as opposed to the aggressions of an overbearing prelacy; what Congregationalism has done for single churches, as opposed to the dictatorial assumptions of synodal majorities; that Plymouth Brethrenism has done for the individual Christian. In a word, the writings and teachings of the "Brethren" have offered a strong and, let me add, a reasonable protest against what they not unjustly describe as "the one-man system"—the practice which has crept into the Church of employing a single official to offer, as it were vicariously, the worship of the congregation. It requires no considerable amount of antiquarian research to discover a state of things within our national Church which certainly demanded such a protest, or to disentomb from among the curiosities of the past an Anglican clergyman whose whole nature would have been agitated with dire horror at the mere idea of a layman offering any contribution to divine worship in public, other than that duly prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer. By such a man the mere suggestion of a prayer-meeting would have been regarded as outrageous; and any lay member of the congregation who ventured to exercise the gifts of an exhorter would have

incurred the gravest and most serious censure. I will hazard no statement as to whether or not such a clergyman as I have described must be regarded as belonging to an extinct species; but if things have altered, who shall say to what extent we owe the alteration to the indirect influence brought to bear upon the Church by the body to which I have referred?

Thus it is that

> "God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt a world."

It is, as of old, "in various parts and divers manners" (πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως) that He speaks to His servants, who have ears to hear; and these, however strong their convictions, will not be slow to admit that

> "Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day, and cease to be;
> *They are but broken lights of Thee,*
> And Thou, O God, art more than they."

Now if I have rightly described the more prominent characteristics of the various bodies to which we have referred, I would ask which of these emphatic testimonies could either the Christian public or the national Church of this land afford to do without at present? If each of these denominations has been raised up and brought into corporate existence by Divine Providence in order to call attention to a truth which was in danger of being lost sight of, or insufficiently recognized, surely it is not for a moment to be expected or desired that these several denominations should lay aside their testimony, or so far modify it as to avoid the antagonism of those who do not recognize it, for the sake of promoting even so desirable an object as Christian unity. Rather we must thank God that if in no single system the proportion of truth is fully preserved—if the witness of each dissenting denomination as well as of the national Church be more or less defective, God has not left Himself without a strong and clear testimony, complete in no single denomiation, but completed in all. Nay, further, the lover of unity, if he can but take a wide and comprehensive view of things, will find that in this very fact provision is made for the closer connection of Christians with each other. The plain truth is, that at present, at any rate, we cannot do without

each other. Neither can the Church afford to do without Nonconformity, nor can Nonconformists afford to do without the Church. Nor can we spare the witness that each denomination bears to important parts of truth. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; neither the hand to the head, I have no need of thee. And this I say, not as one who is satisfied with the existing state of things, nor because I regard our divisions as either desirable or justifiable. They have had their origin in faults, in wilfulness—let me speak plainly—*in sin* on both sides; and their continued existence tends to the perpetuation of a spirit which is opposed to the first principle of the Gospel—the law of love. Yet I rejoice to see how God works out His own gracious purposes even by our errors, and makes our evil an occasion of good. If our national Church were as a whole to accept and to treat with due respect, according to their proportionate value, the various portions of truth to which the denominations severally witness, it might become possible for the nonconforming bodies to assume an attitude of less distinct nonconformity; but as at present this is far from being the case, we need scarcely spend our time in contemplating a remote possibility. As things are at present, I repeat, we must each of us continue to witness to the truth as we see it.

Once again, we *cannot expect each other to think lightly of our differences.* An emasculate latitudinarianism is a thing to be deprecated almost as much as extreme and intolerant dogmatism. So far as we see the light clearly, we are bound to stand by our convictions, and if these convictions lead us to believe in the superiority of any particular ecclesiastical organization, we should be doing an injustice to ourselves and to those whom we teach were we to speak lightly or to think lightly of the advantages which it offers. I have not unfrequently heard it said, for the most part by ignorant people, "But after all there is only one way to heaven, and it does not matter whether we go there through the church or through the chapel." One might reply by saying, Even though there should be but one road to any given locality, it might make a very considerable amount of difference to the traveller whether or not he took his journey trudging under a knapsack or riding in a chariot. Without unduly exaggerating the effects, beneficial or otherwise, of particular ecclesiastical systems, he must indeed be but little acquainted with the influence of the external upon the internal who will venture to affirm that they can exercise no consider-

able influence at all. But the strength of our convictions need not make us unbrotherly towards each other, nor shut us off from those sympathies which should bind together the whole family of God. On the contrary, it seems to me that the very strength of our convictions should render us all the more tolerant and friendly towards those of whom we may in charity assume that their convictions are equally strong. Were it a matter of little moment to them what views they held, we might be justified in indulging a certain amount of indignation at men who could be so schismatical as to contend about matters which they themselves felt to be mere trifles. But inasmuch as we ourselves do not regard such things as trifles, we may safely conclude that our brethren are similarly affected, and for that very reason should be all the less eager to condemn, even where we may not be able to agree. If I may for a moment refer to myself, I should like to say that I stand here to-day with all the more pleasure just because I am not a latitudinarian, but a decided though I hope a liberal churchman; and I feel that whatever weight my testimony in favour of the importance of Christian unity may claim, it must owe greatly to the fact that, holding strong and definite views upon ecclesiastical subjects, I am nevertheless constrained by Christian charity to regard those convictions as subordinate to a great and recognized principle of Christian obligation—brotherly love. I thank God for an opportunity of asserting by the language of actions the importance of Christian unity; and I do this all the more heartily because I feel that in the interchange of such brotherly offices there is no compromise of long-established opinions or convictions.

We have been considering what it is that we are not to expect in our attempts after Christian unity. Let me pass on to point out what, as it seems to me, is within our reach without any compromise of principle. The reference I have just made to my own feelings in accepting the invitation of your minister to address you to-day may serve to introduce my first suggestion. Might we not promote unity of feeling and action amongst ourselves and our flocks, without any compromise of principle, by *an occasional interchange of friendly services?* When a clergyman of the Church of England preaches in the pulpit of a brother clergyman whose views are opposed to his own, he is not supposed thereby to compromise his own theology. The same may be said with respect to the relations

of the various denominations to each other. No one would for a moment suppose that a Baptist was doubtful of his theological position because he preached in a Methodist chapel. But the members of our own Church have hitherto shrunk, for the most part, from the interchange of such friendly offices with their Nonconformist brethren, as though to preach in the pulpit of a Nonconformist were to resign their position as churchmen. Besides this, a recent legal opinion given by a very high authority has induced the general belief that under the existing state of the law it is illegal for a clergyman of the Church of England to preach in a Nonconformist place of worship.

I would just point out, in passing, that this decision proves far too much, and therefore cannot reasonably be considered as of any weight at all. According to it, it is quite as much a breach of the law for a clergyman to preach in an unlicensed hall as in a dissenting chapel: the illegality arises, not from the places being connected with Nonconformity, but from its being unconnected with the Church; but this is surely a *reductio ad absurdum* of law which can never for a moment be accepted in a day of mission halls and theatre services, open-air gatherings, and tent meetings.

The fact that no other ground could be discovered on which to base an opinion unfavourable to this exercise of Christian liberty, is conclusive evidence, in my judgment, that in standing here to-day I am no more disobeying the law of the Church than I should be in giving an address at Exeter Hall. On the other side, the case is, unfortunately, not equally clear. The existing state of the law does render it doubtful whether a Nonconformist can legally occupy a pulpit within the Established Church (unless it be at Westminster Abbey!) Yet no such difficulty would exist with respect to meetings in our schoolrooms; and the occasional presence of Nonconformists even here might be enough to check the bitterness of party spirit, and to show to the world how real a thing Christian union is.

I am firmly persuaded that this apparent coldness in our relations with each other, this absence of religious intercourse, does more than at first sight might appear to hinder the development of a spirit of Christian unity, and to foster the spirit of sectarian exclusiveness. As in social life we get to understand each other, and thus to be bound to each other in affec-

tionate regard, by unrestrained intercourse, so in the Church of Christ it is by the interchange of friendly offices that we may hope to break down the barriers of reserve, and to approach each other more closely.

We of the Church of England need to be reminded emphatically that although there may have been faults on both sides, we after all have been the chief cause of the existing divisions, that our worldly intolerance at one period, and our coldness and apathy at another, called into existence those very bodies which some within our communion are in the habit of stigmatizing as *schismatical*.

The use of this word, frequent as I regret to say it is on the lips of churchmen even in our own day, has contributed not a little to the perpetuation of painful and bitter feelings. It would not be so lightly used if men would but reflect what the true basis of unity is as laid down in the Word of God. The primal unity recognized there is the unity of the Spirit, from which it follows that he who is most under the influence of the Holy Ghost, who is most truly "led by the Spirit," has least of the schismatic about him; and that the unspiritual man, be he Churchman or Nonconformist, is, and always must be, the true schismatic. Wherever the unspiritual and carnally-minded exercise preponderating influence within any communion, the inevitable result must be the production of schism; for you can more easily mingle oil and water, or blend darkness and light, than retain in permanently friendly relations the spiritual and the unspiritual. But when under these circumstances a division does take place, who is the author of the schism,—the spiritual, whose consciences constrain them to withdraw, or the unspiritual, who have necessitated the withdrawal?

These hard words had better be laid aside. Whatever else they do, they can never constitute a reasonable argument, but they can excite animosities and heartburnings. In their place let there be cultivated a spirit of Christian courtesy—an earnest endeavour to realize the ideal of our text, "to dwell together." In one sense we do "dwell together." Our lot is cast in the same land; we are taking part in the same great conflict against the powers of evil; around us are masses of our fellow-men sunk in ignorance and crime, and in our attempts to reach and benefit these we are at one. But living together, it is possible for us none the less to act as though there were a coldness between us, as though we were

lodgers in the same house, rather than members of the same family. God forbid that we should do so.

Next, we may do much towards the furtherance of Christian unity by *endeavouring to educate ourselves to a dispassionate estimate of the points in which we differ*, and *by assigning their proportionate value to those points in which we agree.* I am persuaded that were we to do so, we should be filled with astonishment that those who have so much in common should ever have allowed themselves to be so much enstranged from each other by *comparatively* slender differences. Take for instance the case as between Episcopal and Presbyterian government. Admitting that the point is one of considerable importance as viewed in some of its aspects, what is its importance in comparison with the all-important truths which Presbyterians and Episcopalians hold in common? And, not to multiply instances such will be found to be true of most points upon which Christians are separated from each other.

Above everything else we should contribute towards Christian unity by recognizing and keeping ever in view *the true basis of unity.* As I have already said, unity, to be real, must begin within. The unity of the Gospel is primarily a unity of the Spirit, and it is to such unity as this that the text calls our attention—"Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." But what sort of unity? The bond of unity—the element which binds all together—is "like the precious ointment upon the head, which ran down unto the beard, even unto Aaron's beard, and that went down to the skirts of his garments." It is the unction of the Holy Spirit, which, resting first upon the great Head of the Church, descends even to the very skirts of His garments, makes all one by sanctifying all. The more we know in our own personal experience of that divine unction, the more shall we be united to each other; and the higher we rise in fellowship with our Head, the more close and real will be the bond of brotherhood. These two things are always necessarily connected,—*the higher—the nearer;* more fellowship with God, the more communion with the children of God. We may be ascending a mountain from different sides, and our starting-points may be widely separated from each other, but every step of our upward journey brings us not only nearer to the mountain's summit, but also nearer to those who are scaling it from opposite quarters. To reach the summit would be to meet. But even

as we approach the summit, may we not get new views, not only of the height above, but also of those who, on some distant spur or mountain ridge, are making their way towards that height, and thus become acquainted with each other even before all the barriers are removed, and we join hands on the mountain's brow?

It is like "the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion." Listen to the words of a traveller in explaining the sense of this passage: "What we read in the hundred and thirty-third Psalm of the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion has now become quite clear to me. Here, as I sat at the foot of Hermon, I understood how the water-drops which rose from its frost-mantled heights, and out of the higher ravines, which are filled the whole year round with snow, after the sun's rays have attenuated them and moistened the atmosphere with them, descend at evening-time as a heavy dew upon the lower mountains which lie round about its spurs. One ought to have seen Hermon with its bright golden crown glistening aloft in the blue sky in order to be able rightly to understand the figure. Nowhere in the whole country is so heavy a dew precipitated as in the district near to Hermon."

Our Hermon-like summit soars above the clouds, upon which rests the full light and glory of the sun, but from that light-crowned Head there descends the dew of blessing upon the surrounding hills—"the mountains of Zion." The term is applied, as some commentators hold, with much probability, not to the well-known hill at Jerusalem, but to the smaller mountains which cluster round the base of Hermon, and complete the mountain range—mountains which are one in their reception of the blessing which flows from a common centre. And we, as we cluster round the Person of our exalted Head, will ever find that the dew will ever fall there most where we gather closest.

"And there the Lord commanded the blessing." What is it, brethren, that keeps back the blessing, if not our wars, and fightings, and mutual suspicions, and manifestations of jealousy, past and present? We are weak too often because we desire our brethren to be weak. We are exposed to the foe, because we have declined fellowship with true friends. But where brethren dwell together in unity, and the unction from on high rests on a united Church—united in spirit, if

not in outward form—then we are in a position to claim the promised blessing, "even life for evermore." Not the fleeting glory and passing pageant of external ecclesiasticism; not the hollow fabric of a catholicity based upon the sacrifice of truth and the subordination of the spiritual to the formal; but a blessing which shall last in all its fulness when human systems crumble to decay; which shall carry the most priceless of gifts to those who have hitherto lain beyond the range of Christian enterprise; a blessing that shall scatter the knowledge of the Lord from shore to shore, from pole to pole, and hasten on the day of His appearing who alone can bind our scattered parts together, and weld them into one complete and eternal unity, the blessing which the Lord hath promised —"even life for evermore."

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