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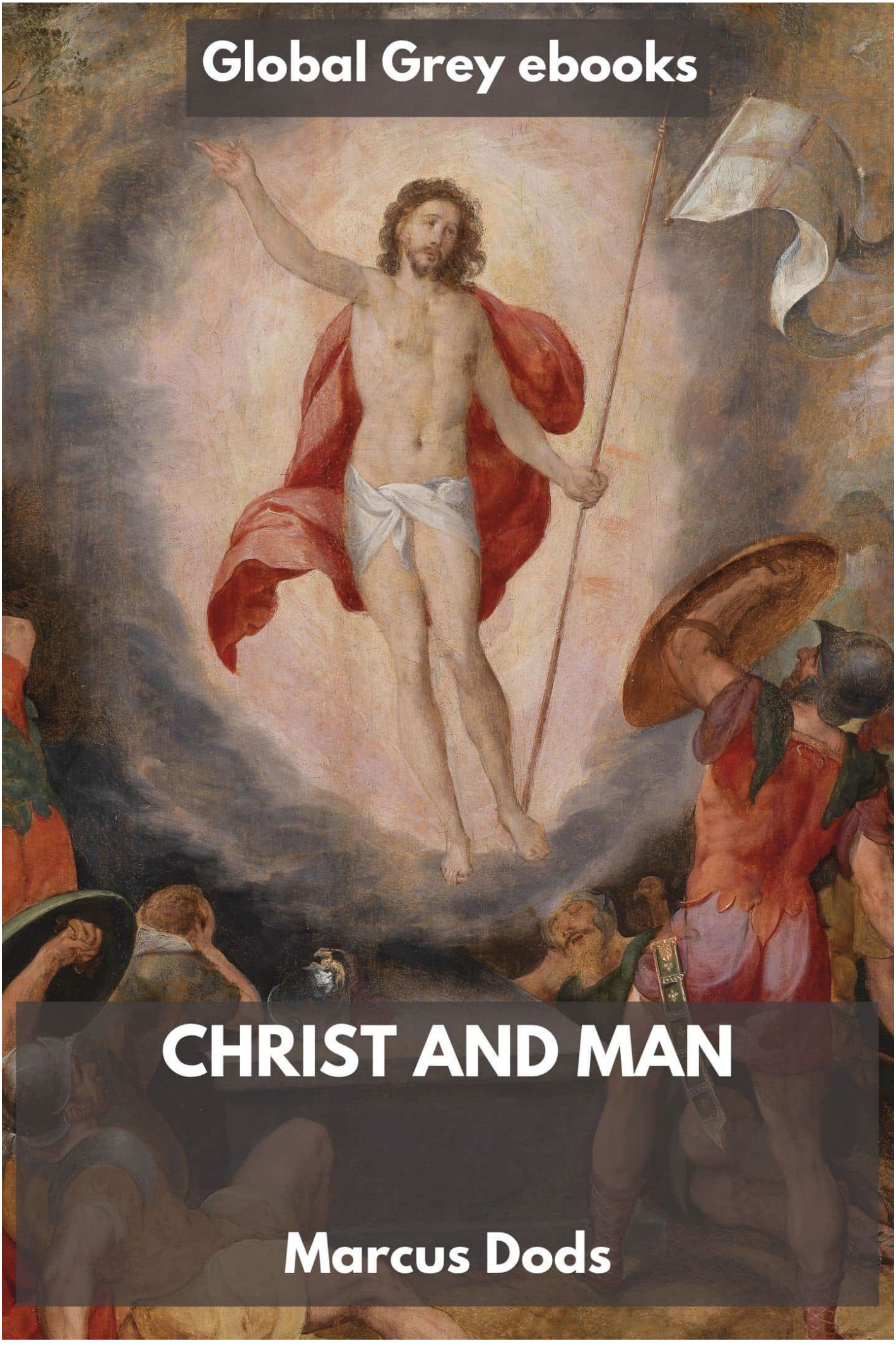

CHRIST AND MAN

Marcus Dods

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Prefatory Note

The following Sermons were not selected for the press by Dr. Dods himself, and did not receive his own final revision. After his death, a desire was expressed by many friends for a book which should be representative of his preaching as a whole; and accordingly, while the majority of the Sermons are recent, the volume includes several which date, at least in their first conception, from the years when he was at the height of his influence in Glasgow.

My work as editor has been narrowly limited to minor alterations such as it is reasonable to believe the author might have introduced.

H. R. Mackintosh.

Edinburgh, September, 1909.

I. Christ's Sympathy With The Tempted

"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."—*Heb*. ii. 18.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."—*Heb*. iv. 15.

There is one experience which no man ever escaped or can ever escape: that is, the experience of temptation. This life necessarily tests every man who passes through it, and on this hinge of temptation our character turns to good or to evil, and by it is our destiny determined. Without temptation no sin would be committed; and without temptation no holiness could be attained. The human wrecks that seem beyond all capacity of repair and refitting, and the victorious athletes of righteousness whom their fellow men adore, are alike the products of temptation. For it is impossible to see how, without temptation and the training involved in it, men can attain purity and strength of character. All moral worth lies in the will; God cannot confer holiness upon you by a simple act: you must choose it. It is not *your* holiness until you choose it. Nay, it is not yours until your choice has become a habit, until by a thousand repetitions of choice you have become habitually righteous. And these repeated choices of good, these ever-renewed righteous acts, will be productive of habitual personal achieved holiness in you, just in proportion to their difficulty—that is, to the amount of resolution or will that is needed to perform them; in other words, in proportion to the stress of temptation in the face of which they are done. Temptation is our opportunity of growth. It is by conflict and exercise, by self-control and discipline, by successfully meeting the tests of daily life that we grow, if we grow at all. In Milton's great language: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is *trial*, and trial is by what is contrary."

How, then, can we secure that in our case the result of temptation shall be victory and not defeat? It is the object of the Epistle to the Hebrews to convince us that Christ came into the world for the purpose of furnishing us with the required aid. Sympathy, we are told, lies at the root of His efficiency as our Saviour. His ability to succour the tempted springs out of His own experience of temptation and His conquest of it. Thorough sympathy is itself often the best aid we can receive. To be understood and considered, to have appreciation and hope spent upon us is more than half the battle. Carlyle was at one time strongly tempted to give up striving for success in literature: "No periodical editor wants me; no man will give me money for my work. Despicablest fears of coming to absolute beggary besiege me." His *Sartor* was pronounced "clotted nonsense"; but at this critical juncture he received a letter from some nameless Irishman, recognizing its merit, and this one voice renewed Carlyle's strength. "One mortal, then, says I am not utterly wrong; blessings on him for it." Every one knows what the sympathy of Kadijah was to Muhammed, how all her life he set her first: "She believed in me when none else would believe. In all the world I had but one friend, and she was that." This is part of the aid which Christ's sympathy brings to us: He believes in us; when others shake their heads, and we

ourselves are in despair, He tells us we may yet succeed. He has brought into the world the brightest and best of gifts, hope. He comes to those who, as best they can, are making their bed in hell, and He tells them that heaven is theirs. It is this which has been the grand inspiration of struggling, baffled men in their strife for righteousness. Christ bids them hope: He tells them that He Himself was man, and knows what temptation means, and has seen the struggle from the combatant's point of view, appreciates the strain that is put upon them, and assures them that success is sure if they persevere.

But a sympathetic understanding of our whole condition and a profound interest in us must obviously lie at the root of all effective dealing with us. No one could propose to become our Saviour who despised or despaired of us; who could not even apprehend what the difficulty is in turning from sin, in restraining the flesh, and in forswearing the world. The writer to the Hebrews assures us of this sympathy on Christ's part, and traces it to the fact that He Himself has been tempted in all points as we are. We cannot fully apprehend our Lord's sympathy unless we believe He was really tempted. But there are difficulties in the way of this belief.

Let us look at the difficulties we commonly find in Christ's temptation.

1. We shrink from believing in the real temptation of Christ because we fear that in so doing we may be ascribing to Him some sinful contamination. In our own experience temptation is so commonly the result of past sin, and is so implicated with sinful habit, and is, besides, so frequently followed by sin that we find it difficult to draw the line between temptation and sin. To be tempted and to pass blameless through the temptation is rare among our experiences, and therefore scarcely among our conceptions. We have not been scorched by the fire, but we have been sullied, we think, by the smoke. We may have quickly poured out what entered the mind, but it has left a tang in the cask which taints all that is in us. Temptation and sin become closely associated in our thoughts. And so when in Christ we see no sin, we conclude there has been no temptation.

We must, then, keep in view that temptation is not sin. A man may sinfully put himself in the way of temptation; one sin may be a temptation to another, but there may be, and often is, temptation without sin either as its accompaniment or its result. The most violent temptations may arise from indispensable appetites, commendable feelings, unavoidable circumstances, heroic purposes. The man who has been weeks out of work and has bread neither for himself nor his famishing children, and who is daily confronted with an easy but fraudulent or degrading means of earning money, is severely tempted, but he commits no sin unless he yields and resolves to acquire the illicit gain. In such a case the temptation arises out of an innocent appetite and one of the finest feelings of our nature; but who for a moment could suppose it was wrong to be hungry, or sinful to desire that your children have bread? To feel the wildest cravings of natural appetite and eagerly to desire its relief is innocent, and sin only then begins when the will gives way and resolves to gratify the appetite by forbidden means. The mere pain of the restrained appetite is as innocent as the pain of the limb that is severed by the surgeon's knife. The sin is not in having the appetite, which is natural, necessary and innocent; nor does it lie in there being present to the mind an unlawful means of gratifying it, for this may only be present to be abhorred and rejected, but sin begins when the temptation is cherished and indulged and consented to. Thomas à Kempis notes five stages in temptation. First, he says, there occurs to the mind the bare conception, then the clear mental picture of the gratification, after that a gloating pleasure in it, to which

succeeds the wicked inclination and assent. Plainly, in the first stage there is no sin, and scarcely in the second, although here danger looms on the horizon; but it is only when the evil thing is delighted in that sin begins; not the bare knowledge that the forbidden object is attractive and delightful, but the letting the mind dwell upon it and find pleasure in it.

2. Another point to be remarked is that sinless temptations may be the most severe. Jesus knew nothing of the terrible might and craft of a temperament naturally predisposed to some formidable vice, and pampered by long, habitual indulgence into a despotism that brooks no resistance. Miraculously born a Holy Thing, with no evil stain contaminating His blood and driving Him to evil, how could He understand the helpless misery of those whose nature is stained through and through, and all whose propensities are towards evil? But it is a mistake to suppose that the most violent temptations are those which appeal to evil passions. The strength of temptation depends, among other things, on the strength of the feeling appealed to, and it is easy to show that pure and right feelings and natural appetites are more powerful and persistent than impure and acquired desires. The drunkard fancies that he must yield to his appetite or die, but that is a mere imagination. His acquired appetite may be resisted without fatally injuring him; but the natural appetite of thirst, if persistently restrained, destroys the physical system. If this natural appetite of thirst can only be gratified at the expense of another's life, as has often happened in shipwreck, in this case the innocent thirst and the ungenerous means of quenching it form material of a temptation far surpassing in severity anything the self-indulgent profligate experiences from the cravings of a pampered appetite. The same law holds good in the higher parts of our nature. The richer a man's nature is, the more interests he has, the finer susceptibilities, the more numerous connections he sustains to other men, and the more loving his attachment to them be, the more open is he to the severest temptations. And it was the wealth of our Lord's nature, the tenderness and truth of His attachment to men, the universality of His sympathy, the vividness of His insight, the vastness of His undertaking, that made Him the object of temptations more distracting, persistent and severe than those which assail any other.

While, therefore, Christ can have been little tempted by the allurements that break down our defences, and must have lived in a region of thought and feeling that set Him quite out of reach of our most violent temptations, it does not follow that He was not as severely tempted as we. A man's strength may be strained and tested quite as much by lifting bags of gold as by handling piles of rubbish. Each man has his own weakness and his own temptation. The scenes of dissipation and gaiety which fascinate one person are not merely indifferent, but positively repellent to others. To the man who has been brought up a banker, and is in comfortable circumstances, it is no temptation to have large sums of money passing through his hands; but this becomes an irresistible temptation to the trained thief whose life has been filled with continuous dishonesties, and who would think shame to labour for what he could appropriate by fraud. Meanwhile, the banker has his own temptations quite as powerfully appealing to him, although in a wholly different region. That we cannot admit the supposition that our Lord was tempted in ways that ruin us is no proof that He was not more severely tempted or that He cannot sympathize with us.

3. Again, the severity of temptation is felt, not by the man who yields to it, but by the man who resists it. We are always apt to conclude that because Christ did not sin when tempted, He can know none of the pain of resistance. Just as when we see a

practised gymnast perfectly performing his various feats we think it must be easy to him, and lose sight of all the training and nervous anxiety and immense effort he has put forth to achieve this apparently effortless result. But so obvious is it that it is the man who resists temptation who knows the pain of it, that it almost needs no remark. Take two men in money difficulties to whom a shady escape is offered. The one jumps at the offer at once, quieting his conscience with the usual arguments, and indeed scarcely spending any thought upon the matter; the other becomes restless and agitated, spends sleepless nights weighing present relief against duty, measuring the disaster which is likely to befall his family, his business, the good name of his firm, pressed almost beyond endurance by the urgency of his need, and recognizing the ease and impunity with which he may glide into prosperity, but at length puts from him the temptation and faces loss: there is surely no question whether of these two—the victor or the vanquished—suffers the more pain. As well might you ask whether the soldier who malingers, and spends the day of battle in hospital, knows more of the hazards of war and the difficulty of victory than his comrade who is found in the front of battle, with many wounds, but with his country's flag held fast. The man who has promptly surrendered to his vicious inclinations and given himself to all manner of indulgence knows nothing of temptation, of its pain and persistence and violence, compared to him who all his life through has been conscious of a strong bias to evil, but has resolutely crushed it, often with groans and torment.

4. Again, it may be felt that even if Jesus was exposed to temptations as violent as those which drive us to sin, yet He had aids to resistance which we lack. Being divine, He must have found it easy to resist sin. Temptation was with Him an unreal thing, a mere show or play, a drama with a foregone conclusion. How could He feel thirst who was Himself the living water, or hunger who could feed five thousand at a word? What need had He of prayer, or what sense of helplessness compelling Him to cast Himself on another's compassion, while He Himself could grant all petitions? It is this double life which perplexes us, and often leaves the impression that He was only playing the part of a man, while not really human; that He prayed not from any sense of insufficiency in Himself, but merely as an example to His disciples; and that when He ate and drank He was merely accommodating Himself to human ways, and could quite well have lived without; that, in short, He did not really resemble us in our constitution, nor was subject to the laws under which we live, but merely assumed certain appearances to serve His purpose.

To think this is seriously to wrong our Lord by gravely underrating the sacrifice He made in becoming incarnate. A true incarnation involves just what the Gospels tell us of Christ. He was subject to the same laws as ourselves physically; if He fasted He necessarily became hungry, if He walked far He was fatigued; if He fell He was bruised, if pierced He bled, because His body was like ours: as dependent as ours on food, air, and other material influences. And as He had to maintain His body as we have to maintain ours, so had He to maintain His spirit by the very same means that we require to use. His human nature was no more independent and self-sufficing than ours; He had to maintain Himself in fellowship with the Father, and His strength was derived from the indwelling of the Spirit. Our Lord's resistance to temptation was a human resistance. His divinity may be said to have ensured His triumph, but His triumph could only be achieved by His use of means which are open to all. Had He thought as little and as lightly as we do of the Spirit's help, had He not spent in watching and praying those nights which others spent in sleep, He could not have triumphed.

The truth is that our Lord's ability to work miracles was a serious aggravation of His temptation. Temptation is strong in proportion to the ease with which the desired object can be attained. If but a word, an act of will, a look lies between us and what we crave, it is enormously difficult to refrain. Temptation is at its maximum of strength where we have simply to let matters take their course, where non-interference is all that is required to attain our unrighteous object. Now, our Lord always had power to obtain what He might desire. To us there could have been no temptation in the wilderness, because we could not have created bread. To Him the temptation was incalculably strong, because He had creative power. Throughout His life He had to restrain infinite power. Who among men could have been entrusted with boundless power; what man could have been trusted always to use that power aright, never for the merely selfish attainment of personal desire, never for the summary removal of obstacles and overthrow of enemies? Was it easy for Christ to accept defeat and death and shame, when by a word He could have had in their stead glory and life?

We begin, then, to understand that Christ was tempted as we are; that He was not simply set forth as a champion to display His strength in the easy overthrow of every enemy that opposed Him; but that He has felt in His own person the difficulty of being righteous in this world, has known what it is to see strong inducements to do evil, and to feel the pain and weariness of maintaining a blameless, self-forgetting life; that He has viewed sin as a possible thing, and as a much easier thing than duty; that He has had to take precautions against sin, to agonize in prayer for strength to do the Father's will, and has found duty so hard and grievous that in making up His mind to perform it His soul was torn with agony and His body prostrated by the violence of His emotion; that in every part of His human constitution He has known the pain and conflict with which alone temptation can be overcome. He has felt the reasons and inducements that incline men to choose sin that they may escape suffering or death; He has had in His own soul, and as His own personal conflict, to curb desires clamouring for gratification; He has Himself stood on human ground, and has felt the difficulty of holiness, the bewilderment and agony that can overwhelm a human career and beat a man down from God. In a word, He has been so tempted that, had He sinned, He would have had a thousandfold better excuse than ever man had.

All this liability to temptation and actual exposure to it He undertook that He might be perfected by suffering as men are perfected, and might become trustworthy and sufficient as our Saviour. He undertook it because He felt for us, and He went through with all His painful experience that His sympathy might be perfect and efficient. And now what is the fruit of His work, what is His reward? He has no reward but this, that all He has won by His experience be laid out in serving you. Sins forgiven you, help afforded you, graces matured in you, temptations overcome by you, your cleansing from sin and complete salvation—these are *His* delight, the promotion of His interests, the increase of His felicity. Suppose it be a poor life He has chosen, a tame delight to spend Himself in saving sinners, suppose it be but a flat way to spend a life that might be so palpably and conspicuously glorious as His, still it is His taste, it is His nature, it is His life to stoop to you and your necessities. If there be some friend whose love you are so sure of that it sometimes strikes you—"Now, could I put my salvation into that man's hands, were he able to accomplish my happiness, I know he would"—you may thus depend on the love of Christ, who has won His high position by living a perfect human life, and who uses it to enable you to follow Him.

What encouragement, then, are we expected to draw from this grand truth that we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities? How does Christ's human experience and the sympathy He has learned from it help us?

First, we have the inexhaustible encouragement that springs from the fact that One who was in all points tempted as we are has not been defeated, but has passed scatheless through all that human life could do to overwhelm Him. There is a way through life to blessedness. It may not be a way easy to find or easy to follow, but there is One who has found it and seeks to guide us to the perfect freedom in which He now lives. He is the strong swimmer who has not only found standing for Himself on the eternal shore, but has also carried a line by which we, too, may escape. He has trodden down for us the drifted snow, so that we can follow Him. Universal defeat has not been, after all, the lot of humanity—sin and death are not the sole experience of those who have passed through life; there is one who has turned all its obstacles into stepping-stones, its hazards into victories, its anxiety and bitterness and gloom into the glory and brightness of eternity. He has shown us the uses and meaning and results of life, so that we may have hope. In the strength of Him who has gone before us we can follow.

"Christ leads us through no darker rooms
Than He went through before."

There is a way through and out of the darkest human experience into everlasting light and joy; there is with every temptation a way of escape.

But, secondly, we have also the assurance that we who are still waging an often doubtful conflict with sin are the especial objects of Christ's care, and in Him have all needed aid to secure final victory. He has suffered for us, and that binds Him to us. Make a sacrifice for a friend, and you are more firmly bound to him than ever. The mother is bound to her children, because her life is for them, because she has suffered and laboured and watched for them; and if there be one more than another she loves, it is not the child that has cost her least trouble, but the sickly and feeble creature that has lain on her hands day and night, that has cast a shadow on her life, and has turned a bright and joyous spirit into one of pensive and solemn care. Who, then, can be so much on the heart of our Lord as ourselves, who have cast so dark a shadow across the brightness of His glory, and have struck into His blessedness so sharply with suffering, and have inserted so new and strange an experience into His eternity? Surely, then, it is reasonable to believe that Christ does not shake Himself free of those for whom He underwent all possible suffering, but that He does remember and feel for us, and that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

II. The Temptation Of Jesus

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."—*Matt.* iv. 1.

In the Gospel narrative, and in the development of our Lord's life, the Temptation follows upon the Baptism. The connection is obvious and is the key to the incident. In His baptism He had been proclaimed as the Messiah; He had been called out of private into public life, and He had been called to take among men a place which could be filled only by Himself, and by no other of all the millions of mortals. Neither had He any counsellor or example or guide to instruct Him in the method by which He might best accomplish the unique work to which He was called. None had as yet attempted it, none had conceived it. It was on an ocean without beacon, buoy, or chart He was summoned to launch. He was called from the carpenter's shop at Nazareth to redeem a world. The village lad was now to reveal God to men, to represent in His person and life the wisdom, the holiness, the love, the authority of the infinite Supreme; and so to represent, that men everywhere and in all time would need no other teaching and no further appeal. How could He face this task, by what hitherto untried method accomplish it?

The burden and glory, the hazard and intricacy and responsibility of His vocation must have stirred in His soul a ferment of emotions never experienced by any other man. Often as He had pondered His future in the quiet of the Galilean hills, often as He had surveyed the actual condition of his fellow countrymen and considered how He could bring light and peace to them, now that He was actually to be launched on His work all past thought seemed insufficient, and He felt that still His decisions were to be made and that the final settlement of His mind and attitude was to be found. Solitude was what He craved—the absolute solitude that could be gained only where the wild beasts scared away all living things. The inquisitive, critical eyes fixed on Him among the Baptist's followers, the eager questioning to which He must at once have been subjected, the necessity of now at last determining the steps He must take to win the world to God made solitude essential to Him.

The intensity of His emotion and of His thought is very simply conveyed by the evangelists, who tell us that for forty days and forty nights—that is, for some unusually long period—He forgot to eat. This gives us the measure of the intensity of His concentration, of His absorption in thought. Sometimes a leader of men is so consumed with anxious elaboration of a campaign involving many lives, or of a legislative act which may affect many interests, that he is irritated and impatient when reminded that a meal-time has arrived; sometimes in heart-broken grief or grave agitation food is wholly forgotten: can we wonder that He who was now summoned to enter on a career on which hung the eternal interests of all His fellows, and upon whose wisdom and steadfastness God's purpose towards the world depended, should have been able for a time to think of nothing else? The nervous agitation, the inability to sleep or to talk coherently, the absentmindedness which we experience when summoned to some public duty for which we feel scarcely equal may help us to understand what Jesus, human as we are, felt when summoned to His superhuman task.

The key to His temptation then is found in the necessity now laid upon Him to ascertain the principles and methods of His work. He could no longer shrink from assuming the *rôle* of Messiah. But how was He to begin? What was He to do? And, as the narrative shows us, the main problems He had to solve were these: "Am I, as Messiah, lifted above human needs and trials? What use may I make of the powers committed to Me? What means may I legitimately use to convince the people of My claims? What kind of Messiah am I to be?" From His childhood He had heard discussions about the kingdom of the Messiah; He had become familiar with the popular expectations of great battles and victories, of signs from heaven and physical catastrophes and triumphs without moral conflict; and His mind had now to face these expectations, to work itself clear of all popular fallacies and to count the cost—a cost written so large in history—of resisting or disappointing those who might expect chiefly to benefit by His appearance among them.

1. The first temptation was to use for His own protection and comfort the miraculous powers given to Him for the use of others. This temptation, which must have almost daily assailed Him throughout His career, received force from the circumstances in which He now found Himself. Absorbed, during His retirement in the desert, in mental conflict, the claims of intense bodily hunger at last make themselves felt. He finds Himself faint, far from any dwelling where He can obtain relief: ready to perish, too sick, giddy and spent to seek for food.

What have men not done through the pressure of hunger? We forgive the starving man who steals a loaf—even the miserable survivors of shipwreck who, after a week's agony, devote one of their number to be the food of the rest, we who live at home at ease have no right to condemn. It was this most powerful of appetites that owns no law and no obstacle that now claimed Jesus as its victim. And how easily He can satisfy it. "The sight of means to do ill deeds oft maketh ill deeds done," said one who seldom erred; and Jesus carries in His own Person the power to turn the very stones of the untilled hillside into bread. Here is the stress of the temptation—that feeling Himself swooning with exhaustion, looking round for relief with the despair of the Australian explorer who has lain down to die of want, He yet is conscious, distractingly conscious, that He has power by one word to supply Himself with immediate relief.

There is no merit in bearing what you cannot escape. The convict chained in his dungeon is not meritorious because he takes no revenge; but a David who has his most relentless and unjust foe under his spear-point, who is urged by every selfish consideration there to make an end, who might seem to have been led by Providence to the determined outlet from all his troubles, he could tell you what temptation means and how much the ease of the action adds to its allurement. This ease existed in the case of Jesus in an extraordinary degree.

And besides, if He dies there with His work unbegun, how foolish a death, what a fiasco of a Messianic reign! Then again, might He not here in private experiment with His powers? If He fail there is no one to be a witness of His failure, if He succeed there is none to draw wrong inferences from His saving Himself.

It was the same temptation He experienced when He knew He could summon twelve legions of angels to turn the stupid and self-confident exultation of His enemies into shame and defeat. Still the same temptation assailed Him on the cross when He was foolishly taunted in the words, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." How tempting then and at all times to turn the tables on His blind and bitter foes by an act

which should demonstrate their folly and humble their confidence! But even more subtle, if not more tempting, was this appeal to His instinct of self-preservation in the wilderness. Why should He not use His power? Could He ever use it for a worthier object than to keep alive the Messiah on whom God's hope for the world depended? Nevertheless, He would not use His power to work miracles, because He has taken human nature and is to live a human life under human conditions; and were He to relieve Himself of every threatening danger and evade every serious difficulty and real test by a quick resort to His supernatural power, this entrance into human life would have been a mockery, bewildering us instead of helping, and becoming an object of discontented envy and hopeless desire instead of being the assurance of Divine sympathy. His freedom from sin would have been no example and no rebuke to us if the danger and discomfort of resisting sin were only in appearance.

This Jesus recognized. He recognized that He was called to do His work among men chiefly by living among them on the same conditions as themselves. Thus only could He purify and elevate human life—not by bringing into human life powers which other men did not possess and could not obtain, not by facing life's temptations on wholly different terms from the normal and ordinary terms, but by accepting the whole human condition and the whole human conflict. It was not for Him but for the Father to relieve Him from His present straits. If He was to do God's work, God must be left free to keep Him alive for it and to lead Him to it in His own way. "*Man lives*—and I therefore, *being man*, live—not by bread only, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God." So absolute was His trust in God that He would not become a providence to Himself. The path to life may lie through starvation rather than through fulness of bread.

It is this self-surrender and self-restraint which the author of *Ecce Homo* admires in Christ. "This temperance," he says, "in the use of supernatural power is the masterpiece of Christ. It is a moral miracle super-induced upon a physical miracle. The kind of life He prescribed to His followers He exemplified in the most striking way, by dedicating all His extraordinary powers to beneficent uses only and deliberately placing Himself for all purposes of hostility and self-defence on a level with the weakest." And in the path thus chosen by Christ at the entrance of His career we have the true direction given for our own life. Every thoughtful man is met at the outset by the same temptation. To me also are committed certain powers, capabilities, means, opportunities: for whom am I to use them? To secure comfort and position for myself, or to make the utmost mark for good upon my fellow men? He would be a fool who feared to bid every young man choose as Christ chose: to leave it to God to provide Him with bread in His own way, to be sure that selfishness is at any rate never God's way. You foresee discomfort, the obscure and dingy ways of poverty; you foresee what you would sum up in one word "starvation," starvation of body, mind, heart. But if you choose as Christ chose you will find that the true life of man lies not in bread only, but in keeping the word of God.

2. In looking forward to His work and considering how He would most effectually win the people's belief in Him as God's representative, the Messiah, it could not but occur to Jesus that this might most easily be done by the public performance of some astounding feat. Were He to meet the popular expectation by leaping from a pinnacle of the temple into the crowded courts below He must at once establish His claim. And this temptation found voice and apparent warrant in the words of that book He had pondered as His best guide: "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee,

and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone." In whom, if not in the Messiah, could these words find fulfilment? The leap had no terror for Jesus. Had it been required of Him He would not have declined. His Father could support Him and make it harmless, and it would be a test of the Father's love. And how easy a path to the popular favour when compared with the slow way He actually chose—the weary disappointing appeal to individuals, the tedious instruction to be repeated in every one of the hundreds of millions of men, the slow, almost imperceptible advance against the contradiction of sinners! How often did this temptation recur when His appeals were met by stolid, apathetic stupidity, when His love was despised and laughed at, when His motives were misconstrued and His word doubted! How easy to overcome all this opposition by stupendous miracle! And how frequently was He assured that precisely this it was which was lacking in His credentials! "Master, we would see a sign from Thee," was their constant cry. And may we not say that men still tempt Christ in similar fashion? Is it not the almost universal cry, that there is not enough evidence, that He ought to do something more astounding, something that would compel the admission of His claims?

Our Lord uniformly and emphatically refused to give the signs demanded. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and *no* sign shall be given to it." Why not? Why did He prefer the slow, laborious, hazardous, often inefficient method of teaching, of living, and of the cross? He did so because that only was the true method. To leap unhurt from a pinnacle of the temple was to rival a mountain goat or a chamois, but it had no connection at all with spiritual power and was no sign of a disposition and ability to save men from their sins. To abandon the region of man's actual needs and work wonders, not for their relief but for mere display, was to trespass against the Father's love and to mistake the Father's intentions. The miracles of Christ were never grotesque, unnatural marvels, but were always on the plane of nature and the expression of the Father's love in bringing joy to the joyless, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, turning sorrow into gladness. It is this which in large part distinguishes the miracles of Christ from the grotesque monstrosities that are ascribed to the ordinary wonder-worker. Besides, there was no call here for a miracle. He could descend from the pinnacle by the stair which had furnished Him with a means of ascending it. To demand supernatural aid when natural aid is sufficient is to tempt God.

Here, then, our Lord lays down for Himself the great law which He observed throughout His ministry, that He would never work a miracle *merely* and primarily to prove that He was God's Son. The miracles He wrought did prove Him to be what He claimed to be, but this was not their primary object. The poet writes because he is a poet, not to prove himself to be so. The charitable man does his deeds of kindness not to exhibit himself as charitable, but because he is so. But the poet's poetry proves him a poet and the good man's charity proves him charitable, precisely because this was not their purpose. So those deeds of Christ which He did because He carried in His own heart the love of the Father and possessed the power of the Divine Spirit, deeds which were done in response to the need of His fellows, and not for the purpose of proving His claims, did most effectually establish those claims.

3. But perhaps the temptation which most constantly recurred in the life of Jesus was that which is here placed third—the temptation to be an earthly king. The devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and all this he offered Him on condition that He would abandon God's service and accept Satanic

suggestions. Christ had come into the world to bind men in a universal brotherhood, to achieve a world-wide dominion. No one can ever have felt so much capacity to govern well, to reform social abuses, to lift a people to the pinnacle of glory. Continually must He have longed for supreme power that by a word He might crush oppression, give liberty and rights to all, and reduce vice to a minimum. When He saw the misused power of a Herod or of a Pilate, how intensely must He have longed to possess that power and to use it for the benefit of His fellows! He considered what the world and its kingdoms actually were, how little likely it was that they would exchange their glory for the spiritual glory He was to reveal. He saw the godlessness of the world, its worldliness and its contentment with worldliness. He saw what is as visible to-day as in His time, that the human heart is set upon present enjoyment, easily deluded by what is tawdry, by the glittering tinsel that calls itself gold, by the superficial mirth of fools that mistakes itself for happiness, and the cheap and transient triumphs that blind them to all real glory. He had as a boy seen the legions of Rome, and had in imagination followed them to the scenes of bloodshed and desolation that marked their march. He had, with the rest of His countrymen, groaned under the heavy and unrighteous exactions of fraudulent publicans; He had noted how vice flourished in high places and how the whole land was polluted. His heart burning within Him at all He saw and knew; can He have failed to long for power to alter all this, by one stroke to establish His benign rule over all men? Who has not wished for one year's supreme authority to right the most glaring wrongs, and to give righteousness the upper hand? And Christ might have had this supremacy. Twice at least He was offered it, and had He but yielded to the temptation to become a king and raise the standard of rebellion against Rome, He had a reasonable prospect of success. Besides, might not this acceptance of outward authority be the only means of winning His spiritual end? Might He not from a throne much more effectually win admission for His teaching? Nay, was there not much in the Old Testament that seemed to point to an earthly throne in Jerusalem as the seat of the Messiah's rule? How easy to accept an interpretation of the Old Testament which all the authorities accepted! Might He not be presumptuous in opposing His unsupported opinion to that of trained scholars and accepted interpreters? And when He found how hard it was to strip even His own disciples of the conviction that temporal rule was the only path to success, must not the sickness of despair often have seized His heart? Here already, it was whispered to Him, is power, authority, glory—why not accept them? Why strive to bring to the world a glory it will have none of, a spiritual glory which it counts a mere *ignis fatuus*? Take what you can. The wise man will not seek the unattainable. If he sees it is impossible to have what he desires, he will take what he can get. The strength with which this temptation appealed to Him throughout His ministry may be measured by the sharpness with which He turned upon Peter when he innocently renewed it, with a "Get thee behind Me, Satan." A temptation which made little impression upon Him would not have been so vehemently repelled: it was thus repelled because it revived forces that were never wholly and finally defeated till the very end.

But why would the acceptance of an earthly throne have been a service of Satan? It would have been so, because it would have involved partnership with worldly men, compromise with those in power, the attraction to His rule of men who obeyed Him from worldly motives and with selfish ends, Judases and Samaritan Simons, and because instead of furthering it would have hopelessly defeated the purpose for which God had sent Him. Why, even the sick folk He healed and the demoniacs He cured He had to warn not to publish the benefits they had received, for by so doing

men would have come to Him for temporal aid and so have interfered with His true work. Had He not deliberately put aside this temptation and chosen the cross as His throne, His kingdom would long since have gone the way of the empires of Sennacherib or Alexander or Augustus. It would have shone for a century or two with the spurious glory of arms and wealth and wide dominion, it would have admitted much that is of the devil, and it would have been undermined by its own worldliness.

But choosing the throne that God appointed for Him, facing in faith the opposition, persecution and failure that He at first encountered, believing in the face of all present rejection and defeat and extinction that the work God had given Him to do would bear fruit, He accepted the cross, and has thus rooted Himself for ever in the love and worship of all men, has illustrated once for all that the path to true glory lies in absolute devotedness. This great example of submission to God's way and adherence to the task He assigns us, our Lord has given us. Never can we be tempted as He was; never can such prospects of earthly glory be opened to us to intoxicate and delude us: it is petty and poorly devised baits that are sufficient to hide the truth from us; we sell our birthright of glory eternal for the self-indulgence of an hour.

To understand and sympathize with our fellow men in their temptations we find to be one of the most difficult exercises of thought and heart.

"What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

To understand and sympathize with our Lord is above all difficult. Yet it is not more necessary that He sympathize with us than that we sympathize with Him. Indeed, it is very much in proportion to our intelligent apprehension of the difficulties He encountered in serving God, that we can believe in and use His sympathy with us. And it is a point gained if at any rate we cease to think of the temptations that assailed Him as toy-arms falling harmless from a coat of mail. Rather is the fight between Christ and Apollyon the true picture of our Lord's conflict. His resistance was the utmost He could do. Perhaps you know what it is to be possessed day after day with passionate desires and longings, with instincts and appetites that drive you to their gratification; perhaps you know what it is to waken morning after morning with the same torment of vision and day by day to resist it till you feel that you cannot any longer hold out; perhaps you know what it is to feel as if your very life depended on your allowing yourself to be ruled by the circumstances that present themselves, as if life would be turned into a wilderness were your desire not gratified. If you know what it is to be at the end of your strength in resisting sin, if you know the real conflict and pain it costs to repress desire, if you seem to have been hardly dealt with in life and are tempted to think you have been in the hands of Satan rather than of God, then in some measure you can understand the pain which Christ endured. But who shall measure the desolation of the criminal's cross, the just dying as the wickedest of men, abandoned by the few friends He had, and so utterly forlorn that He could not but think Himself abandoned by God also? Such trial we cannot measure: the pity is we rarely even try to sympathize or to understand what for our sakes He endured.

Do you ever think what would have resulted had Christ not resisted temptation? We should have had no stainless life to look to, no life of which we could say, "This reveals God to us." Our faith in God and righteousness would find no support in Christ, but would be cut off at its root.

III. Christ's Sacrifice And Ours

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."—*Ephes.* v. 1, 2.

Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, we are commanded to be imitators of God in that which seems most peculiarly Divine—His forgiving love; and imitators of Christ in that act or work of His which seems to be, and in one sense is, beyond all imitation and repetition. Every Christian understands that he may expect to be called upon to make sacrifices; he knows that he is a priest, and that a priest must have somewhat to offer; and he is also aware that these sacrifices may not always be of the pleasanter order of praise and thanksgiving, but that he must be prepared to give up certain pleasures, and in some sense sacrifice his own will to God for Christ's sake. But the Word of God goes much further than this, requiring a much more thorough sacrifice; and it requires it not as an arbitrary tax or imposition, but merely as explaining to us what the nature of the case requires, so that we ourselves are always driven back to this when we inquire why we so manifestly fail of becoming like Christ; we find that the reason is, we have not received His Spirit, have not caught the animating principle of His life, have not really left self behind, are still scheming some private and only individual advancement or salvation, and are not quite given up to God and our fellows—have not, in short, made the sacrifice Christ made. Now, the apostle assures us that except we have the Spirit of Christ we are none of His; and it does not require an apostle to tell us so, for every one who is concerned to know that it is a *real* work that is going on in himself, is conscious that it is folly to speak of being saved by Christ if we have not His Spirit in us, but only our own old spirit modified and improved a little. And if there is one thing more than another which this Spirit produces, it is love or holiness—love to God and love to men. As the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ, He produces this, if anything. A man may become very correct in his conduct, and may go through numerous religious performances, but he is not like Christ unless he have the same spirit of love to God and man which Christ had. It is only this Spirit which can bring all things right again—which can knit or fuse all intelligent and moral beings into one harmonious whole, and cast out all disorder and sin. And therefore, throughout the New Testament, we are constantly reminded that it is this which is to be a Christian, that it is this which makes a man Christian, or Christ's, or Christ-like—namely, the acceptance of Christ's Spirit as our own—the acceptance of the practical spirit of His life, the principle or idea of His life as ours; the entire submission and surrender of ourselves to God and the general good, so that if by our death, or by any prolonged suffering, we could secure some benefit to others, we should be found gladly accepting and undergoing it. In showing us how far we should follow Him, Christ draws no line beyond which we are not to pass; never turns to us and tells us that beyond this point He will go on alone; never bids us content ourselves with some different kind of life, and some lower kind of love than His; but everywhere sets before us, as our only safe example, Himself, even while doing those works that were most peculiar to Him. So Peter very distinctly tells us, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps"; and John says, "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Cases continually occur—nothing so common in life—in

which, by some sacrifice on our part, we can ease, help, or bless others, or stand between them and some pain or loss. Cases sometimes occur in which we can even by our own death confer prolonged life or great spiritual benefit on others; and in all such cases the Christian must at least recognize his duty; for, while Christ by His death *effected* what no other can ever effect, He acted in a manner in which every Christian is bound to act, and in which every one who has the Spirit of Christ will act.

Let us consider—1. What the sacrifice of Christ, which was so pleasing to God, precisely was; and 2. The relation between the sacrifice of Christ and that which God requires of us.

1. What was the sacrifice of Christ, which was pleasing to God? In what did it consist? Not, we know, in those offerings of kids and lambs which even David saw to be insufficient; not in the minute observance of the Mosaic ritual, for very little is told us of Christ's religious services. The words of the text agree with many others in telling us that it was *Himself* He offered to God, and that it was this which was a sweet-smelling savour. He offered not only His *body*, but Himself; not only all that He had, but all that He was; not only letting go some possessions, parting with some joys and hopes, but giving Himself up; yielding Himself into the hands of another. From the first the worshippers of God had felt that it was not any material offering that could please God. The cattle on a thousand hills were His, and if He were hungry He would not ask men to supply His wants. Even the heathen had sense enough, many of them, to acknowledge freely that God had no need of the offerings of men. David and the prophets again and again expressly say that God desires not sacrifice nor delights in burnt-offering. It required only the most ordinary discernment to see that to a spiritual being merely material offerings, which were already His own, could be no gift or pleasure, and that between moral guilt and the blood of bulls and goats there was no real connection. The sole value of the material offerings was as the expression of a state of soul, a willingness to yield everything to God; and the value of the sacrifice was to depict and revive in man the consciousness of guilt, and God's forgiveness and cleansing. That which was called the sacrifice was really only the sign, or outward symbol, or expression of the real sacrifice. The only real sacrifice man can make to God is spiritual—is a sacrifice of the man's self. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." The visible, material thing, of whatever value, was but the shell or sign of the invisible and real sacrifice. It holds good in all ages that a man must offer to God his best, and if he keeps back himself, and refuses to yield himself to God, he does so because he feels himself too precious to give to God—is too fond of himself to part with himself—will retain himself in his own hands, and take service and pleasure of himself, rather than give himself to God to use; and, therefore, honours himself more than God, and has the very essence of sin in him. If a man thinks to buy himself off *from* God—to redeem himself from God by sacrifice, he wholly misunderstands the whole matter of sacrifice. For sacrifice is the way to God, not the way from God; and the most costly sacrifice ever David or Solomon offered was but the case, or husk, or embodiment, or outward shell in which they offered up themselves.

This, then, is the first thing to be held as ascertained about sacrifice—that it was the righteous intention of the offerer which God accepted in it, and not the outward offering. Sacrifices were, of course, appointed for the wicked, for those who had sinned; but if a man brought his sacrifice to purchase impunity for the past, while yet he intended to return to his evil ways, this man's offering was rejected. In order that the sacrifice be accepted, there must be a turning away in heart and will from the sin

for which the sacrifice atones. There must, in a word, be repentance. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise”—though a sacrifice without such an internal significance would certainly be despised.

That which pleased God, therefore, in the sacrifice of Christ was the spirit which the sacrifice expressed—the perfect obedience and the perfect love with which Christ did and endured all that was required of Him—the perfect and faultless abandonment of His own will to God—the reality of the self-sacrifice. In Christ there was a perfect hatred of the sin for which He made atonement, a perfect conformity of spirit to God’s judgment regarding sin, even when that judgment was falling painfully on Himself. It was not Christ’s suffering in itself which was pleasing to the Father, but it was infinitely pleasing to Him to find at last, in humanity, a *perfect* response to His own feeling against sin, and a perfect return to Him. In the human body of Christ the Father saw the penalty of sin doing its work, and in the human soul of Christ He saw a perfect submission to every pain, in acknowledgment of God’s justice, and in love to man. In that hour when most sorely tempted to mistrust God and to hate men, Christ maintained His faith in the Father, and His love for His brethren; and this it was which made the sacrifice acceptable.

We see, therefore, how ignorant and unjust is the language so frequently used against those who hold evangelical views of the Atonement—language intended to convey the impression that we look upon God as a bloodthirsty Deity who delights in suffering, as if we believed that it was the agony of Christ which pleased the Father. With equal justice it might be said that ours is a bloodthirsty and hard-hearted country, because when the flower of our youth are seen embarking for a foreign war, from which not a fourth will return, we are awakened to the most excited enthusiasm of admiration. Do we cheer them as they defile through our streets because of the carnage which we know we shall hear of in a few weeks, and not rather because we are proud of the patriotism, the disregard of danger, of pain, and of self, the gallant devotion to the public good which we see? Is the tenderest mother displeased with the son who has risked his life to save another, or is not the tenderness with which she weeps over the wounds she has to dress the very measure of the pride she has in him for the daring and unselfishness which ran him into danger? One would suppose such a distinction was plain enough, and that no one could be so foolish as to say that because we believe God found pleasure in Christ’s death, we therefore mean that it was simply because Christ was suffering, and irrespective of the motive and object of the suffering that God was pleased. God delighted in the death of Christ, because it was that action in which Creator and creature at once did their noblest.

This, then, let us accept in the first place regarding the acceptableness of Christ’s sacrifice, that it was pleasing to God for the spirit it expressed. But we may learn something also from the fact that though it was the spirit that was looked to, yet material sacrifices were enjoined. Why, it may be asked, was this so? Was it not enough that men should come before God as we do, and tell Him that we repent and return to Him, and yield ourselves to Him? Probably the simplest answer to this is that, in the childhood of the world, men naturally spoke by signs, by ceremonies, by outward visible things. They had not the same ideas, nor the same words to express them as we have, and it was easier for them to embody their feeling in actions than in words, and easier for them to learn truth by symbols than by oral teaching. And even we know the value of rites. There is often on the face of our lives so little that assures us plainly that we are living as God’s people that we find an urgent need of points at

which we definitely submit ourselves to Him, rites in the performance of which we have to make up our minds whether we are or are not to yield ourselves to God. This was the use of material offerings. They helped the spirit to express and understand itself, and they formed tangible fixed points to which the despairing soul could refer itself, and say, "*Then*, I did honestly give myself to God."

But there was another very important reason for demanding material sacrifices—a reason which reflects a good deal of light on the sacrifice of Christ. If the people had been allowed merely to come and confess sin, and receive pardon without any visible demonstration of the evil consequences of sin, they must inevitably have become gradually indifferent to it—their moral sense must have been blunted and depraved. The law which required them to offer certain things extraneous to themselves, certain material things which could not partake of sin nor be guilty in the sight of God, this law kept before them an ideal after which they were always to strive though they could never reach it. In presenting their whole burnt-offerings, and seeing the whole animal ascending in smoke to God, they were forcibly reminded how far short the spiritual sacrifice fell behind the material, and how imperfect was their self-devotedness. In seeing the innocent lamb moving confidingly to the altar, they felt conscience-stricken at their reluctance to yield themselves to God—at their rebellings against His will. They were, in short, kept by these sacrifices within sight of an ideal—that is, of the sacrifice they ought to make, though they could never make it. The idea of it, though not the actuality, was kept before them; and they longed for the ideal, longed for a perfect contrition, an absolute death to sin, an entire and irrevocable submission to God.

This ideal sacrifice, this sacrifice which satisfies the highest conception men have ever formed of God's requirements, and of man's duty, has been offered by Christ. In Him there was not only the negative innocence of the lamb which could not sin because it had no moral nature, but there was the positive perfection of moral character and spiritual purity in which God delights more than in aught else His creation can furnish. There was not only the negative and unconscious willingness of the ignorant animal, that knew not the meaning of the altar to which it suffered itself to be bound, but there was the positive self-devotement of One who was straitened till this sacrifice was made. In the death of Christ there was visible not merely the result of sudden generous impulse, which has frequently carried men to acts of self-sacrifice, but there was apparent the result of a lifelong submission to God, and a lifelong and indestructible love for men, which was no new thing in the hour of His death, but which merely culminated then in one more striking and final act. Through His whole life, as truly as in His death, He was offering Himself up to God. On every day and hour of His life you can read His motto, "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."

Here at length, then, there was offered to God the perfect sacrifice; it is this sacrifice which keeps before our view always that which God requires of us; it is towards the complete and perfect devotedness of Christ that all of us must be ever striving. Christ has shown us the kind of sacrifice which God accepts, and we are accepted when we approve of this sacrifice, when we take it and say to God, "This is what I *would* do if I could, this entire submission—this free, voluntary yielding of the life, of self to Thee—is what my conscience approves, and what my heart longs for." When an Israelite presented to God the innocent and devoted lamb, desiring with his whole heart to be himself as truly given up to God, he was accepted. When we present before God the

sacrifice of His Son, desiring to be as truly one with God as He was, we also are accepted.

The sacrifices appointed by Moses fall into three well-marked divisions. There was *first*, the *sin-offering*, in which the characteristic feature was the shedding of blood. This shedding of blood signified that the life of the offerer was forfeited for sin, but that the death of the victim was accepted in place of his death by God's merciful appointment. This was brought out with especial distinctness by the ceremonial on the Day of Atonement, when, after sacrificing the one goat, the priest laid his hand on the head of the other, and confessed the sins of the people over it, and then sent it away with these sins into the wilderness. This was making the removal of guilt from the sinner to a substitute, and the permanent taking away of that guilt, as visible as could well be. It was this, then, which was specially taught by the sin-offering—that men were sinners, that sin deserved death, and that God had provided an Atonement, by the vicarious suffering of an appointed victim.

But, *second*, there was another equally important class of sacrifices—the *burnt-offerings*, or, as they were sometimes emphatically called, "whole burnt-offerings." In these the idea of expiation by blood was subordinate and secondary—the main and primary idea was that of self-dedication; and therefore, though the victim was slain, this death was only the requisite preliminary to its being laid on the altar and being completely consumed by fire. The name by which this offering was commonly known was a word which means "that which ascends," for this was the idea of it, that the whole animal was dedicated to God, and, as it were, ascended to Him in the smoke that rose from the altar. By this significant sacrifice, the offerer was understood to dedicate himself as completely to God as the animal was completely consumed.

The *third* class of offerings were those called *peace-offerings* or *meat-offerings*. They consisted of wine, oil, flour, the fruits of the field, offered to God in acknowledgment of His kindness in giving these and other benefits to men. In offerings of this class, the worshipper exhibits the joy and gratitude with which he remembers that he himself and all he has belong to God.

Now, it is obvious that if we wish to understand the full meaning of the sacrifice of Christ we must keep in mind not one only of these kinds of sacrifice, but them all. We must not, like very many in our own day, look upon it as merely self-dedicatory, and so neglect the expiatory element. Neither must we think of it only as a vicarious suffering for sin, and decline to think of it as the burnt-offering through which we offer ourselves to God. Neither must we think of it merely as a peace-offering, lest we fall into the mere heathen tendency to bribe God by paying Him a tribute. All these mistakes have been and are continually committed.

Now, what I wish you to observe at present is the different relation in which the offerer stood to the victim in the sin-offering and in the burnt-offering. In the sin-offering the victim was the sinner's substitute, suffering what the sinner deserved, and suffering it *in order that the sinner might escape*. In the burnt-offering the victim was the sinner's representative, expressing what the offerer himself inwardly felt and did. The burnt-offering was presented to God and wholly made over to Him, not that the sinner might escape such punishment, but that the hearty self-devotement of the man to God might be expressed. Now, it is of prime importance to observe that the sacrifice of our Lord comprehends both these offerings, which were used by God to symbolize its fulness, and, therefore, that our Lord Himself is both our Substitute and our Representative; in other words, there is embraced in His

sacrifice something which He has done for us in order that we may be saved the doing of it, and something which He has done in order that we may the better do it. He has suffered the penalty of sin that we may be saved from that suffering; and He has given Himself wholly to God that through Him we may do the same. What He did as our Substitute we need not attempt to do over again; what He did as our Representative we must ceaselessly aim at. He is our sin-offering, by whose blood we are cleansed from guilt and accepted as God's children and people. He is also our burnt-offering, in whose sacrifice we recognize the ideal after which we strive, until, by the power of His Spirit, our sacrifice of self is also perfect: to disconnect the two is to lose both. It is an error of equal magnitude to look to Christ solely as our vicarious sin-offering, or to look to Him solely as our forerunner who leads us in self-dedication.

2. The sacrifice which the Christian is required to offer. From all that has been said about the sacrifice of Christ the same one conclusion obviously flows, that it is himself the Christian is required to sacrifice. We have recognized three things about sacrifice:—(1) That sacrifice of any outward thing, external to the man himself, is only accepted as a token that the inward personal sacrifice is made; (2) that in the ideal sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, it was the perfect, willing, lifelong submission of His own will to the will of God, and of His own life to God's purposes, which was the essence of the sacrifice, and which made it what it was; and (3) that sin-offering was not by itself sufficient to typify the sacrifice of Christ, but that there was also indispensable the burnt-offering to set this forth.

Now, whether we take one of these truths, or all of them in combination, the same conclusion equally follows from them—viz. that the sacrifice of Christ is of none effect to those who do not sacrifice themselves through it. The slain lamb merely offered as an external thing, not vivified and rendered significant by any spiritual act on the part of the worshipper, was plainly of no effect in the way of bringing the offerer nearer to God. And the sacrifice of Christ, thoroughly efficient for our reconciliation as it is, remains invalid and of none effect to those who do not, through it, really yield themselves to God. And it is to be feared that, as many Jews stood quite aloof in spirit from the significant ritual enacted before them, so do we come to treat the sacrifice of Christ in a merely external and, therefore, thoroughly useless way. It is a sacrifice, intended, like all which symbolized it, to open up for us a way back to God, and is manifestly then only valid when we, by the earnest act of our own wills, do return to God. If this end be not desired by us, what other end can it serve? If we be not prepared to abandon self and own a *God*, why take to do with Jesus Christ, the whole meaning of whose life was to set before men the image of perfect sacrifice, and enable them also to attain to it. Sacrifices, we have seen, were intended to be the embodiment and expression of a state of feeling towards God; of a submission or offering of men's selves to Him; of a return to that right relation which ought ever to subsist between creature and Creator. Christ's sacrifice, that offering of Himself to God in His whole life, and very specially in His death, is valid for us when it is the outward thing through which we offer ourselves to God. When His sacrifice is the expression of our own feeling towards God, then, and not else, is it valid for us. It is the open door through which God freely admits all who aim at a consecration and obedience like to their Lord's.

It is obvious, therefore, that to share in the benefits of Christ's sacrifice is most truly to sacrifice ourselves. Whatever His sacrifice expresses we desire to take and use as the only satisfactory expression of our own aims and desires. Did Christ perfectly

submit to and fulfil the will of God? So would we. Was there on His part a meek resignation of every desire which would run counter to God's will; was He led as a lamb to the slaughter guileless, as little thinking of evading God's will as if He knew not what was before Him? So would we obey, yielding ourselves without reserve to the hand of God. Did He acknowledge the infinite evil of sin, and recognize that everything which He suffered was the just due of sin? So would we recognize, and would have God accept of all that Christ did and suffered as our own utterance. And thus, just in so far as we use Christ's sacrifice, does it become our example. In order to use it, we enter into the spirit of it, feel with Christ through all He did, become partakers of His Spirit, and animated with His purpose.

IV. The Great Invitation

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."—*Matt.* xi. 28-30.

This is the most memorable of Christ's words of invitation to men. It has lodged itself in the human heart as a seed of hope. It still speaks with efficacy to the weary and heavy laden. Here we get back to the actual gospel of Christ uttered by Him in presence of the human beings He understood and loved. Here we see the preaching of Christ Himself and can listen to Himself apart from all sermonizing and explaining, apart from all that which theology has discovered in His words or with which one's own fancy has overlaid them.

1. The aspect of the human condition which struck Christ was its burdened and toil-worn appearance. As He looked upon men He naturally addressed them as, "Ye that labour and are heavy laden." They seemed to Him like the heavy laden camels He had seen sullenly moaning under their loads, or like the patient oxen dragging the plough through the stiff clay from one end of a field to the other all day long and day after day. Fruitless labour, unsatisfied, restless desire, weariness and oppression everywhere characterized the lot of man. This struck Him with painful force and also with surprise. For He Himself was throughout His Father's child, carrying in His heart a sense of His Father's presence in the world which gave Him peace and joy.

The view of human life as a monotonous and yet hurried toil is familiar to us who live in a city. In the country men seem to have time to breathe, time to look about them, time to think—here it is almost solely toil. It is familiar also to us to think of our fellow men as burdened. We know individuals, and many of them, who find life very, very hard. Almost every one has some burden to bear. When you get near enough to a man to win his confidence, or even to read his life, you see that he also bends under an oppressive weight. Either the labour and anxiety required by his occupation are exhausting, or his constitution is weak or worn out, or he has a sickly child whose future gives him anxiety, or a relative whose affairs are in chronic disorder, or he has suffered pecuniary losses of a crippling nature, or he has met with disappointments of a kind which touch the very springs of life. Some have by their own folly tied a burden round their neck which saddens and hampers them all their days. They work in chains like convicts, and every movement reminds them of their folly and their sin.

It was not the mere laboriousness of life that Christ pitied. Without activity there can be no happiness. We are so made that we are happy in proportion to the amount of energy we are expending. And no one can grudge toil which adds to the sum of human happiness and forwards the needed work of the world. But excessive toil for worldly ends, the spending of one's best energies in the vain hope of finding solid happiness in money, the outlay of a man's entire time and strength on the work of keeping himself in life and fitting himself for another day's toil—this must affect with pity every thoughtful mind. All toil that narrows the nature and stunts the affections and blinds the soul to things eternal is pitiful in the extreme. The toil of the covetous, the toil of the worldly, the toil of the selfish; the toil that aims at display, the toil that

is prompted by thirst for money, the toil in which there is no thought of good to be done but only of gain to be got—all such toil is pitiful and ruinous; the toiler spends his life in making himself less and less a man, less and less open to any ennobling influence, less and less worthy of his own respect or of the affection of others.

But that which prompted Jesus to call men toil-worn and heavy laden was probably something different from this. Wise men of all ages and of all creeds have constantly protested against the folly of seeking for joy and comfort in things outside ourselves. But what must especially have distressed Jesus and filled Him with pity was that men turned their very religion into a burden and a toil. That which was meant to be their strength to bear all other burdens they turned into an additional load. Instead of using their carriage to carry themselves and all their belongings, they strove to take it on their backs and carry it. All that religion seemed to do for them was to make life harder, to fill it with a thousand restrictions and fretting duties. They toiled to keep a multitude of observances which no man could keep; they bound heavy burdens of penances and duties and laid them on their backs as if thus they could please God. So that the sinner was in despair, and the religious man a heartless performer. They had fancied that God was like themselves, a poor little creature, revengeful, spiteful, liking to see men suffering for sin and crushed under his petty tyrannies. They thought of a God who must be propitiated by careful and exact performances and to whom the sinner could only find access after crushing penances. As if the pain of sin were not enough, and as if the bitterness of a misspent life were not itself intolerable, they sought to embitter life still further by emptying it of all natural joy and by hampering it with countless scruples.

It is this which excites the compassion of Jesus still—not only that life itself is difficult, but that we make it so much more so by our foolish thoughts of God—not only that the burden of sin is crushing, but that we make it altogether overwhelming by refusing to believe that in spite of our sin God loves us. It is in view of the restless cravings of the human soul, of its remorseful tossings to and fro, of the despairing attempts at amendment, and the more despairing failures, that Jesus is filled with pity, and says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest.” It is in view of all the bitter sorrow we bring into our lives by sin, and of the unavailing penances we endure, and the ever-unsatisfied conscience, and the continually renewed efforts we make to please God and win happiness, that Jesus says, “Not by such tumultuous and heart-broken service, not by attention to this and to that can you find rest, but by coming to Me. I am with you not to lay new burdens on you, not to add to the difficulty of life, not to create countless duties before unthought of, but to help you, to be your strength. Your first business is not to give anything, to produce some acceptable disposition or work, but to accept what I have to give. Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Christ speaks, then, in these words very pointedly to all who feel that life would be easier without religion, to all who look upon divine worship and the divine law as a burden, to all who fancy that without any knowledge of God life must be tolerable, but that the restraints and duties imposed by religion are more than they can bear. To all such Christ’s words come with the assurance that so long as His religion is felt to be a burden it is misconceived. “My yoke is easy,” He says, “My burden is light! I come not to lay heavier taxes on your strength, not to crush out the expiring spark of life with additional burdens, but to help you to bear what you have to bear, to give you new life, to remove your self-imposed burdens.” All service that is not spontaneous, all that is not the expression of the spirit and a relief to the spirit is

removed by Christ. Your life is to flow as a stream flows from a fountain, not as it is forced up by a pump. “I come,” He says, “to give you life as God intends life to be—not a life of indolence, not a life free from what is arduous, not a life in which there is no real trial of strength and testing of what is in man, but still a life in which all tends to good, and in which God is with you to provide for you, to cheer you, to give you grace according to your need.”

Still, it is of course true that Christ’s yoke is light only to those who like it. A burden is a burden to one man and none to another according to the strength and habit of each, and many a person may feel that for himself it would be much easier to comply with any number of rules and precepts than to be humble and loving. No doubt if he were loving and humble it would be a pleasure to bear Christ’s yoke, for He requires nothing but what a loving and humble spirit dictates, but the difficulty is to acquire this loving and humble spirit.

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Christ deserves a hearing, first, because He asks you to come to Him. It is not every one who likes to have his house crowded with needy people and his heart laden with the sorrows of others. Most men fight shy of you when you are in trouble, not altogether because they do not pity you, but partly because they do not wish to cloud their own joy with your sorrows and partly because they feel they cannot do much to help you and might only provoke you by their intrusion. Men feel that as they cannot heal your chronic complaint, or minister to your diseased mind or materially alter your circumstances, they had better let you alone and not trouble you with mere words of compassion. But Jesus neither shrinks from sharing your sorrow with you nor feels Himself incompetent to deal with it. And this, I say, gives Him a claim to your attention. He at all events proposes to be your friend—He wishes to help you to bear your burden. Understanding all the misery and complicated distress of your case, He does not pass by on the other side, but prefers rather to be with you than with the whole who need no physician, or with the joyful who can easily enough find company. It is something to have such a one as Christ for your friend.

He deserves a hearing, secondly, because He will certainly give what He promises. This, of course, is a point of which every one must for himself be convinced. Does Christ really deliver men from the restless, dissatisfied, burdened condition He finds men in? Certainly He believes He can. No person of even ordinary sense and good feeling proposes to accomplish a very great and apparently impossible thing unless he is quite sure of success. There is really no way at all of accounting for these bold and comprehensive offers of Christ but just this, that they were sincerely made. He knew the difficulties better than the persons who laboured under them; He had no slight or frivolous estimate of the essential evil of sin; He knew better than any other how deep one must go if natural character is to be altered and a life of wrong-doing undone: but knowing all He did, He unhesitatingly undertakes this greatest and most needful of all works. And many and many a one can tell of rest found in Christ. They will tell you how in times when the world was hurrying them into excitement and thirst for gain and pleasure He has sobered and steadied them and brought rest to their spirit—how in times of anxiety and overpressure and sorrow His friendship and the consciousness of His sympathy have given new life to the soul.

The kind of rest, then, which Christ offers is obvious. It is not rest from the ordinary toil of life; that toil may be excessive, may be incompatible with health, may be very slightly remunerative, may be accompanied with conditions which are disagreeable,

painful, depressing; but Christ does not emancipate the individual from this toil. He does indeed slowly influence society so that the slave awakes to his rights and the slave-owner acknowledges them; and so that all grievances which oppress the various sections of society are at length measured by Christ's standard of righteousness and charity, and tardy but lasting justice is at length done. But until the whole of society is imbued with Christian principle thousands of individuals must suffer, and often suffer more intensely because they are Christians. Yet even to ordinary toil Christ brings what may well be called "rest." The Christian slave has thoughts and hopes that brighten his existence; he leads two lives at once, the overdriven, crushed, hopeless life of the slave and the hopeful, free, eternal, divine life of Christ's free man. And wherever in the most shameful parts of our social system the underpaid and overdriven workman or workwoman believes in Christ there rest enters the spirit—the hunger, the cold, the tyrannous selfishness, the blank existence are outweighed by the consciousness of Christ's sympathy, and by the sure hope that even through all present distress and misery that sympathy is guiding the soul to a lasting joy and a worthy life. And surely this is glory indeed, that from Christ's words and life there should shine through all these centuries a brightness that penetrates the darkest shades of modern life and carries to broken hearts a reviving joy that nothing else can attempt to bring.

Christ, then, though He does not give rest from toil, gives rest in toil. He gives the inward rest which all men alike need. If a man is to be anything or to accomplish anything he must have a certain inward satisfaction, repose of spirit, and settlement. He cannot pursue a series of experiments, or write a book that needs research and thought, or carry through a great measure, if he is distracted by pressing anxieties. You may as well expect a man to build a house in an earthquake. Stability of foundation, a steady foothold for himself a man must have if he is to do his best. Settlement of spirit is our prime necessity: a thorough and abiding adjustment with the powers that rule us and all things. We must know what is to come of our work, and what is to become of ourselves, and then we can give ourselves without hesitation to the life that calls us. This is the rest which Christ gives. He calls us to a perfect reconcilement with God, with the Supreme; He gives us an eternal settlement, adjusting us to a place which we feel to be thoroughly suitable, and satisfying all in us which we feel deserves to be satisfied. He gives us rest by making life intelligible and by making it worthy; by showing us how through all its humbling and sordid conditions we can live as God's children; by delivering us from guilty fear of God and from sinful cravings; by setting us free from all foolish ambitions and by shaming us out of worldly greed and all the fret and fever that come of worldly greed; by filling our hearts with realities which still our excited pursuit of shadows, and by bringing into our spirit the abiding joy and strength of His love for us. We enter into the truest rest when we believe that He takes part with us and that we can depend upon Him.

But to enter into Christ's rest we must also "learn of Him," the inducement held out being that He is meek and lowly. A harsh master who cannot remember that he was once as ignorant as his pupil and treats the scholar as if it were a crime not to know what he has never learnt, repels the learner. There is in Christ no impatience, no surprise at our slowness. He teaches by Himself obeying. It is surprising how many persons who in a sense "come to Him" yet learn nothing from Him. Watch the pupil of a good teacher and you see how rapid and definite is the progress. Watch many who profess to have come to Christ, and you cannot trace any signs of progress. They seem to have come to Him for some other purpose than to learn. But His purpose in

bringing men to Himself is that they may take His yoke and learn of Him. This is the condition of their finding rest. To come is not enough; you must enter His service and let Him guide you, your life must now be under His hand. It is a training of character He proposes, and only through the actual life you are leading day by day can He fashion your character and make you like Himself. It does not require the sundering of family ties or the shifting of the duties these ties bring; it does not require retirement from any of our obligations to society: it is a salvation for those who have to work for their bread, who have to bargain and toil, to serve harsh masters, to deal with provoking and unprincipled people.

We are in the first place to come to Him—not by a mere physical approach such as many made while He was on earth and who received no benefit from their nearness; but we are to come to Him in will and in spirit, meaning to learn of Him and to inquire into His way. We are to come to Him with expectation of benefit, with desire for salvation and some germ of belief that salvation lies with Him. We are to come to Him with the intention of remaining with Him. We are to come in response to His own call, doing this first and expecting that He will give us further guidance. For, short of this, every religious act is unsatisfactory. A man, for example, may repent of his past; he may be convinced he has done wrong and may be ashamed that he, like others, has been weak and sinful. You may have known such persons and have seen how keenly they feel the loss of self-respect and their failure to reach the high and pure ideal on which their eyes were fixed. They long to be free from the bondage of their sinful nature and from the inward impulses to evil which mar their lives; “free from the repeated falls, the sense of evil in themselves, the backslidings which fill their souls with bitterness and shame to think on.” And yet they are not much drawn personally to Christ. And, therefore, there is always something lacking in them, a coldness and sadness in their religion, an emptiness of heart and dreariness which, for all their strength, betrays them often into sin. But they who come to Christ in their penitence, who feel that in Him they have a Friend who sorrows with them and who longs for their deliverance, they who sorrow at the cross and carry in their hearts the look of Christ have a penitence of a far deeper and more fruitful, as well as of a happier, kind.

For as it is chiefly through personal influences we sin, so it is by personal influence we are saved. We are moulded in life not by abstract laws and views of things, but by the actual people who are about us. This influence gets closer to us and is more constantly with us than all other influences; and to balance and purify and correct this constant influence nothing avails but the personal influence of Christ. And therefore He says, “Come to Me”; knowing that in His friendship there is a healing and soothing charm, and that He has strength and rectitude for us all. They are the only successful Christians who are as conscious of Christ’s presence as of the presence of their nearest relatives. Nothing can compensate for the lack of this personal intimacy with Christ. Nothing can be substituted for “coming to Him”: no knowledge of doctrine, no familiarity with the Bible, no acquaintance with the terms of salvation. Only by being on terms of friendship with Christ do you come within range of the most powerful and efficacious moral influences.

Let His invitation, then, find its way to your heart. Everything that burdens you is a reason for your coming—everything that makes you anxious, everything that gives you a sense of your own weakness. You are not doing yourself justice; may I not say, you are not satisfying your conscience until you listen to Christ’s invitation and come to Him? Some friendships would not help you; you would find a want of

understanding, an unsuitableness in many persons: in Him you will find a perfect adaptation to you. You will find that all that is good in you is drawn out and strengthened, that your better self is asserted, and new possibilities of good awakened in you. If you have found that the way in which you have spent your strength in times past is unremunerative, try His yoke now. If you have found hollowness and dissatisfaction almost everywhere in life, is not this a reason for your now learning of Him and truly studying and adopting His method and His spirit? Can you look at your life as a whole and be perfectly content with it? Are you prepared to exhibit it in its inward principles and secret motives, in all that has characterized it, and to justify it to yourself and to all? Are you willing that the whole of it should be spent as you have spent a part?

V. Taught By Suffering

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec."—*Heb.* v. 7-10.

The argument of which these verses form a part is meant to convince us that in Christ sufficient provision is made for all our spiritual wants. Addressing men who were accustomed to tell their tale to a priest as the person appointed to represent them and their wants to God, the writer speaks to them in terms with which they were familiar. They had always felt sure of the sympathy and attention of their priests on two grounds: first, because they were officially appointed for the very purpose of ministering to the people and managing their spiritual matters; and, secondly, because the priests, living for a great part of the year in their own homes and among the people, were known to be men with appetites, passions, domestic troubles, sorrows, temptations and trials such as other men were subject to. But in transferring the care of their spiritual affairs from the ordinary priesthood to Christ, there was always a difficulty in understanding how one so pure and holy in His own life, and of so high a descent, could really understand, much less sympathize with, the actual ignorance and weaknesses of ordinary men.

To remove this difficulty the writer argues that just as their old priests had offered for themselves as well as for the people, so Christ offered (the word is the same) prayers and entreaties with strong cries and tears for Himself, cries and tears wrung from Him by His needs and anxieties. All who are in temptation and sorrow must see in Christ, thus agonized and anxious, a fellow-sufferer whose own experience gives Him a perfect apprehension of their weakness and need of help. This experience was essential to the perfecting of Christ as our Saviour. Had He not Himself experienced how trying a thing human life is, and in how many of its circumstances the human spirit is torn and tested, He could not have sufficiently understood, nor sufficiently compassionated, nor wisely aided us. But having Himself learned what obedience is, how hard it may often be to obey in the actual circumstances of human life, He has been perfected as a teacher of obedience, and can eternally save those who obey Him.

We may, perhaps, best get at the contents of this statement if we first consider the suffering of Christ, to which allusion is especially made, and then turn to its result in perfecting Him as our Saviour.

1. The only recorded instance of suffering on our Lord's part which answers to the description here given is the agony He passed through in Gethsemane when, with strong crying out and tears, He offered His prayers and entreaties "to Him that was able to save Him from death." Compared to the majority of men, there was in the life of Christ little outward suffering. It was in fact with Him, as it is with men generally, under the outward appearance of a comfortable and prosperous life that there lay an inward sorrow which made the whole painful and difficult. In His case, that which embittered everything was a sorrow we can little appreciate, a sorrow for sin, for

men's obstinacy in it, and the sympathetic shame and darkness He felt as connected with a race alienated from God and to so large an extent content to be so. This sorrow, this deep and lively concern about the moral condition and prospects of men, He felt intensely in Gethsemane. Then He felt as if He could not longer endure it, as if He could not drink more of this cup. It was especially then that He turned to Him who was able to save Him from death, to scatter the gathering gloom and lift Him for ever above it, and besought Him, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me."

The cause of the extreme agitation which our Lord experienced in Gethsemane, an agitation overcoming one whose characteristic was imperturbable tranquillity, is not at once apparent. Half-an-hour before, He had been praying in a mood of calmness at the furthest possible remove from the state of distraction and depression into which He seems to have entered as He passed into the shade of the olive trees. The events which He knew were now to happen, His betrayal, His trial, His death, were evidently in some sense the cause of His anguish. And these events may very well have disturbed Him more in the quiet and solitary anticipation of them than they did when He was actually passing through them; for in presence of others He was compelled to think of them, and the very fact that the end was now determined removed from His mind the pain of an undecided issue. Without supposing that the fear of suffering was the cause of His condition in the garden, there can be no doubt that His agitation was somehow connected with this anticipated suffering. Two men about to die the same death may be agitated by the thought of it, the one by the mere fear of dying, the other, knowing that in his person there is dying a great cause, and that a deep injustice is being done, may be oppressed with insufferable anguish, or be downcast in the extreme, though he has not a thought of his own suffering.

There was much in the circumstances of Christ to expose Him to this severe depression. He had been betrayed by one disciple, and He knew that the rest would desert Him, that He would be left without one friend to stand by Him or in any way screen Him from injustice, contumely and outrage. He had lived the greatest life ever lived by man, and this was the end of it, this its reward. He had come to earth for a great purpose, and those for whom He had come were so little alive to it that they could not understand His concern. Never was man so entirely alone in any great enterprise or work. He had to plan it Himself, and to carry out the plan Himself to its least detail. On His single person weighed the entire responsibility of saving the world. Is it extraordinary that He should be agitated at the crisis of His work? Men of sternest character have burst into tears on seeing masses of men move at their word into doubtful battle; do you wonder that this human soul, left alone in the darkness of night with the weight of a world upon Him, should have trembled under the load?

But even the sense of isolation, depressing as that was, together with His disappointment in His friends and His feeling of responsibility, will scarcely account for the extraordinary tumult and agitation of His spirit. Even if we add to this the shrinking from dying in public by the hand of the public executioner, there still seems something unaccounted for. All these things are terrible, and especially terrible in anticipation when the spirit is not stirred to resistance. Dissolution, as the life slowly ebbs away and a sense of utter helplessness possesses the spirit, and the whole person seems to be lapsing into nothingness; the desolation that clouds the loving heart as it is betrayed and deserted and left alone in the world; the exposure to false accusations; the being confronted by ruthless and unscrupulous enemies in the hour of their triumph—all this was certainly crushing and perturbing in the extreme. But the sting of death was, no doubt, to Christ in the circumstance that it was

accounted the penalty of sin, the mark of God's displeasure. In the weakness and pain of body, in the unrelieved hours upon the cross when those about Him were surprised God did not save Him, in the darkness of mind that commonly accompanies such physical distress, it was this sense of sin, of being involved with and reckoned among a race of sinners, that caused Him to cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" God was never nearer Him than then, never was He dearer to the Father or more precious in His sight; but His bodily distress construed His circumstances into a forsakenness. He had often looked upon suffering, He had been familiar with many forms of weakness, but now in His own person He experiences what human weakness is, He feels that He is dying, and in this physical prostration and sinking He feels Himself for the moment separate from God, and understands the horror of this separation. In Gethsemane it is some foretaste of this which darkens and disturbs His clear and calm spirit. He is brought into closer contact with the results of sin than ever before, and understands better than ever what it is to be one of a sinful race.

2. By this suffering Christ learned obedience. The general truth that in all learning suffering is involved had been so clearly seen that it had passed into a proverb. And if in all learning there is more or less of suffering involved, this is specially true of learning obedience. To attain to perfect submission to the will of another necessarily involves the conquest of self-will, a conquest which cannot be painless. A child is not learning obedience so long as you only bid him do what is pleasing to himself. It is when you tell him to do something he does not see the reason of, or something which involves giving up pleasures of his own, or something he dislikes, that you teach him obedience. It is then he learns that his own will is not supreme, and that he must be guided, not by his own taste or his own judgment or his own desires, but by an authority external to himself. Obedience is the first of virtues, because, when we learn to recognize that, irrespective of our present likings, and independent of our own will, there is a righteous and universal law, and when we have learned to submit to this law, we have found the key to peace and happiness.

The child can learn nothing so valuable as prompt obedience, because it is this which is needed throughout life. And when a child in all circumstances obeys promptly, he is proficient in his measure; he has wrestled with his own will and mastered it. Not by doing what is easy, but by doing what is difficult; not by doing what pleases and suits him, but by doing what entails more or less of suffering, can obedience be learned. And obedience is perfected when that which is most difficult has been commanded and has been done. It was thus Christ was perfected in obedience by the things which He suffered. Nothing could be required of Him which involved more suffering than His accepting of the cup the Father put into His hand. When He obeyed in this, He learned a perfect obedience. No further proof or test could be given. He gave Himself; He put Himself at the Father's disposal; with the deepest truth He submitted Himself wholly in the words, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

It need scarcely be said that in affirming that our Lord "learned obedience," it is not hinted that there ever was a time when He did not obey. From His earliest years Christ knew how to obey. He had not to be taught by the rod either of God or man. He never had to be driven by sharp correction from paths he would otherwise have pursued. As a boy of ten years His obedience was perfect, but He could not then obey in circumstances so trying as when He was a man of thirty. In the boy who was subject to His parents at Nazareth it was as impossible to find a fault as in the condemned Redeemer carrying His cross to Calvary, but such obedience as was

required of the man could not have been required of the boy. As the years brought clearer insight into the needs of men, and disclosed to Him more and more what human life actually is, as He was assailed at every step in life by new temptations, and as duties and responsibilities of increasing heaviness were laid upon Him, He still submitted Himself to the will of the Father, and learned obedience by the things which He suffered. His spirit, by the very difficulty of the tasks set before Him, and by the intensity of the temptations to which a nature so full of life and love as His must have been exposed, was wrought to perfect conformity with God. He so learned obedience, so learned to triumph over all obstacles in the way of obedience, that at length He was perfect, and nothing could be asked of Him that He was not able and ready to do.

And in thus learning to obey, He also learned what obedience costs. He learned to appreciate the difficulties men have in yielding their will to the will of God. He knows what abandonment of self means, what the giving up of all means, what anguish and overwhelming gloom and sorrow flood the soul as it confronts the actual trials of human life. That agonized cry wrung from Him, patient, meek and self-restrained as He was, shows us what He suffered, and how well He understands the difficulty of obedience. In that cry we see the Lord Himself standing on the brink of failure, in the agony of His spirit forgetting the unsympathizing crowd, feeling as if He could not bear the burden laid upon Him. In that cry we see that His obedience cost Him all He had to give, all His strength, all His trust in God.

But Christ thus learned obedience as an equipment for the great work He had to do. Having learned it, and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. That is to say, this schooling in obedience to which He submitted Himself made Him perfect as our High Priest. It gave Him the understanding of human nature and the sympathy with human weaknesses which every one must have who is to help us in spiritual things. You daily find how difficult it is to live without sin; the atmosphere of the world relaxes your moral fibre; you are thrown into the company of people you do not like to offend; you are called to make sacrifices which are like the cutting off your hand; persistent temptations press in upon you through your own flesh, and your spirit seems little purer than your flesh; many hideous thoughts spring up in your mind, envy, lust, fear, unbelief remind you that the victory is not yet yours, rather that your strength has been spent with no result. And ever and anon we are called to some greater trial, to some acceptance of a providence that desolates our life, or to some act from which all our natural feelings recoil. It is then we require the aid of one whose sympathy we can trust—who will not with cold eyes misread us, and chill our hearts with misunderstanding, or freeze our life with contemptuous reproach. No teacher brings his pupils forward who has nothing but contempt and sarcasm for their failures, who can only express wonder at the difficulties they experience. Every one craves to be appreciated, to have his struggles recognized. When we have done a piece of hard work, or are engaged in it, it is cheering to find that it is understood to be hard work. Now, Christ cannot but look intelligently and sympathetically on every struggle we make, on all endurance of temptation. His own suffering, a suffering He found inseparable from His life in this world, excites in Him a tenderness towards us. He has been through it all. It was not easy for Him to conquer. He did not do it with one hand tied. It taxed His strength to the utmost, and made Him feel as if He were on the brink of failure, and as if He could not longer maintain the conflict, but must give way. It made Him cry for aid, as if He felt all His own strength insufficient. He felt that unless help came to Him, He had not in Himself the wherewithal to resist. His cry was the cry of a drowning man

whose strength is spent, and whose last breath is spent in the cry. With what feelings does such a man look on those who are still swimming for life after he himself is rescued! Can he think contemptuously of their ineffectual strugglings? Must he not feel again his own weakness, and understand precisely what must be done, and eagerly rush to bring the help they need?

If, then, we ask, as we must ask, what does Christ's experience of temptation and suffering do for us? would we be any the worse off without His sympathy; what the better are we practically for it? is it not a mere sentiment, this grateful remembrance of His suffering?—if we ask such questions, we can with assurance reply that to know we have a sympathy like this really directed towards us and our conflicts is half the battle. A sympathy like this of Christ's, which is not ideal and sentimental, but which springs out of His real experience of this life, and which occupies His heart and determines His attitude and action towards this world and ourselves, has the utmost practical significance for us. We may not be at all times able to trace the practical steps which result from this sympathy, as we may often be quite unaware of the place we hold in some other person's affection, and of the schemes for our good they contrive. But we do know that a sympathy so powerful as this of Christ's, so wrought into the very fibre of His spirit by His first and sole experience of life on earth, must find utterance for itself in forms of thoroughly practical utility. Surely Christ is not the only person who has sympathy and is unable to find vent for it! Surely we cannot suppose that He in whom resides a fulness of life that nourishes all else, and who has shown in His life on earth how eminently practical His sympathy is, can be content to feel sympathy and do nothing for those with whom He sympathizes! We might as well suppose that a father should see his child struggling in the water and stretch no hand to save him, but be content to contemplate it as an interesting spectacle. Christ has attained supremacy, the highest place and the greatest power in the moral world; He has also come into the closest affinity with us, an affinity more real (if you think of it) than any natural relationship—can we believe that this supreme power and this close affinity move Him to no practical output of His helpfulness in our behalf? Rather believe that in His sympathy you will find a ready and practical response to all your need, and that in effectual ways He now brings to you the help He once Himself required.

Two points in which Christ's suffering is strengthening to us are incidentally indicated here. He learned obedience by suffering, *though He were a Son*. At all times our suffering tempts us to think we are forsaken or hardly used by God. We can sometimes only escape from accusing God by supposing He is not in the matter at all. All the brightness of life is suddenly enveloped in the blackness of darkness; all interest in things is deadened; we feel crushed and broken. Silently we cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Is it nothing in such circumstances to remember that these same words were wrung from God's own Son—from that Person in whom God was well pleased, and in whose life we see the ideal human life and the happiest connection with God? In presence of Christ's suffering we can never reasonably suppose that our own is any indication of neglect or disapproval on God's part. When all God's waves and billows go over our heads, the experience of Christ is a plank to which if we cling we shall not sink.

But another incidental allusion in this verse is to be noticed. These strong cryings and tears of Christ were heard. He was heard in that He feared, that is, on account of His pious submission and reverential meekness. But the cup was not removed. So is it often with ourselves. Many prayers are heard which are answered, not by

lightening the burden, but by strengthening the bearer. Every one is brought at some time to cry in an agony, “Anything but this. Can it be that good can come out of this? Is it possible that this should be the best thing that can happen to me—this calamity with its hopeless desolation, its crushing misery, its ruthless extinguishing of schemes of usefulness, its humiliating reminders of past sins? Can this be that which I am to enter into and pass through?” What can we do but take up the prayer of our Lord, and say, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me”? But in Christ’s case this prayer was heard by a love which could choose for Him the greater blessedness which came by drinking the cup. To have spared Christ the suffering would have been to answer His prayer in appearance, but to disregard the deeper cravings of His spirit. Can any one suppose that if Christ had received the actual exemption from suffering He prayed for, it would have been a greater kindness on God’s part than the kindness He showed in allowing the suffering to continue, and to work its grand effect in the salvation of the world?

And so in a measure is it with ourselves. Our cry of agony is not coldly put by; our heart-broken prayer is not disregarded. Far from it. God knows what we suffer, and feels with us; our pains pain His fatherly heart: but He knows that these pains are passing, and that, when meekly and hopefully borne, they work for us a deeper joy and a fuller life. It is dreadful, indeed, to see the thing we fear drawing nearer day by day, marching irresistibly onwards over all cryings and entreaties we make, trampling apparently on our bleeding heart, and leaving a track of desolated hopes and apparently disregarded prayers; but by the very anguish we suffer we may measure the greatness of the end to be wrought by it, and the intensity of the joy with which God will compensate us. The light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

VI. Jesus The Leader Of Faith

"Let us run with patience . . . looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—*Heb.* xii. 1, 2.

This advice was given to men who were finding that to live a Christian life was a more difficult thing than they had expected. They were beginning to waver, to think of giving up, to fancy it might be as well to abandon their high aims. There are times when we experience similar weariness. We are not finding the Christian life to be the thing we expected; there is far more of failure in it than we looked for; more failure indeed than anything else, till at last it seems to be a struggle after the unattainable. We have used the means of grace, and no grace seems to be gained. We remain what we are. Nature still rules in spite of all we have done. We have prayed with our whole heart, we have recognized our faults and fought against them, we have over and over again gone through the weary round of repenting, resolving, praying and striving, and the result is that we still sin. Would we not have been very much what we this day are, had we during the past ten years omitted all that striving and straining, that anxious thought and painful toil and remorseful feeling? What has come of it all, and why continue it?

I say we are all familiar with such feelings, and something may be said to mitigate their bitterness. It may be said especially that your prayers and efforts have not been in vain, and that in due season you shall reap if you faint not. You are nearer the goal than when you began—*some* part of the way is got over. But many of God's processes are silent, imperceptible and *very slow*. Thousands of years have gone to the formation of the coal we are now using; and in many processes of nature and of art an uninstructed onlooker cannot detect progress until some one element is added and suddenly the desired result is obtained; for example, in making paper a great deal of preliminary labour has to be gone through, and if you watch the material passing through process after process you are mainly struck with this one thing, how exceedingly unlike the desired result this material is, and until the very last moment the pulpy substance remains wholly unfit for use as paper, and quite unlike paper, till the final shake brings the particles together; and, so suddenly that you cannot say how it has happened, this semi-fluid substance which you fancy could never become paper rolls itself on the cylinder a broad white hardening surface, and then, though not till then, all the obscure preliminary treatment is justified.

Notoriously things that are but half finished deceive the uninitiated who cannot believe that any good purpose can be served by what shows to them so little promise. It is indeed little promise that our characters show; they are like those deep mosses which swallow up hundreds of tons of good material and give no sign, but at last one day the hardening solid surface appears and men know that their apparently fruitless labour has not been in vain. So may it be with yourself. Apparently you may be as far from soundness of character as you ever were, but *really* you may be much nearer it—nay, you *must* be nearer it if your efforts have been genuine.

The considerations, then, which the writer of this Epistle urges as sufficient to reanimate us in all weariness and faint-heartedness, are these two: first, that there is

one, Jesus, who has had greater difficulties in His life than any we have, and secondly, that He overcame them and is now triumphant, and overcame them through the virtue of a motive which is available also for us.

Now this writer is filled with a very passion of concern for those dispirited persons who, because of the difficulties of Christian living, are on the point of relinquishing all they have already gained, and sinking in weak and slothful defeat. To all who have been striving against sin and have found the strife so full of pain and shame and of so little avail that they are relaxing their watchfulness and ceasing to care for consequences; to all who have failed to secure what approves itself to conscience as best, and are contenting themselves with what merely commends itself as well enough; to all whose knees are relaxed so that they feel as if they could go not a step further, and whose hands hang down in listless, pusillanimous failure, this writer addresses himself. The Hebrews he addresses had much to endure, they were in the minority, they were laughed at, their hopes were derided, their livelihood was taken from them, they had no prospect in life, they were tempted to think themselves deluded. But having exhibited the truly awful consequences of apostasy and of denying an unseen world which they had once cordially believed in and a Redeemer whose love they had known, the writer summons before their imagination in an extraordinarily discriminating historical survey the magnificent line of their severely tried but faithful ancestry, and bids them remember the family and race to which they belong. But above all, he says, fix your gaze not on these your comrades and fellow soldiers, but upon your Captain who leads you in faith and *who alone exhibits the life of faith in its perfect form*.

The term "Captain" (rather than "Author") suggests one who goes before us and cripples the common enemy and makes a way for His followers through the thick of the fight. It suggests one who fights from the same level and by His superior strength wins victory for Himself and others; the strong swimmer who carries the rope ashore and so not only secures His own position, but makes rescue for all who will follow; the daring man who goes first and treads down the drifted snow, leaving a lane for the weaker to walk in; the originator of salvation to all by Himself leading the way from the present actual life of men in this world to the glory beyond. There is only one path by which any one in human nature can reach his destiny, and that lies through temptation and the suffering which temptation brings. Christ being leader must take this way. He was human and obliged to make growth in human righteousness, made *under* the law, subject to human conditions and exposed to all human temptations, finding His strength not in Himself but in another even as we, needing faith as we need faith.

Now the hardest thing any man can be called to do, that which constitutes the extreme trial and triumph of faith, is to leave one's self in God's hand when to human judgment all seems wrong and against us. To know that all that is now dark and heart-breaking and that spoils all life to us could be changed by God into joy and brightness and strength, to pray to God that this may be so and to receive no more answer than if the heavens were brass, this it is that tries our faith; and this it is that Jesus was called to endure. He prayed "with strong cryings and tears," in bitterness of soul and agony. He prayed to Him who *was able* to save Him from death, and yet no deliverance came, though His prayer was heard in that increased faith which enabled Him to accept all the pain and distress which formed the close of His life. He had, like the rest of us, to learn to submit to another's will, to take what is sent, to

follow a path appointed by another, to know that our strength is not in ourselves. He had to learn the human attitude, the attitude of the creature.

There is no need to exaggerate the suffering of Christ, and we must not lay the stress of it where it did not really fall. Compared to the majority of men He had little *outward* suffering. He knew nothing of the hopeless torture and life-spoiling anxiety inflicted by many of the diseases to which men are subject. The misery of the thousands who fill our hospitals or are dismissed from them incurable He knew only from observation. The squalor and despair and starvation which are engendered by the struggle for life in our large cities He was spared. He spent His youth remote from those "darkest caverns" of vice and misery—

"Where hopeless anguish pours its groan
And lonely want retires to die."

During the greater part of His life His circumstances were tolerable, and we must look below the surface if we would understand the greatness of His trial and His need of faith. We must take into account His sympathy which made all sorrow His own; His godliness which made all life in a godless world a perpetual pain; His solitariness so that to the very end, and although burdened with universal interests, He was obliged to be His own counsellor, His own support, not only exposed to the contradiction of sinners, but finding His friends as baffling and thwarting as His enemies.

But in common with the instinct of Christendom this writer lays the stress of Christ's trial on His death. "He endured the cross, *despising the shame*." So much out of the line of our troubles is this shameful death that we do not perhaps appreciate it fully. But we know that the enemies of Christ were satisfied that in that death they had brought Him to the last possibility of human degradation. One result of their frequent consultation was the device of getting Pilate to condemn Him, that so the death which was too brutal and disgraceful for their own law to inflict on the most degraded criminal might light upon Him. John the Baptist and James the son of Zebedee were slain with the sword, but decapitation in prison was too swift and honourable a death for Him. Stephen was stoned, but stoning, though the death of a cur, was too good for Jesus. He was stripped and hung up by the roadside that the crowd of Jerusalem might have a day's entertainment in witnessing, disturbing and embittering His last and most sacred moments. When our own patriot Defoe was pilloried, the people disappointed his judges by offering him flowers and greeting him with cheers instead of hailing him with mockery and filth; but no such reversal of His unjust sentence awaited our Lord. The dignitaries of the city forgot their dignity to wag their heads in vindictive satisfaction, the soldiers were roused out of their official apathy to jeer and mock, the very felon who hung by His side claimed Him as a partner in iniquity, and turned the shame from himself by taunting his comrade.

This shame, which formed so large an element in the suffering of the cross, our Lord, says this keen thinker, "despised"—*despised*—the poor-spirited exultation of His enemies was beneath His attention; these jibes and scoffs and bitter accusations fell pointless from Him as blunt arrows; the shame they were meant to fix on Him found nothing in Him.

But there would manifestly be no encouragement to us in considering the case of a person who had suffered more than ourselves and whose life had been hampered by greater difficulties, unless he had triumphed over them. In fact, nothing is so

discouraging as to witness the failure of better men than ourselves. It takes a stout heart to mount a breach over the mangled and gasping forms of comrades. But the instance of Christ is the standing proof that a human life, no matter how assailed, and beset, and opposed, may be a triumphant success. Here this writer gives us the measure of human possibilities: in the forenoon on the cross, the derision of men, in the afternoon on the throne ruling for God. Sounding the very deepest abyss of human woe, Jesus rises uninjured, undimmed in glory, undetained. Making experiment in His own person of the worst that can befall a man, He finds nothing unconquerable, nothing which can absolutely bar our passage to the throne of God, nothing which can permanently dispute our progress towards righteousness and felicity eternal.

But is this victory of Christ's possible to us? Why, says the writer, the very motive which animated Him with courage to carry through His warfare was this, that every one who willed might share in His triumph. This was the joy set before Him. This victory and entrance to the place of all power He has achieved as our forerunner. Can any better thing happen to men than that they be ruled by the Spirit of Christ? Can the most enthusiastic humanitarian depict a future for the race more satisfying and enduring than that which Christ has wrought and suffered for and is now slowly evolving? Can Christ have any truer, greater joy than to know that He is the source of victory to men? What is it that in the last resort renews hope and effort in defeated men? What is it that stands between the weakest and the worst of men and final defeat? It is precisely this, that Christ has deeply lodged in the human heart the conviction that victory is possible, that it has been won by Himself, won indeed by infinite effort, but won that we also may attain it. To reign in solitude would have proved He did not reign at all. Therefore "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit *with* Me on My throne as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne." If Christ is true, then nothing but want of faith can prevent our enjoying the utmost our nature is capable of. Whatever else is meant by being at God's right hand it is at any rate meant that we are really victors. The possibility of being an eternal failure is for ever past, the possibility of knowing one's self for ever as a fool and a coward—as one that has chosen the worse in preference to the better, evil rather than good, as one that has loved soft living and feared hardness, as one in whom innate meanness and corruption have prevented all noble endeavour and devotedness to God.

What trouble will not that repay? What hardships will not be forgotten, what sacrifice and losses will not receive compensation in such fulness of life?

But the joy set before our Lord was not the idle repose of one for whom the mere fact of being victorious is enough to live upon. Too frequently the first successes of feeble characters intoxicate or exhaust or otherwise unfit them for further efforts. Many persons begin life eagerly and work well for a time, but as soon as they have attained position, or won their object, or proved their capabilities they feel all motive die out, they discover, or observers discover, that they had no true discernment of the need of labour, had no high aim, no worthy object, but only some ignoble ambition or craving for victory as a selfish satisfaction. It may occur to some that the motive of our Lord, as here explained, needs justification. Is it not said that it was "the joy set before Him" that nerved Him to all He did and suffered? Was this not a selfish motive? If He underwent all His trials, severe as they were, merely that He might, as it were, better Himself, that He might attain to a reward He longed for, does not this reduce His high example to the level of those who have undergone years of hardship and

self-denial and patient labour that they might win a name or a fortune or some object their hearts were set on?

The difficulty is one which requires no profound knowledge of human life to solve. Of course in every case in which you see a man patiently and persistently enduring hardship and deprivation, which he might, if he pleased, avoid, you conclude that he has some object in view, the attainment of which will in his estimation compensate him for his pains. Some years ago a young Scotch nobleman, who might have lived in the enjoyment of all the pleasures which money, high position, affectionate friends and a good education can provide, abandoned all these and put himself, outwardly and so far as he could, on the level of the common sailor before the mast, and worked his way upwards on the same terms as the plebeian and unaided seaman. It was manifest to all his friends that this youth had some weighty end in view, for the sake of which he was content so utterly to abjure all that he had learnt to consider comfortable ways of living. Or look at the case of that mediæval physician, who voluntarily put himself in the way of infection that he might give to the profession a more accurate description of the plague than any they could otherwise obtain. In short, in every instance where dangers or hardships or death is voluntarily endured there must be present to the mind some good which is to result from their endurance, something which satisfies the feeling or the conscience of the person more than the mere avoidance of such toils and pains could. There must be a joy set before them, making it rational and possible for them to endure. To call such a satisfaction, or such an inducement, selfish is to mistake.

There are rewards which selfish men seek, and there are rewards which only the unselfish can set as their aim. The having a reward in view does not prove a man selfish, for all men must have an object worthy of their effort—no man will work or will suffer unless you can show him a reason for doing so, unless you can assure him of an adequate compensation, a true satisfaction. But in the case of the selfish man this satisfaction must be some benefit to himself; in the case of the unselfish it will be a benefit to other people.

Of which kind the joy set before our Lord was we need not be told. He aimed at the right hand of God, at the seat of all dominion and authority, that He might be a Prince and a Saviour to His people. Like our best rulers who seek dominion not from the lust of conquest or territorial acquisition, but that the conquered race may be lifted by our manners, our inventions, our law, and our religion. Like the youth who longs to make money that his younger brothers may have a better education and a better place than himself. Like the physician who eagerly seeks recognition not for the glory's sake, but for the joy of seeing the methods of cure he believes in accepted and bringing health to many sufferers. So the joy set before the Lord was to sit at the right hand of the throne of God, not in idle repose, not to receive the acknowledgments of all creatures, but that He may be an energetic, living, almighty Head to the Church and with His fulness may fill all things. Unlike all selfish joys, the triumph of Christ must be shared that it may be complete. He has it not Himself except in so far as His people have it. As he again and again told His disciples, His aim was that our joy might be full, that His joy might remain in us, that in our joy His joy might be prolonged and renewed continuously.

Jesus Christ is man; His interests like those of all men are in this world of men; through His human nature He looks at things humanly; just as we have no joy in life save in the joy of those we love, so neither has He; and to accomplish our joy was the adequate inducement which bore our Lord through all the difficulty and sorrow of

His life. Manifestly no one ever had an aim more worthy or more deserving the praise and admiration of all men.

And now observe, in the last place, the precise bearing which this patient endurance of our Lord has upon our own perseverance. Unfortunately the verse is so translated as seriously to obscure the writer's meaning. Jesus is in our version represented as "the Author and Finisher of our faith," by which we naturally understand that it is He who originates faith in us and brings it to perfection, that we are His pupils and in His hands throughout, and that it is to Him we must look as able to produce and to perfect faith in us. This is, of course, true, but it is not the truth which the writer had in view. In the first place you notice that the word "our" is inserted in our version without any corresponding word in the original, which might of itself show us that it is not our faith directly that is spoken of. And in the second place, the word translated "Author" is better translated by the word "Captain" in a former passage of this Epistle, where the writer speaks of Christ in terms that throw light upon the words before us, as being made perfect through sufferings and so becoming the Captain of our salvation. Similarly here he bids us in all distresses and temptations look to Jesus, the Captain or Leader in faith, the Captain who goes before us in this fight of faith and in His own person shows us how to endure hardness as His good soldiers. The whole context guides us to the same meaning.

Jesus, then, is set before us here not as the originator of faith in us, but as Himself displaying a perfect faith. We are invited to consider Him not as He is exalted and able, as a conqueror, to communicate spiritual gifts, but first of all as down on the battlefield, often beaten to His knees, hard pressed by the very foes that assail ourselves, and only saving Himself by the faith to which His brethren in the flesh are called. He that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of one, He perfected by suffering as they, He human and obliged to make growth in human righteousness by fighting the same foes which keep us back and which we also must vanquish. We have not a Captain who cannot be touched with a feeling for our weaknesses, for it was no idle victory that gained Him the honours He now enjoys; the place He now holds He fought His way to, often in an apparently doubtful contest, a contest that bewildered and exhausted Him and drew much blood, a contest for which He needed the strongest faith. Faith, says this writer, is the confident expectation of future good, the vivid realization of unseen verities; it was this faith which upheld our Leader. The joy that was set before Him, our deliverance and triumph,—this nerved His arm once more when it was numbed with conflict, and brought light to His eye dimmed with fatigue and anxiety. It was thus that He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them that believe on Him. It was by Himself faithfully accepting the Father's will that He at once won the victory for us and showed us the way to reach His own victory. By going before us He has crippled the enemy and opened a way through the thick of the battle; all that we could not face He has faced for us; and now from the height He has gained He animates us with His voice: "In the world ye shall have tribulations; but be not afraid, I have overcome the world." It has broken its weapons on Him and can now only cut skin-deep. He has driven aside all that is fatal, and has bound it so that it cannot reach those that follow close in His steps.

Therefore *consider* Jesus, consider this "greatest of all believers," this perfect pattern of faith, this crowning and unquestionable instance of faith's trial and triumph. Consider Him till you feel assured that this is the life for you, this the ideal you would fain realize. If you need encouragement—and who does not?—here you will find it. However dark and perplexed and slippery your way has become, however

complicated and difficult and full of anxiety your life is, you need not be defeated. You have been, perhaps, in many an agony, have writhed and tossed in your mental distress—all this happens many a time in lives that are quiet enough to the public eye; but even though you feel that no sorrow has been like yours, still it holds true that there is a way through it, it has an end. Jesus held to the belief that righteousness must come eventually into a land of light and joy; He believed in God, and is now at His right hand. The same course and the same result are open to you.

The main thing is, not to give in; to aim at the best and strive after it; not to be cajoled into the silly imagination that a weak life and a strong life, a false life and a true, a slothful and an energetic, a life led in the truth, accepting the best as its rule, and a life full of evasions of duty have all the same issue. The main thing is to cherish that faith which gives substantial existence to things hoped for, and solid, living reality to things unseen.

VII. Putting On Christ

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."—*Rom.* xiii. 14.

It has, naturally, been more than once observed that it is man's distinction among the animals, that he dresses himself. The other animals have no choice, and must appear in the dress with which nature has provided them. Their dress is a part of their nature, and, whether clad in feathers or in fur, in bristles or in scales, whether they are colourless or glitter in the gayest ornament, they do not voluntarily assume these coverings. Man, on the contrary, clothes himself, and even in the most savage state paints his body, decorates his hair, or in one way or other adds to his natural appearance. And as dress is thus a matter of choice, it always reveals something of the man's disposition. The paint of the savage shows whether he is at war or peace; whether he has lost a friend or slain an enemy. It indicates to the eye the circumstances, the relations, the intentions of the wearer. In civilized countries the great distinctions of sex, of age, of profession, and much subtler varieties of character are revealed by dress. So closely is dress felt to cling to the inward character that we use it as the readiest means of expressing many of our deepest emotions, and a little history may be read as often as we peruse the dress of a stranger. There is an appropriateness of certain dress to certain states of mind, so that ornament and fantastic colours are shocking in the house of woe, while the guest who should come to a wedding clad in mourning would justly give serious offence.

Dress and character being thus closely connected, it was inevitable that men should use the one metaphorically of the other, and speak of God being "clothed with majesty," or of clothing themselves with humility. When so used no one has any difficulty in apprehending what is meant. In the Early Church, when a heathen professed faith in Christ and desired baptism, he laid aside his ordinary clothing to signify his "putting off the old man," and, having passed through the cleansing water of baptism, he assumed a white garment to symbolize his putting on the new man. His former friends, who had been accustomed to recognize him by his dress, might now have passed him by and taken him for a stranger; and so were they to be at a loss to recognize in this man, clothed with meekness and temperance, their former acquaintance who had been wont to wear a haughty look, and had "suited" himself in intemperate habits. The obvious meaning, therefore, of the words, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," is, Assume the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. The putting on the new man is the counterpart of the putting off the old man, and what that is Paul explains when he says, "that ye put off *concerning the former conversation*—that is, concerning your former way of life—the old man, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Our old ways and character are to be laid aside, and therefore to put on the new man is to assume a new character and new ways. To put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to make our own His character.

But is such a thing possible? Can a man alter the character with which he is born? Are we not as helpless as the clay in the hands of the potter; and the shape given us at our birth, must we not retain throughout life? Certainly there is much that seems to argue the impossibility of altering our nature; enough, at all events, to make it worth our while to look closely into the matter, lest we spend a vast amount of hope and effort on what is really unattainable.

1. And first of all it will at once be recognized that there is in every human being something that does not change. What we call the man's individuality abides unalterably his from first to last. It is remarkable that of all the hundreds of millions on earth, no two individuals are identically the same, either in outward appearance or in inward character. A stranger may see little difference; an intimate friend cannot understand how the one should be mistaken for the other. Such is the fertility of Nature that she breaks her moulds as soon as they are once used, and every individual is formed on a design of his own. This individuality no one can part with or alter. A man can as little rearrange the component parts of his inner man so as to produce a different character, as he can alter the colour of his eyes or the number of his vertebrae or the length of his jaw. There are thousands of persons with the same colour of eyes or of hair, with features very similar or identical, but the slight differences in the arrangement and proportion of the features give individuality to each. And similarly the individuality of character, by which we identify our friends, consists in the peculiar proportion and adjustment of their qualities. One person has equal friendliness with another, but he has more humour or ease of manner. Two men are equally frank, but one is blunt, the other genial; or they are of equal courage, but one is ready and self-confident, the other is diffident and slow. In endless proportions and relations the qualities of human nature are mixed, and each mixture has a fragrance of its own which we call individuality; and this a man can as little alter as the Ethiopian can change the colour of his skin. The diversity of character within Christ's kingdom is as great as outside, for each man as he enters it carries his peculiarities with him. Everything that is human finds a place and a use there.

This individuality that makes each of us distinct from everybody else is not in itself either bad or good morally. The qualities that form it may be used for good or for bad purposes, but in themselves are neither bad nor good. Humour, buoyancy of spirit, sensibility, sociableness, methodical exactness, an eager and passionate temper—these and such-like qualities are like physical qualities of strength or endurance, or delicacy or acuteness of the senses, and may be used for either good or evil. One man's natural qualities may be much higher and stronger than another man's, and religion does not bring these two men to an equality. The one remains of inferior quality, the other of superior, but each uses his nature for the best purposes. The one is clay, the other gold; and the material cannot be changed, although the form into which it is thrown may, and the use to which it is put. The clay may be fashioned into as exquisite a form, and it may be as serviceable in its own place, but clay it remains.

A still more serious difficulty arises when we consider whether the will has power to alter or mould the nature we are born with. Theology tells us we are born in sin, with a natural tendency to choose evil rather than good; science, in different language, tells us the same thing. It says we are descended from the lower animals, and that the beast is still in us. It bids us—

"Arise and fly
The reeling faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die."

Like Milton's lion springing out of the mud, we are but "pawing to get free," to extricate ourselves from the debasing influences under which we are born. No doubt it is also true that we are the heirs of good as well as of evil. If we are born with hereditary weaknesses, we are also born with hereditary instincts and proclivities to good, won for us by the painful struggle of past generations. But the serious aspect of

heredity or natural depravity presents itself when we look at the will, the great moral force within us, and see that it is contaminated as much as the rest of our nature, and can only by courtesy be called “free.”

This difficulty has been stated thus: “Your will and your nature or character are not two separate things. Your will is a part of your nature, and cannot be separated from it. It is not the will which rules the nature, but the nature which expresses itself in the will. You may say, you could do things if you liked, but that you would not. Precisely—‘if you liked.’ But it is because you do not like that you do not do them. To say you could do a thing only you would not is a flat contradiction. You mean that if it were not for the strong feeling you have on the subject, the mere act would be quite easy. But this strong feeling which would not let you do that thing is *you*; it is your character which makes that impossible. You must act in accordance with your character. A bad man will act badly, and a religious man religiously.”

This teaching of modern writers seems, then, as hopeless as the most rigid Calvinism. Our character is determined at birth by influences over which we have absolutely no power, and our will is a part of our character; so that if our character is bad, our will must also be bad, without the power of change. But things are not so hopeless. We know that bad men are changed. New motives and new aims present themselves to men; their whole character is altered by coming into contact with persons who influence them powerfully; they seem to derive a strength from these persons which was not theirs before, and they become to all intents and purposes new men. That men do thus change is matter of everyday observation, and they change by some new persons or ideas entering their life. And there is no influence of this kind comparable to that which Christ exerts upon us.

2. If, then, it is possible to assume a character different from our present or original character, *how* can we do so? How can we put on the Lord Jesus Christ? For experience tells us that mere imitation of Christ does not come to much. It must be an imitation rooted in conviction and prompted by love and hope. No man ever made much way by consciously setting himself to copy into himself certain features of Christ’s character. That is like an actor assuming his part, selecting the fitting mask and dress, and rehearsing till he can enter into the part and express it by the appropriate gestures, looks and tones. So long as a man imitates Christ thus, so long as he keeps his mind on the strain he is a different man, but as soon as the effort is over he falls back to his own natural character. It is a mask assumed, a disguise put on, which is effectual so long as it is worn, but which cannot be worn always, and merely hides without eradicating the old nature. Yet this is precisely the putting on of Christ with which some persons are satisfied. They do not put off their old character, their selfishness, their carnality, their love of applause, their falseness remain; but over and above these they assume some show of better things, an appearance of devoutness, of piety, of Christian sentiment and phraseology. Yet these things are not their real character, but a mask; though, perhaps, not consciously used for purposes of deception. They have put on the new man as a cloke over and above the old man, and without first stripping themselves of the old.

Obviously more than this is meant. The Greek word for an actor was hypocrite: and we are not intended to be hypocrites, to assume a part which it would be a relief to resign. We must so put on Christian habits that we shall never gladly or disappointedly cry, “Off, off, ye lendings!” We must be penetrated with His Spirit, and be transformed into His likeness, and not merely imitate one or two of His qualities or ways. And this can only be done either by those who are carried away by

enthusiastic love of Christ, or by those whose deliberate and immovable conviction it is that Christ has really shown us the best life, and that He has initiated a great cause in the world which it becomes all good men to promote. The grand peculiarity of Christ is that He demands our personal allegiance. He does not throw out doctrine and let who will receive it; He does not utter His views of things and leave them to work in men's minds. He forms a society, He calls men to Himself, and invites their trust, their love, their service. And experience tells us that until we give Him this, we give Him too little; too little for our purposes as well as for His. It is entire belief in Him and entire devotedness to Him as a Person that enables us to put Him on morally. Until we give Him this sovereign place in our life, and allow Him truly to rule all we are concerned about, His character is not sufficiently impressed upon ours. The more any person fits and suits us, the more does he influence us. The more our tastes and peculiarities and wants are satisfied in any person, the more do we seek his company, and the happier we are in it. As the flower turns to the sun and expands in it, so do we open out and grow in a true friendship. Indifferent and half-alive, and only able to maintain the proprieties and courtesies of life in other companies, in this company we give free play to our feelings, and our character expands, lives and develops. And if our friendship with Christ be a friendship of the understanding and of the heart, if we see that to serve Him is really the best life for us, then the deepest parts of our nature will open to this friendship.

It is a great mistake, then, to suppose that the acceptance of Christ and the Christ-like character can in any way contract and restrict and stunt true and desirable growth. On the contrary, it involves that we learn to expand to the largest personality and in the freest manner. Our life is not reduced to a narrower compass, our character does not become constrained and artificial by our putting on of Christ, unless we really are not finding our best and fullest life in Him. Your clothes do not restrain and trouble you when they fit closely and are quite on, but only when half on. If you are only struggling into them, or if they are so new and unaccustomed that they do not quite fit, then you are at a disadvantage. And no doubt many would-be Christians are in that predicament. They want to put on Christ, they wish to appear with the uniform of His people, and to pass muster as such; but it will not do, their awkwardness betrays them, you see that they are not at home in their assumed character. There are even those who honestly desire to be more thoroughly adjusted to Christ, and to find themselves more at home in Christian conduct, and who yet cannot make it out. They might naturally express themselves in the words—

"I would that Thou wert all to me,
Thou that art just so much, no more.
I would I could adopt Thy will,
See with Thine eyes and set my heart
Beating by Thine: Thy part, my part
In life for either good or ill."

Such persons are straitened and ill at ease, trying to live as Christians, and yet not finding it come natural. But they who have made their choice with full conviction, who have accepted Christ because they find in Him the very Sun and Life of the soul, and are convinced that beyond His loving purpose there is nothing worth desiring, eagerly adapt themselves to His mind and ways.

This figure of donning Christ as a garment suggests another imperfection in our manner of accepting and using Christ. You have often noticed, with disappointment and perplexity, how commonly, if not universally, a man's religion seems to touch

only one part of his character. In some one department of conduct he is all that could be desired; in that particular field of conduct he is really Christ-like, clearly awake to duty, eager for opportunities of service, zealous, watchful, efficient, perfect. As often as you see him in that character and under conditions where this one side of his character is appealed to, you are deeply impressed with the reality of his religion, with his spirituality of judgment and of feeling, with his true acceptance of the character of Christ. But you meet him to-morrow under altered circumstances and engaged in other matters, and night is not more different from day than he from his former self: he is actuated by the most worldly motives, and takes coarse views of his obligations, such as any honourable man would be ashamed of. You do not know how to construe his conduct or bring it into harmony with his professed adoption of Christ as His ruler. This inconsistency exists in some degree in almost all Christians. Their Christianity can only be seen in one or two exceptional parts of their conduct, not in all. But as the garment stripped off Christ when He was bound to the cross was of one piece, seamless, so His character was of one piece, consistent, each quality playing its own part and in its own place. He was from first to last always and completely clad in holiness; not ragged, or half-clothed, not robbing one part of His character to strengthen another, not assuming a comely piety at one point, but leaving other parts of His character naked and uncared for. His character was not fragmentary and composed of pieces ill-assorted and ill-joined; it was not like our clothing, which has many parts we can put on or off at pleasure, it was one whole garment. It resembled rather the skin which grows with our growth, is part of ourselves, homogeneous and all of one piece. So when we accept Christ we are not to act as if we fancied we could pick and choose in what points we shall be assimilated to Him, what features of His character we may assume and what we may leave; we must either take the whole seamless robe or leave it. It cannot be otherwise. Real holiness strives towards completeness.

"Whoever says 'I want no more'
Confesses he has none."

If we have life in us, *that* will equally nourish each part of our character and every member of our spiritual body.

This is the more to be insisted on because the Spirit of Christ has so long been percolating and colouring our society that we are all brought up to admire and respect much which belongs to Christian morality, even though we should never hear the name of Christ. Many persons admire some element of human character which Christ was the first to emphasize, and they adopt and cultivate that particular quality. They admire, for example, Christ's scorn of hypocrisy, or His genial fellowship with all kinds of men, His magnanimity and love of truth, His combination of the most delicate sympathy with the sturdiest independence, His hatred of sin and tenderness for the sinner. But while attracted by such qualities, they never seem to see it to be their duty to recognize other parts of Christ's conduct—the meekness and self-restraint, the unworldliness, the purity, the devotedness and self-abnegation which equally characterized Him. They select the articles of clothing that suit them and leave the rest. We are all of us too ready to seek from Christ nothing more than a devotional drapery for our natural character. But what we need is to achieve and make our own possession the complete holiness of Christ.

To all of us this is possible. The poorest among us who have but a rag of character, those who feel they have much to do to keep themselves decent in their fellows' sight with the fluttering remnants of good that remain to them, those who are heart-sick

with the struggle to maintain self-respect, and find that after all they must own themselves poor, miserable and undone; or those, on the other hand, who are not aware of their poverty and nakedness,—to all alike Christ says, “I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” Frankly accept the provision thus made for us all, and be not among those to whom it is said, “Woe to the rebellious children that take counsel, but not of Me, and that cover with a covering, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin.” What a tale does the tattered coat, out at elbows, scarcely held together, tell of indolence or vice; and does not our character in its incompleteness, its looped and windowed ruggedness, tell to any eye that can read it of negligence, sloth, indifference in the best things? He who has never seen that his very righteousnesses are as filthy rags, he who practically trusts to his own character to bring him through, and who is not sensible that anything more or different is needed, has everything yet to learn. We all need to put on Christ: our own character is not sufficient; the character of Christ is sufficient. Going into the world with our natural character uncorrected, we are unjust to God, to our fellows and to ourselves. For a better thing is possible to us. What doth it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? And how do you lose your own soul?—by making no effort to cleanse it. You lose your life by spending it on ends which prevent you from attaining the highest end. Other things you can afford to neglect: but be sure you are really gaining in likeness to Christ. That is the real prize of life. You do not know how much you miss by neglecting to cultivate some one grace; you do not know what new views of life you would have, what new strength for doing good, what new attachment to Christ, if only you set yourself resolutely to conform in every particular to the character of Christ. Not without self-control and self-knowledge, not without pain, not without striving and sacrifice can we make that character our own; but that character satisfies all the requirements of God and human life, and to be without it is to miss the chief end of our being.

VIII. The Baptist's Message To Jesus

"And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou He that should come? or look we for another?"—*Luke* vii. 19.

The career of the Baptist has recently been dramatized by a well-known German poet. That is not surprising. No figure stands out more distinctly on the page of history; independent, original, pronounced and striking, it cannot be confounded with any other. Allowed but a few months to make his mark, his singularly noble, prompt and dauntless character found room enough to complete his work. Scorning the softness and futile conventionality of his father's priestly office and well-provided home, he found in the freedom and bracing air of the desert an atmosphere more congenial to his athletic spirit. In his bare manhood, stripped of all possessions and thirsting for no honours, independent of the world and disregarding its blinding offers and entangling associations, he was in a position to say exactly what he thought of the ordinary life of men and to speak to high and low, king and peasant, as man to man—a perfect specimen of a type of man that is never out of date.

Probably the Baptist himself would judge that we waste too much emotion on his comfortless life, his early self-sacrifice, his magnanimity. The tragic character of his death, the despondent doubt which darkened his spirit while in prison, the severity of his whole life, all tend to make us oblivious of the fact that his life was filled and crowned with a deep and solid and unique joy. And after all, it not being possible to him to be the Christ, it was no small glory to be the friend, the next, to the Christ. Few men see much lasting fruit of what they have spent their life to attain. But John, to whom it was given to stir and awaken men's minds to appreciate their true King, to whom it was given—to use his own figure—to negotiate the marriage between Christ and men, had the perfect satisfaction of seeing men flocking to their true Lord, and of hearing His voice of welcome and of deep satisfaction. No wonder that this should eclipse all the apparent and superficial bareness of his life. No wonder that when he saw that he had been the chief instrument in finding for Christ and for God entrance into men's hearts, when he apprehended that to him had been entrusted the initiation of the greatest movement in the history of man, and possibly in the history of God, he should have been filled with humble and exultant satisfaction, and have said, "This *my* joy is fulfilled." No wonder that Christ should have declared that among those born of women none was greater than the Baptist.

But John was in no degree lifted above the common distresses and temptations. Chained to the wall in the gloomy dungeon of Machærus, and finding that no rescue came, he began to wonder whether Antipas was greater and more powerful than the Messiah. What his disciples told him of the doings of Jesus provoked and perplexed him. They told him of the miracles Jesus was working; but why, if He had this power, did He not use it, as John would have used it, to give righteousness and justice a commanding place? His miraculous power was precisely that which created the difficulty. He could not understand why, if Jesus was really the long-looked-for King of men, He should content Himself with curing a few blind old women, or leprous outcasts, or reclaiming harlots who could bring no lustre to His kingdom. Why did He not use His power to blast iniquity in high places, to dethrone the profane tyrant Antipas, to free the people of God? Why did He waste His brief opportunity in dining

at Pharisees' tables, teaching in remote villages, talking to uninfluential sinners, helping a few crippled beggars while Israel was crying out for its king? What were individual sorrows compared to national grievances?

In common with all his countrymen John had to rise to new conceptions of the kingdom of God and its King. He had to discard the fancy that a great conqueror would arise to throw off the Roman yoke. And in the process of transforming old ideas and expectations into new ones, he had necessarily to pass through the stage of bitter disappointment and doubt. It was not as a mere mechanical official, pulled by strings from heaven, but as the result of his own personal faith that he had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah; and he could maintain this faith not by miraculous seclusion from the ordinary human experience, but by honestly facing the difficulties and finding his slowly reasoned way to convictions in which he could permanently rest. Happily he took now as always the straightforward course and appealed to Jesus Himself. The authorities had mistaken the Baptist himself for the Christ; Jesus, he knew, would make no mistake.

Jesus at once apprehended the state of mind of His friend, and anticipates and explodes the idea which He knew the crowd would cherish, that the personal misfortunes of the Baptist were clouding his faith. You hear the pleasure with which Jesus defends and applauds him ringing through His words. It would almost seem as if Jesus were taking revenge on Himself for uttering what might appear to be the harsh saying, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." He turns on the people as if *they* had in their hearts been calumniating John, and at once defends his friend. "Do not," He says, "let yourselves for one moment suppose that John has fallen from his high estate. You yourselves, when you saw him in the wilderness independent of public opinion and of criticism, knew that he was no reed bowing to every change of circumstance, moved by every passing breeze, never for two days in one mind. You saw a man untouched by luxurious living, content with a camel's skin and such food as uncultivated nature could afford. Do you suppose that such a man is much disturbed or daunted by prison-fare, or that the gloom of the dungeon has damped his optimism and blotted out the coming kingdom?"

But no doubt the prison had its own effect upon John. Day after day, month after month passed as he lay with his blazing energies pent up, and still there reached him not the shout of a nation welcoming its King, but the same monotonous tidings of a few lepers cleansed, a few blind beggars restored to sight. He had waited to feel the shock of revolution shake the solid walls of the remote fortress where he lay; let its ruins bury him, if only he knows for one flash of thought that God has remembered His people. But, as when one listens in the dead of night till the ear aches with the silence, so had John waited till his heart grew sick with watching. What could it mean? He had learned how quickly a man must do his work if he is to do it at all. He had learned how short a time would be given to any one who sought to root out evil from the land. Why, then, this delay? Was it possible that, after all, he had been mistaken, and that Jesus was merely another forerunner of the Messiah like himself?

Thus are even good, wise and strong men tempted to think that God's work in the world has ceased, if things are not turning out as they expected. Thus are the best of men tempted, when they themselves are left in a siding, to think that there is no forward movement at all. So difficult is it for us to remember that we are, each of us, but one among fourteen hundred millions who have all their own interests, their own point of view, and their own place in God's regard and training. John thought, what we all think, that God has but one way of working, and *that*, our way.

Had any one else challenged the Baptist's testimony and now sought to convince him he had been mistaken in indicating Jesus as the Messiah, he would doubtless have smothered his doubts and maintained his Messiahship as before. Yet in his own mind grave perplexities had arisen. But doubts are only dangerous when they are not allowed expression, and strike inward. In a region of fog, such as this life is, there is good reason for going slow and for taking soundings without intermission. Doubts are dangerous when men who are tormented by them think themselves exceptional, and that God frowns upon them for not believing what they find it impossible to believe. God is reasonable. Here Jesus shows in what spirit He meets honest, serious-minded doubt. He knows that beneath that question of John's which so shocked the bystanders, there lay a heart more capable of loyalty to Him than was to be found in any of those who gave their easy assent to claims they scarcely understood. That question, sceptical as it seemed, was of more value to Him than the unreasoning hosannas of thoughtless followers, for through it He saw a man in deadly earnest to whom the answer meant life or despair. It is when a man takes the Messiahship of Jesus seriously; it is when he proposes to make the mind of Christ rule all that he himself is connected with, that he necessarily begins to question whether Christ's claim is well founded and whether His rule is right. It is through such doubt and perplexity that ultimate faith and lasting allegiance are reached.

John's doubt hovers over each generation and has to be solved by every man. "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" Do we find in this person God, righteousness and eternity? And this doubt is nourished and strengthened much as John's was. Men are always tempted to resent Christ's method. His work seems so slow: one is tempted to say, so inefficient, so unmarked by urgency; in so many ways it disappoints the expectations of practical men—fitted rather for some other world than for this actual order of things. He seems so tardy in achieving a regenerated society that many persons prefer their own methods of reforming it, and scarcely think it worth their while to take His method into account. He seems never to be on the spot when wanted. If He actually sat as King in our midst, legislating for us and administering justice, and redressing all grievances, men would not be offended in Him. But things go on so much as if no power in heaven or on earth were His, His help comes so ambiguously, His interference is so indirect, that in times of great stress and need many are tempted to ask with John, half in doubt, half in challenge, whether this is the best and the final rule of mankind.

It is precisely John's difficulty which is to-day preventing many earnest men in the working classes from believing in Christ. His methods bring no immediate relief, no revolution, no upturning of the social order, no instant setting right of all that is wrong. He claims to be King, and to have a special regard for the oppressed, yet generation after generation of the oppressed pass away and He gives no sign. It is this which prompts so many to turn from Him in disappointment and bitterness and to look for "another," generally some hasty demagogue who offers a panacea which is to cure all the world's ills in a fortnight.

But it is not any one class in the community that is confronted by this question, but every individual. Does this Person fill the utmost of our hope and expectation? Can we conceive nothing better—no form of the administration of human affairs which would bring more permanent and solid good to man? Does there remain in our heart or life some want which bids us look for another than this Christ? Is He for us the solution of all problems, the end of all our strivings, the God in whom we find rest?

The answer Jesus sends to John is, “Go and tell John what I am doing.” Virtually that was to say, “I have deliberately chosen My method, and I do not mean to change it. My kingdom is spiritual. Hence I must work through the individual. Only by regenerating the individual do I expect to regenerate the world.”

Jesus never answers the question thus put to Him with a categorical “Yes, I am the Christ.” He may for the present leave doubts and difficulties in the inquiring mind, because He will win no man by compulsion. It must be by the free movement of our own intelligence, by the home-grown convictions reached by the individual that He wins His way to universal empire. As one of our greatest statesmen once said, “No more in the inner world than in the outer has Christ come among us as a conqueror, making His appeal by force.” This is what inquirers resent. “Tell us plainly,” they cry, “how long wilt Thou keep us in suspense? Art Thou the Christ?” But it is useless to tell men plainly. Christ does not wish to be received on authority. He is content to wait until you are yourself convinced, because in this process of conviction, of questioning and considering and confronting alternatives is the only true education of the spirit. It is you yourself who must for yourself determine the worth of Christ, what He deserves and what you owe Him. Material for making up your mind is not lacking, and if with this material you still fight shy of a thorough-going decision, you will one day find that above all the wrongs you have done in life rises this greatest wrong of neglect or ingratitude towards Him who chiefly deserves our consideration. However incomprehensible His dealings with ourselves may seem, surely we also may trust Him and earn the blessedness of those who are not offended in Him.

But what were the reflections of Jesus Himself on this incident? These are given in the little parable with which the passage closes. Neither John nor Jesus was such a leader as the people desired. The people were not sufficiently interested in the spiritual movements of their time to approve either of the severe or the genial reformer. They considered themselves justified in being irreligious because none of the current forms of religion quite fell in with their crotchets and prejudices. They had adopted the fatal critical attitude: the attitude of unconcerned spectators and judges. John, they said, overtaxed their strength and demanded a purity of life which seemed easy to him, but was impossible to them. Jesus was even more repellent. In Him indeed there was no asceticism that they could see; He came eating and drinking, enjoying freely God’s good gifts, genial, companionable, living a hearty life among the common people. But when they besought Him to resist the oppressor He went and paid His taxes, and when they would have made Him a king He hid Himself. He seemed wholly to ignore the national sorrows. Unlike the old prophets, unlike the Mahdis of more recent times, He would not touch politics. He would never interfere, not even when His relative was basely thrown into a dungeon would He head a rescue. Nay, He violated the proprieties by sitting at a publican’s table—feasting, as they might have put it, at the expense of His starving, overtaxed fellow men. What could be made of such a person? The Messiah indeed! He was a mere good-natured timeserver, indifferent to the sorrows of His people, so long as He could dine well: “a gluttonous man and a winebibber.” How could such a person ever lead men to great things? He had no ear for their grievances: they had mourned to Jesus, but He had not joined in their lamentations; they had piped to the ascetic and grim Baptist, but not a step would he dance.

Those to whom our Lord spoke must have seen how accurately this parable hit off their attitude towards the two great manifestations of God in their own day. In the persons of John and Jesus religion, the will of God, had taken shape before them. But

the people approved of neither. They were like petted children, who think every one should fall in with their whim, dancing when they pipe, and pretending to cry when they whimper or strike them. To some people no religious movement of their time is acceptable. They live at feud with their generation, because they cannot have their own whim petted. They would need to make a world for themselves in order to be content. They allow themselves to be stranded like useless hulks, and the stream of progressive Christian life flows past them. The great movements of their time pass on unconscious of their sour remonstrance. They feel themselves ill-used. They have fallen on evil days, and spend their time sulking and grumbling. They are the only survivors of the good old times, and accept it as their mission to bewail the degeneracy of the Church. In fact they are only spoiled children sitting in the market-place, much in the way of practical men, and piping their little monotonous tune, wondering that no one listens.

Certainly John and Jesus represented opposite poles of human life, and that man had no ordinary breadth of view who could perceive that far from being antagonistic they were forwarding one great movement. Frequently men of limited vision fail to see the inner harmony of movements which are superficially diverse. Sometimes they count those the enemies of religion who are indeed its truest friends. And as men could quite plausibly denounce Jesus as undoing the work of John, so does the truest progress often seem mere demolition of what many have found to be for their soul's health. By hastiness of judgment and self-satisfied condemnation of all that does not at once commend itself to our preconceived ideas of how God will accomplish His work, we are found to be resisting God. To make our own tastes and expectations the measure of the religious movements of our time is to secure that we get no good from the activities of other people, but all the harm, the self-righteous vanity and hardness of heart and blindness which must result from opposing the work of God in our own generation. Triflers, playing at religion, may criticize all movements and support none; honest men will take care that their devoted support be given to one form or other of the work of God in their own time. To be mere spectators and critics is to play the poorest part in life; surely some good cause is worthy of all our effort.

"Wisdom," says our Lord, "is justified of all her children." They may be as unexpectedly various as the children of one family often are; but the good mother does not need to be ashamed of any, and sometimes she understands each and all better than they understand one another. What we have to do is to prove our parentage by a wise and generous life—not thinking we can do no good because we cannot do the good some other is doing, not striving to be two men, but content with the faculty and sphere allotted us. We need men of the type of John and also men of the type of Jesus. We need men like John, trained to endure hardness, independent of all that society can offer, living a free life according to conscience, tied by no social or professional bonds, neither prophets nor the sons of prophets, owning no allegiance to tradition or conventions of any kind, men resolute to see iniquities suppressed and righteousness everywhere reigning.

Even more do we need men of the type of Jesus, for though among those that are born of women there is not a greater than John, the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. For Jesus knows and uses a power John never knew, the power of God's Fatherly love. The dullest medical student of to-day, with his anæsthetics and his aseptic surgery, is in a sense greater than Galen or Hippocrates: the apprentice engineer can accomplish more than Archimedes or James Watt; he lives in a richer world, and has tools and methods undreamt of in earlier days. So the advance made

by Christ is measureless. From John to Jesus is from law to grace, from slavery to sonship. And we need men who understand the new world made by Christ, men whose indignation at every form of evil burns with an even fiercer flame than John's, but who recognize that no kingdom of God can be founded on earth until men are convinced that God is their Father. To let wickedness prevail in our land and strike no blow for its defeat is mere pusillanimity; but there is a better thing even than destroying wickedness, and that is, planting the root of goodness deep in the acceptance of God as our Father, as that One to whom we are most akin, and whom we cannot honour without honouring ourselves, nor serve without forwarding our own cause.

IX. The Three Candidates For Discipleship

"And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."—*Luke* ix. 57-62.

1. The circumstance which evoked this scribe's sudden exclamation was simple enough. Jesus, wearied with a forenoon of attendance on the sick, and an afternoon of loud speaking from a boat to the crowd on the shore in an atmosphere sultry, close and thundery, portending the storm that quickly followed, proposed to cross over to the wild, eastern side of the lake, and so for a time get quiet from the pressure of the busy, thickly-peopled western shore. The scribe had evidently been greatly impressed by the parables regarding the kingdom which our Lord had been uttering, and which are recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Himself a man of education, he saw, perhaps more clearly than the multitude, the extraordinary literary grace and point of these parables, and probably, also, he was influenced by a desire to have a secure place in the kingdom spoken of, which he expected our Lord would immediately establish in Jerusalem. Seeing our Lord about to leave, he proposes to attach himself to Him.

It is always painful to throw cold water on the ardent, and it is not always wise. Especially painful must it have been to Jesus to discourage one who seemed so ardently attached to Himself. Thirsting as He was for human love and recognition, so often met by suspicion, questioning, thankless acceptance of His kindness, He must surely have been touched by this man's unexpected and public acknowledgment. But, above all else, Jesus is true and faithful to every soul He deals with. He saw that this enthusiast was misapprehending what the following of the Christ inevitably led to. So He meets his proposal with the sedative, if not chilling, rejoinder: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

Whether this ominous utterance quenched the zeal of the scribe or not, we do not know. If he persisted in following, then during the next two hours, when the heavy seas were thundering into the half-decked boat to the dismay of the fishermen, he might wish himself well back among his books in his quiet room at Capernaum, and might steal round by land to his own home as soon as they touched the shore. But it may have been quite otherwise, and this unnamed disciple may have had not only impulse to prompt profession, but courage, steadfastness and devotion to carry through his resolve.

The incident, however, is told not for the sake of any special interest attaching to this scribe, but because our Lord's treatment of him is representative of His treatment of a class of people that is always with us.

The scribe was sincere but hasty. He was the kind of man who leaps before he looks: by no means the worst kind of man, and very decidedly better than the man who neither leaps nor looks. He was a man of impulse. And impulse has a most important function in life.

"Moments there are in life—alas! how few!
When, casting cold prudential doubts aside,
We take a generous impulse for our guide,
And, following promptly what the heart thinks best,
Commit to providence the rest;
Sure that no after reckoning will arise
Of shame and sorrow, for the heart is wise."

One has sometimes to regret acting on impulse; but more frequently, I think, we have to regret that we did not act on impulse.

Certainly, however, there is also a danger in acting so, and the danger, as every one knows, is that we commit ourselves to a kind of conduct we cannot maintain, to positions in life that become thoroughly distasteful to us. It is a frequent mistake: indeed, it is a great part of wisdom to know what we are fit for, to know our own mind, and to anticipate the future we make for ourselves by taking certain steps. The misery and failure which men bring into their own life and the lives of others in great part arise from acting on impulse, without any consideration proportioned to the serious nature of the issues. Young men choose professions so, and great talents are often lost by the idle predilection of a youthful way of looking at things. We swear eternal friendship to persons whom we would without regret ten or twenty years after pass on the street without recognition. Persons who are attracted to a cause by anything which appeals to their merely superficial likings or passing whims are apt to prove most dangerous to it in the long run. They are like bad bolts in a ship: when the strain comes they are no good, but give way at once, and bring disaster on the whole.

Now, a person who is naturally impulsive will be so, of course, in his religious actings as much as elsewhere. He will fail to weigh the issues of becoming a disciple of Christ. He will run into the matter heedlessly. He will not anticipate and make quite present to his mind the kind of life he is committing himself to. He will not look at the matter all round, in every light, from every point of view. And so when the strain comes he gives, he yields like the bad bolt, he proves to be no Christian at all.

Our Lord, therefore, does not wish facile converts, headlong followers. He desires that those who propose to follow Him should see both sides of the matter. It is not that He does not want followers, but that He wants persistent followers. He does not reject this man: He throws him back on a more resolute desire. He bids him exchange his whim for a purpose rooted in conviction. Therefore He says to the scribe, "To follow Me means homelessness, vagrancy, to be hunted down." To the fishermen accustomed to spend nights in an open boat on the treacherous Sea of Galilee this want of shelter might not seem formidable, but it was a serious prospect for the scribe. "Every man has his price," it is said; and it is true in this sense, that for every man there is a test which will bring out the real worth of his attachment to Christ: some condition in life which he so shrinks from that, if he can make up his mind to accept *that* for Christ's sake, nothing else can separate him from Christ.

This is the thought which makes the way to Christ the narrow way. This is the wicket which admits only those who are profoundly sincere in their attachment to Christ. The following of Christ means in all countries and times, the sharing of His Spirit and experience. The followers must possess something of the Leader's disregard of outward comforts in comparison with spiritual growth, the same magnanimous superiority to everything, however delightful, which hinders God's service. If we mean anything rational in saying, "We will follow Him," we mean that we hope and intend to be of one mind with Him; to have the same comparative estimate of spiritual and fleshly pleasures, of this world's gains and of things eternal. In proposing to follow Christ we propose to share the experience of one who despises comforts and ease, who has a great work in hand for which He sacrifices everything: in a word, we propose to share the fortunes of one whose treasure is in heaven.

Many make the scribe's mistake and think more of the claims they may make on Christ than of the claims He is sure to make on them. They forget that all friendship involves sacrifice of self, and that only that love is worth anything that finds the keenest pleasure in such sacrifice. There is no genuine friend of Christ who cannot show in detail how his attachment to his Lord has led him to an experience similar to his Leader's. They can point to passages at least in their life, if not to some long-continued thread running all through it, in which their deliberate cleaving to Christ's will has brought them into painful circumstances.

2. Strangely enough, while one member of the crowd was deterred, another was urgently pressed to follow. The Lord has a fresh method for each individual. One He retards, another He quickens. There is no mechanical or uniform or formal appeal; no urging the same action on every one. Entrance to Christ's kingdom is obtained not by a password known only to the initiated, but by the knock of the ignorant suppliant. The wall of His kingdom is all doors. From opposite quarters, with diverse pleas, needing distinct individual treatment, come the applicants, and are dealt with as differently and discriminatingly as the patients who are ushered one by one into the presence of the physician. While our Lord restrains and moderates the ardour of the scribe, He claims as His follower one who had been merely viewing the scene as a spectator. But whether by previous acquaintance or present discernment, Jesus sees in him the stuff of which disciples are made, and utters the determining word, "Follow Me." Think of the joy of being thus singled out by Christ, and summoned by Him into eternal connection with Him. But has not His call come to you? *Ought* you not to recognize that *you* are thus summoned into that connection which is fruitful of every blessing the soul can crave? Can you say that He has not given you reason to know that He desires your friendship and service?

The man thus abruptly summoned to take a step so decisive of all that is to be, knowing enough to see what a chance is opened to him, and yet scarcely prepared to break with his past, excuses himself—excuses himself on the ground that he must stay with his father till the last filial duty is discharged. Any excuse was good enough. He does not refuse the call, he cannot finally exclude himself from the fellowship of Jesus—he is too wise to do that, but he defers the great decision, and pleads that he may do something else *first*: type of those who virtually say, "Let me *first* do all I want to do, and then when nothing else calls me I will follow Christ." Always there is something else that must *first* be done, and the time for following Christ is still future when the one thing now to be done is to die. So Augustine confesses that he prayed, "Give me chastity and continence, *only not yet*," till at last, appalled at his own weakness, as the procrastinating man may well be, he cast himself in anguish on the

ground and cried, “How long, how long is it—to-morrow, and to-morrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?”

The man also represents that large class of people who feel themselves good enough for business or family life, but not good enough for Christ’s service and kingdom. When they hear Christ’s call, they wish to yield to it, but they feel as if their place were rather in the ordinary ways and observances of life. They have Christian conviction, attachment to Christ, good impulses, but either from native shyness and modesty and fear of failure, or from a misconception of duty, they will not appear as declared followers of Christ and promoters of His kingdom, and prefer to abide in the domestic and social duties of their station.

What our Lord has to say, then, to such persons is, “Let the dead bury their dead. Let those who have no spiritual life attend to those duties that need none. Leave the common duties of life, as much as possible, to those who have no fitness as yet for the higher duties; but go thou, My follower, and preach the kingdom. You are urgently needed for this work; other things will be done whether you do them or not.” The surgeon, short-handed on the field of battle, and with men bleeding their life away lying thick around him, will not suffer his assistants to spend their time carrying the dead to the rear while every skilled brain and hand is needed to save life. So our Lord lays His hand on this departing disciple, and claims him for higher work than anointing the dead and weeping over hopeless clay.

It was this thought which so powerfully possessed Gladstone at one period of his life. “My mind involuntarily reverts,” he says, “to the sad and solemn conviction that a fearfully great portion of the world around me is dying in sin . . . and entertaining [this conviction] as I do, how can I bear to think of my own seeking to wanton in the pleasure of life—or to give up my heart to its business, while my fellow creatures, to whom I am bound by every tie of human sympathies, of a common sinfulness and a common redemption, day after day are sinking into death?”

Does our Lord, then, mean that we are all to abandon the common duties and business of life and to become preachers? No. He trusts us to use a little imagination and a grain of common-sense in interpreting His words. Necessarily the majority of Christian men will always be found engaged in the ordinary business of life; but the business man is called to the supremely hard task of compelling every transaction to fashion itself after the laws of the kingdom. Nothing more needs cleansing than the ordinary business of life, and it is while closely engaged with other men in it that the difference will appear between the man who is living for the kingdom of God and the man who is living for himself. Preaching by word of mouth is hard enough, but it is a hundredfold easier than preaching by unworldliness, unselfishness, nobility of character and conduct—and may we not say it is also a hundredfold less effective?

Our Lord, then, would not have uttered these words to every one; but the principle underlying them is applicable universally. It is His law of economy. In His kingdom every man must be in his right place, and his gifts must be utilized to the utmost. There must be no “village Hampdens,” no “*mute* inglorious Miltons.” The born statesman must not be left to follow the plough, nor the genius that can plan campaigns be lost, undiscovered, in the ranks.

Such an economy every man, as he grows into life, finds he must employ on his own account. He is pressed to occupy positions or to engage in work which he knows will prevent him from achieving the purpose for which nature has fitted him. He is offered promotion which seems attractive and has its advantages, but he declines it,

because it would divert him from his chosen aim. Continually men spoil their life by want of concentration. They are greatly tempted to do so, for the public foolishly concludes that because a man does one thing well, he can do everything well; and he who has written a good history is straightway asked to sit in parliament, or the man whose scholarship and piety have been conspicuous is offered preferment which calls for the exercise of wholly different qualities.

What our Lord says, then, is this: "If you are My follower, this consideration must always be in your calculations: how you can effect most in My kingdom, of which you form a part." Consider well how you can be of most use. This that you are asked to do, will it not be quite as well done though you give yourself to other work? In your case you have not only to ask, "Must somebody do this thing?" you have also to ask, "Can my strength not be better spent in doing something else?" It is not a sufficient reason for your engaging in some enterprise or work, that some one must do it. There are many things which need to be done in the world, but on the doing of which there is no need to spend a Christian.

This principle is extremely difficult to apply, because in one way or other we so soon become entangled in the net of society, and are enslaved to the world. Young men are comparatively free, and, like this young man to whom the Lord spoke, they are standing at a critical point in life, where they may make the right or the wrong choice. A young man may be conscious of natural advantages which fit him to compete successfully for what are considered the prizes of life. He is, however, bound, before committing himself to an exhausting business or laborious career such as the world offers, to consider whether he cannot in some other, though less pleasant and more obscure walk, serve Christ's kingdom better. It is not attractive to look forward to the unrecognized life of a mediocre preacher or only moderately successful worker in Christ's kingdom, but a life that proceeds on an unselfish motive is sure to come to greater happiness than that which is governed by selfishness. And what Christ said to this young man He says to all: "Throw in your lot with what is alive in the world and advancing; do not spend yourself on what will shortly be buried out of sight. You are living men, put your life into what will go on and endure."

3. On the third candidate for discipleship there is not time to dwell. The essence of what our Lord says to him is: "You must carry your discipleship through to all its issues and consequences, and this you can only do by giving your heart and mind to it." To serve Christ with the fag-ends of life, to be devoted when in the mood, to give Him a third or fourth place in our thoughts, or even a second place, will not do. We all compromise, but compromise is fatal. All life must run on one line, and all interests must be subordinated to Christ's service, included in it, coloured by it. The figure He uses brings this out. The plough demands undivided attention—foot, hand and eye always on the strain. You cannot even walk straight for a few yards if you turn your head to look behind you, still less can you draw a straight furrow. Success in any work demands that we give ourselves wholly and heartily to it. The late Master of Balliol, who launched so many men upon successful careers, when asked what it was that secured success, promptly replied, "Complete devotion to the end we have in view. Pleasures and feelings and society must all be made to give way to it."

Our fitness, then, for Christ's kingdom is thus tested. And in the end what will all else avail if we have not helped the work for which He lived and died? Are we so captivated by the work He gives us to do that we never dream of looking back? Has His idea of life and its uses such a charm for us, and does it so appeal to us, that we

are compelled to turn our back on all competing ideals? Do we in point of fact give ourselves unreservedly and uncompromisingly to His way of life, not sorry to leave for ever behind us the pomps and vanities, the indulgences and shallow pleasures, the sinful excitements and wicked gratifications which so often form the substance—if it can be called substance—of human life? In other words, have we attained to know Christ? For, to know Him, to see Him as He really is, is to see that in Him we have that "pearl of price" for which a man gladly sells all that he has, that Leader, in following whom we abandon nothing of real value, and enter always more fully into real life and all its blessed issues.

If, then, we would be Christ's followers, we must be prepared to make His experience ours, His work our work, His person our chief joy. In other words, we must be prepared to be unworldly, consecrated, devoted. He held cheap the common prizes and gains of this world, and was scarcely conscious of hardship in pursuing spiritual aims. We must allow Him to raise us to the same spirit.

Shall we, then, be content to observe how He deals with others, and hold ourselves aloof from Him and His kingdom? There is no question that we are as fully understood, and have the same opportunity open to us, as these three men; how unspeakably well for us, now and ever, if we are able heartily to close with His terms, understanding the happiness of making His experience and work and person ours. What a destiny of elevation, purity and gladness is before those who can so choose. How changed is the world when you add Christ to it! how overwhelmingly blessed is human life when you can hope for the things He surely promises! Well may every intelligence rejoice over any one who awakes and becomes aware of what Christ makes possible to him, and at once turns from all lower and lesser things, and seeks his joy where Christ sought His. Who would not rejoice over him of whom with assurance we can say, "Whatever befalls that man, he will play his part in this world well, and will at length enter into the joy of his Lord"?

Would that we were all like Matthew, who has been called "the pattern of obedience to divine vocations, the model of prompt submission to holy inspirations," and of whom it has been said that he—

"Left all for God
Self and the world and wealth
At God's one word
Without question, without reserve
Without delay
To be for ever in the Church
The Doctor, the prophet, and the patron
The comfort and the justification
Of those who follow heavenly calls in the world's despite,
And who give themselves in love
As He gave Himself, without limit or condition
As creatures to their Creator."

X. In Remembrance Of Me (Before Communion)

"This do in remembrance of Me."—*Luke* xxii. 19.

These words contain the sole direction our Lord gave regarding the great rite of His religion. The elaborate rituals and theories which have grown around the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper find no countenance here. The simple distribution and partaking of bread and wine formed the entire rite; and its sole object, according to our Lord, was to keep Him in remembrance.

The confidence and the simplicity and humanity of His action surprise us. In all the actions of Christ there is a marvellous simplicity which men do not seem even yet to have apprehended and understood. As little do we seem to have entered into the tender humanity of His most important actions. The more we consider His life, the more does everything official become transformed into what is human. He dies because appointed Priest and Sacrifice: yes, but rather because He is the most loving among men. He is God's representative on earth, because in a special sense God's Son: yes, but also because He is the most human of men, the Man who best understands God, and therefore best understands men and human life.

Nothing could be simpler, nothing more human than His appointment of this sacrament. Lifting the material of the supper before Him He bids His disciples make the simple act of eating and drinking His memorial. "You will not forget Me," He says, "and this will recall Me to your mind." As the friend who is setting out on a long absence or is passing for ever from earth puts into our hands his portrait or something he has used or worn or prized, and is pleased to think that we shall treasure it for his sake, so did Christ on the eve of His death secure this one thing, that His disciples should have a memento by which to remember Him. And as the dying gift of a friend becomes sacred to us even as his own person, and we cannot bear to see it handed about and remarked upon by those who have not the same loving reverence as ourselves; and as when we gaze at his portrait and recall the many happy times we spent together, and the bright and inspiring words which fell from those lips, or wind up the watch he wound for so many years, or handle the pencil-case worn smooth by his fingers, we seem to be brought again into his presence; so does this sacrament seem sacred to us as Christ's own person, and by it grateful memories of all He was and did throng into the mind.

The law of the Passover had run, "This day shall be unto you for a memorial"; and our Lord simply puts Himself or His death in the place of the Passover and bids His followers remember Him. The confidence with which He does so is nothing short of majestic, divine. In the popular mind He is a failure. His enemies consider that they have defeated Him and extinguished His pretensions and His hopes. His best friends are nervous and trembling with forebodings. In His own mind alone is there a clear perception of the actual state of matters; in Him alone is there neither misgiving nor hesitation. Far from hiding from His followers the ignominious end that awaits Him, He speaks of it freely. He knows they will in a few hours be scattered; He tells them so, and yet so far from apologizing for leading them into difficult and discreditable circumstances, so far from bidding them forgive and forget Him, He actually bids

them set aside the event which was most memorable to them as Jews and remember Him instead. His death is to be more to them than their emancipation from slavery in Egypt. By their connection with Him they were to have so complete and all-sufficing a life that they, prouder of their nationality than any other people, might forget they were Jews. The Passover had done its work and served its purpose, and now it was to give place and make way for the celebration of the real deliverance of the race. Picture Him standing there on the eve of His death, knowing that His influence on the world in all time to come depended on His being remembered by these half-enlightened, incompetent, timorous men, and you see that nothing short of a divine confidence could enable Him to put aside the very core and symbol of the Jewish religion and present Himself as the hope of the world.

Christ, then, desires to be remembered, first, no doubt, in gratitude for what He has done for us. Certainly it is with gratitude we do remember Him. This sacramental ordinance is justly known as the "Eucharist" or Thanksgiving. In it we gladly and gratefully acknowledge that Christ is to us the source of happy and hopeful existence. If we believe what the Communion assures us of, that Christ has devoted Himself to our service and actually gives Himself over to us in love, we cannot but be thankful. In Him God associates you with whatever is best and highest in existence, claims you for Himself, makes life real and intelligible and full of purpose, pledges to you His unchangeable and most energetic love, promises to undo all the evil that is in you, gives you all that can accomplish this promise, and opens to you an eternity fitted for your ever growing powers and purified desires. Without Christ we have neither communion with God now nor hope for our future. It is He who makes the difference to us. Accept Him and boldly take and use all He gives—make life as rich and intense as He enables you to make it, and you will be grateful.

As we remember Christ, then, let us be thankful. Let us believe we have those great things He gives—the pardon of our sin, strength to live a helpful life, hope of all good beyond; and let us think gratefully of Him who has thus filled and glorified our life for us. No Christian life can be healthy in which thankfulness is not a constant disposition. It gives a tone to the whole character. The thankful man is a happy man, and happiness is strength. Spiritual vigour, the vigour which implies a superfluity of strength to help those who need it, has always a background of joy and thankfulness. A thankful spirit is the regular accompaniment of that true humility which makes a man most acceptable and most useful to his fellow men, and it is the outcome of our recognition of what God has done for us in Christ. You have lost much in life, enough to sadden you all your days—yes, that is true, but think of what you have in Christ.

But doubtless, secondly, it is chiefly for *our* good that our Lord bids us remember Him. How glad would a father be did he know that his example lived with his sons and strengthened them in the hour of temptation; that his image was ever present to them and created for them in every place a bracing and purifying atmosphere! How satisfied would he be did he know that they felt proud of his name and honoured to carry out his work and his will! But his joy would be more for his sons' sake than for his own. He lives in them, and to see them living in honour and godliness is his happiness. With what pleasure and profit do we all look back to some of the friends who were too soon taken from us! How do we thank God upon every remembrance of them! How different a thing they made this life to us; how largely it has become coloured by them, identified with them! What happy hours we spent with them, what inspiration we have derived from remembering them, from closely recognizing the beauty of their character!

Christ desires us to have such thoughts of Him, because He knows that in so far as we remember Him we shall have confidence in God, a true humility and contrition, an inspiring hope, an infallible example and a never-failing motive. We are to remember Him as one whose love for us is the grandest expression of feeling that has ever been; whose love for us connects us with what is highest and holiest and most enduring. We are to let our memories go back to what He was and did, till memory supplies the lack of sight and we own the presence of overpowering love. We are to let our mind be filled, as the minds of other men have been filled, with this great and saving Figure; for ourselves to understand its excellence, for ourselves to receive and be drawn by its love. In it there is regeneration for us all. The proudest spirit, the coldest heart, the most callous conscience must either turn from this remembrance or must melt.

Christ is to be remembered, thirdly, because in Him is the hope of the world. Through Christ the world is to be brought back to God. By keeping Him in remembrance and by allowing His spirit to rule—thus only can men rise to what is eternal and give themselves an abiding place in God. Christ has opened for us a way to the Father by giving Himself for us, and we remember His death because through it we hope and desire to be restored to the Father. But what do all these phrases and expressions with which we are so familiar mean?

Let us mark the significance of the particular manner in which Christ desired to be remembered. "*Do this* in remembrance of Me."

First of all it was a kindness to these disciples to give them something to *do*—a simple act which every one could do. Bewildered by many conflicting thoughts and entangled among half-recovered reminiscences of what the Lord had said, they must have found it a very welcome relief to engage in this simplest of rites. We cannot too much insist on the simplicity of the religion of Christ, and can scarcely err in the direction of divesting it of mystery and ceremonial. Our Lord does not frame a creed for His followers which they are to repeat, a ritual which they are carefully to observe and to alter at their peril; He does not require from them subtle thoughts and rare experiences. His religion is meant for all men, for the slow and narrow mind, for the hurried and overwrought, for the ignorant and for the savage. Its method of salvation is therefore so simple that any mind can understand it, its forms can be observed by every one who can eat.

Again, the form of this memorial is fitted to recall the actual life and death of the Lord. It is His body and blood that the symbols of bread and wine invite us to remember. By them we are brought, as it were, into the presence of an actual living person. Our religion is not a theory; it is not a speculation, a system of philosophy putting us in possession of a true scheme of the universe and guiding us to a sound code of morals: it is a personal matter. We are saved by being brought into right personal relations. And in this sacrament we are reminded of this, and are helped to recognize Christ as an actual living Person, who by His body and blood, by His actual humanity, saves us. This body and blood of Christ remind us that His humanity was as substantial as our own, and His life as real. He redeemed us by the actual human life He led and by the death He died, by His use of the body and soul we make other uses of.

It is, then, with a Person we have here to do, with One who, having lived on earth as a man, understands human life and its needs. Your spiritual life will be healthy in proportion as you thus remember Christ. You will be influential for the best purposes

of human life in so far as you are in true communication with this Person. Christ bids us remember Him, not with a tribute of admiration such as we pay to the great names of history, not with a mere feeling of affectionate regard such as we sometimes cherish towards characters we read of but can never know. He desires to be remembered as one who lived and died for us, claiming to be connected with us and desiring that we own the connection. And experimentally a man finds he cannot feed his spirit on doctrines, on thoughts about religion, on devout aspirations and righteous resolves, but only on personal fellowship with Christ. It is when we recognize Him as a Person with purposes to fulfil, and yield ourselves to Him with the intention of fulfilling these purposes, that we gain spiritual strength. Until you come into this personal relation with Christ, truly submitting your will and your life to Him, your religion is not the religion of Christ.

And further, the mode of remembrance appointed by our Lord reminds us that it is the same kind of personal connection with Him we are invited to as the first disciples enjoyed. We who gather here to-day have the same symbol of our connection with Him as they had. We are no more remote from His love, no more out of reach of His influence. All that He was to them He can be to us, and means to be to us. Our outward circumstances are very different from theirs, but the inward significance of Christ's work and His power to save remain what they were.

But especially, when Christ said "Do this," He meant that His people to all time should remember that He had given His all, Himself, for them. The symbols of His body and blood were intended to keep us in mind that all that gave Him a place among men He devoted to us. And we on our part are invited to respond to His perfect love by accepting it frankly and humbly and by finding our life in it. By giving His flesh and blood He means that He gives us His all, Himself wholly; and by summoning us to accept His flesh and blood He means that we must receive Him into the most real connection possible, must admit His self-sacrificing love into our heart as our own personal possession. For we come to Christ and enter His Church and body not as we join a political association or a society founded for achieving some particular object, or a club where we can meet certain people and enjoy their conversation. To use such a form of admission to any such society would be out of the question. It is because Christ is wholly ours and we wholly His that He bids us remember Him thus.

Again, He bids us "Do this," to remind us that we must daily renew our connection with Him. He desires to be remembered under the symbol of food, of that which we must continually take by our own appetite, choice, and acceptance. We do not gather at the Lord's Table to look at a crown, the symbol of a king who governs by delegates and laws and a crowd of officials, and with whom we have no direct connection. We do not assemble to view the portrait of a father, who gave us life, but of whom we are now independent. We do not come to garland a tomb which contains the mortal part of one who was dear to us and who once saved our life. But we come to renew our connection with One who seeks to enter into the closest relations with us, to win our love, to purify our nature, to influence our will. It is by maintaining this connection with Him that we maintain spiritual life; by taking Him as truly into our spirit by our affections, by our choice, and by our faith as we take bread into our body.

Lastly, He gives us as a remembrance of Him that which inevitably recalls Him as He died. It is His body broken, His blood poured out that He sets before us. He does not give us a picture of Himself as He is now and as John saw Him in vision. He does not appeal to our imagination by setting before us symbols of unearthly majesty. He

desires to be remembered as He was upon earth and in the hour of His deepest humiliation. And it is obvious why He does so. It is because in His death His nearness to us and His actual involvement in our life and in all our matters is most distinctly seen. It is because that is His most characteristic action: the action in which He uttered most of Himself, all that was deepest in Him and all that it most concerned men to know. And as we prize that portrait of a friend which brings out the best points in his character, even though it is old and he has changed much since it was taken, so do all the friends and followers of Christ think of Him as He was in His death. They believe He is alive now, and that now He is clothed with such manifest dignity and beauty as must attract boundless regard and admiration; but yet it is to the humble, self-sacrificing, bleeding Christ their thoughts persistently turn. It is there they find most to humble, most to encourage, most to win, most to purify, most to bind them to their Lord.

Let us then do this in remembrance of Christ. Suffer these memorial symbols to carry your thoughts with reverent simplicity to what Christ was and did for you in His death. You are not asked to renew resolutions that have hitherto been followed only by failure and shame; you are not asked to anticipate the renewal of a conflict which has commonly gone against you, the return to a life which as yet has but revealed the weakness and earthliness of your nature; you are asked to turn from all thought of yourself and remember Christ. It is not to exercise your mind with hard thoughts you come to the Lord's Table; it is not to be initiated into mysteries too high and subtle for the common herd; it is not to be tantalized by the offer of a salvation that depends on accurate notions and the knowledge of profound principles that plain men cannot understand. You come to listen to that which has a voice for all men, for every human heart, and which is as intelligible as a mother's caress. There is no soul so dull as not to know the value of love or as not to see it here. When all else fails to impress us, when life ceases either to inspire us with hope or fear, when our heart is shut to warning, to hope, to remonstrance, to reasoning, the remembrance of Christ bleeding, suffering, agonizing, dying for us finds the heart and makes us human again. If you have strength for nothing else, you can fall at the foot of the cross; if your faith is limited and feeble, you can yet believe in the death of Christ, in the love that prompted it, in the redemption it aimed at. Empty your mind of other thoughts that it may be filled with the remembrance of Christ. Make room in your heart for His dying love, and let that love possess your spirit. Do not seek in the first place to pray for pardon, or to secure peace with God, or to be delivered from sorrow, or to seek great things for yourself; but seek to remember Christ, to let your mind settle upon His pure compassion, His untold anguish, and in your heart to say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

XI. The Christian: What, Why, How?

"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."—*Acts* xi. 26.

The name "Christian" was coined to denote a new class of people who had sprung up in society. Men of similar political opinions, or holding the same philosophical tenets, or attaching themselves to the same scientific school, associate and become a recognizable class in the community, and are designated by a distinctive name. And in these first Christians there was that which their fellow-townsmen recognized as distinguishing them from others, and as forming them into a visible party. They gave them therefore a distinguishing name—calling them Christians, apparently, because the feature they all had in common, and in distinction from other men, was their acknowledgment of Christ as their Lord.

From this fact I wish to start now in pursuit of an answer to these three questions: 1. What is a Christian? 2. Why should a man become a Christian? 3. How can any one become a Christian?

1. What is a Christian? There is a loose sense of the name Christian with which we have here nothing to do. In various parts of the world different religions prevail, and just as a man who is born of Russian parents is a Russian, so the child of Buddhist parents grows up a Buddhist, and the child of Christian parents grows up a Christian—that is to say, he grows up with the knowledge of certain facts about Christ, and in the observance of certain usages and forms of worship. There can be very little interest in inquiring and very little advantage in ascertaining what such a Christian is. In the widest sense of the word, a Christian is a man who professes Christianity, but our Lord Himself assures us that to very many of these He Himself will one day say, "I know you not." The question we wish to answer is not the very easily answered question, How is a Christian outwardly distinguished from a Mohammedan or a pagan? but, What is it that constitutes a man such a Christian as Christ Himself will acknowledge? Who is the real Christian?

Yet, on the other hand, we must be careful so to define a Christian as not to confound the ideally perfect Christian and the true but imperfect Christian. In defining who is a "living man" you must content yourself with a definition which shall not exclude a man who is lying at the point of death. He may be unable to discharge the functions of healthy life, but he is a living man, and your definition must include him. So in defining the Christian we must adopt a definition which comprehends the man who has the minimum of Christian life. We must not adopt a definition which applies only to the perfect Christian, and excludes the beginner, the Christian who is genuine but imperfect—this would be so to define "human being" as to exclude children.

What is it, then, which all true Christians, whether perfect or imperfect, have in common, and which no one else has? It is not the observance of certain rites, the maintenance of certain customs, such as attendance on Church, resting on the Lord's day, or the habit of family prayer; because many who are not genuine Christians fulfil this condition. Both those who are and those who are not true Christians read the Bible and hear the gospel preached and pray in their families: it is, therefore, none of these things which distinguish between the man who is a Christian and the man who is not.

Neither is it the knowledge and belief of certain doctrines or facts. No one would be bold enough to say that the fact of a man's having written a good system of theology is sufficient proof that he himself is a Christian. A geographer may draw admirable maps of places he has never visited, and it would be as absurd to conclude that a knowledge of Christian truth constitutes a man a Christian, as it would be to conclude that a man must be a great traveller if he has drawn an accurate map of the world. As James says, the devils believe there is a God, and for aught we know may believe every article of the Christian creed. To have the clearest knowledge of the route to Rome does not carry you there; and the clearest knowledge of the way of salvation is by no means equivalent to being saved. You may be able to explain to your own perfect satisfaction how Christ atoned for sin, and yet you may yourself be unforgiven. You may understand with perfect clearness the fitness of the means of grace for sanctification, and take pleasure in perceiving how powerful and complete the motives to righteousness are which flow from the cross of Christ, and yet you may yourself be untouched by these motives, and your own graceless condition may prove that knowledge of the means is one thing, attainment of the end another. Knowledge, then, or belief of certain facts and truths is not the distinguishing feature of the true Christian.

It cannot even be said that the distinctive mark of the Christian is to be found in his conduct. No doubt our Lord more than once defines the true Christian as the man "who doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." But when society has for many generations been formed upon the Christian model, not only those who are Christians, but all respectable persons, conduct themselves in a certain fashion; and you cannot easily argue from the conduct to the character, unless you have under review a large section of the life of the individual. The individual may only be a reflex of society, and may have in himself nothing which secures that he will in *all* circumstances act righteously, nothing which guarantees that he himself is a good man. Now, whatever else a Christian is, he must certainly be a good man, a man who not merely adopts purity and truth and kindness as habits which bring him into better relations with society, but who is himself a lover of these things and of all that is good. He must be a man whose nature it is to do good; who does good not by constraint, not through fear of consequences, or from any other consideration, but because he likes it. He must do good as a tree brings forth its own proper fruit, and can produce no other—because it is its nature so to do. One must, therefore, in seeking for the mark of the true Christian, go deeper than the conduct. Besides, a Christian may have been born with a very violent temper, or an unusually slothful disposition, or with some strong vicious propensity; and it would be uncharitable to affirm of such a man that he is no Christian, because from time to time he succumbs to the violent assault of these obstinate passions.

It is, in short, difficult to find any mark which definitely distinguishes the Christian from all others save this, that the Christian is the man who has received the Spirit of Christ. "If any man," says Paul, "have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Every man who has Christ's Spirit is His, is a Christian. All the knowledge that a man needs to make him a Christian is only the knowledge that Christ can and will bestow the Holy Spirit; for the one article of the Christian creed is faith in a now living and supreme Christ. All the action that is required to make a man a Christian is that action which consists in truly depending upon Christ for the Holy Spirit. And all the conduct and that peculiar character which are the proper manifestation of a Christian life do regularly and always result from the acceptance of the Holy Spirit. It is this which distinguishes the Christian from every other kind of man, that he looks

to Christ and waits upon Him for this greatest of all gifts, the gift of a divine power that can be applied to human nature, and that brings to human nature a life-sustaining, enlightening and sanctifying energy. It is as the Dispenser of the Spirit that Christ becomes the hope of the sinner. The apostles were not allowed to go and preach Christ until they had the demonstration of the Spirit—until they received that great evidence of Christ's resurrection and power to save which was given in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. It is by giving men this Spirit that Christ saves them from their sins, and it is in the hope of this salvation that men attach themselves to Him and become Christians.

Let us test this definition. Christians, we commonly believe, are those who are to inherit eternal life, who are to be saved. But what is to determine who shall enter life everlasting and who shall not? It must be something in the man's self which claims kindred with eternal life; which is capable of eternal life, and to which eternal life is appropriate. If there are two men of precisely the same character and habits, so alike that if you analyzed their moral and spiritual life you would find precisely the same contents, you would not feel justified in opening the gate of life to the one and closing it on the other, on the ground that the one had professed Christianity while the other had not, or on the ground that the one held certain doctrines of which the other knew nothing or which he did not believe. All teaching of doctrines and facts is in order to change the character, and mere knowledge, which does not appear in a changed character, goes for nothing.

Christ is given to us only for the sake of making us better men, and if we are not better men, nor have that in us which will of its own nature infallibly make us better men, it matters nothing that we have paid homage to Christ, calling Him "Lord, Lord." It is not on account of homage done to Him that He admits men to His company in heaven, but on account of their similarity in character to Himself. Christ indicates by His character and work what the glory of man is to be in the future; he who is not conformed to that character excludes himself from all share in the progress and history of the race.

2. Why should I become a Christian? Let us look only at one or two reasons.

The first reason is found in the definition of the Christian already given. Every man should become a Christian, because in Christ there is found a power greater than that of sin. Christ is with the Father, and dispenses to men the Divine Spirit. That He does so is a fact ascertainable. Whatever virtue, whatever triumph over temptation, whatever self-sacrifice, or nobility of action, or holiness of life, has been found in the Christian Church, have all been referred to the Spirit of Christ as their source. And this still goes on. In our own day, men similarly circumstanced, and of like passions with ourselves, are directed to seek the Spirit's help against overmastering sin; they seek it, and are delivered. Such a help the facts of your own experience prove that you need. You have often fallen, because you had not strength to resist. You have often cherished feelings you are ashamed of, because you had not native purity of heart. Not only do you need help, but you need help such as none but an Almighty, Holy Spirit can give you. Your helplessness is recognized by God, and He affectionately invites you to receive help. If you will not receive it, what have you to expect? Have you some exceptional, private succour which shall enable you to attain where all other men have failed? When God offers you His Spirit, do you say, you do not need Him, and can perfect yourself, and by your own efforts reach all that is desirable or attainable by man?

It should always be borne in mind that there is no other way whereby a man can reach maturity of manhood than by becoming a Christian. About every other kind of man there is something defective. Without Christ, a man may attain a very great deal, but he cannot attain everything. The road he pursues may promise well, and may bring him to much, but it does not reach the summit. There are qualities in you which must remain undeveloped, there is a future of perfected blessedness you can never reach, save in Christ. A plant may manage to live in a cellar, but its life will be very different if you bring it out to the open sky and sunshine. Life out of Christ is life in a cellar: it is only in Him you learn what liberty is, only in Him do you find light, life, and scope. Religion is not an accomplishment, which you may be somewhat the better of but can get along without; it is not a refuge you may be compelled to resort to, as a man may be driven to enter a hospital, but it is an essential of life. You cannot become a normal human being without it. A man who is born deaf, dumb and blind, and with a very imperfect brain, may live in a kind of way, and you may by courtesy call him a man; but you know how much he loses, even though he himself, from his diseased condition, may look upon speech as a mere superfluity, and may have a kind of contentment to be as he is, never having known anything better. So the man who is not a Christian, and has no connection with those things with which Christianity brings men into connection, is a man only in a very imperfect sense, and is by no means like the person he may in Christ become. The great reason why you should become a Christian is simply this, that only thereby can you become a man.

It may, indeed, very reasonably be said, that if this be so, if the Spirit which Christ gives is an essential of true human life, we should have it irrespective of our own choice and act, as we have air and sunshine. It may be said that the very circumstance of its being offered as a gift, over and above what we naturally have, leads us to look upon it as a luxury, and not as an essential. It may be felt that if the loss consequent on our rejection of Christ is so utter and so irreparable, there should be a natural provision securing that we should not incur this loss. But on second thoughts we see that the essentials even of our physical life are not provided irrespective of our own effort. Men will starve if they do not keep constantly working; the bulk of the toil in which all men throughout the world are ceaselessly engaged is undertaken in order to secure the essentials of life. If the mother were to neglect her child, the child would not be kept alive by miracle. And if this is so in physical life, we cannot be surprised to find that our moral life is dependent on our own recognition of facts and on our own choice of spiritual sustenance. Your spiritual maturity, your growth in all that constitutes true manhood, is made dependent on your own choice, and is not reached by the mere passing of time, as the corn ripens—why? Because in its very nature spiritual life must be a growth of your own will; compulsory morality is a contradiction in terms. The help of the Spirit is offered to you, but if you think you are well enough as you are, and will come to as much in your own strength as in His, you can decline the offered help. If you do not wish to be the most you can be; if you are quite content to be always fighting against foul sins you are ashamed of, and never victorious; if you prefer to associate yourself with the hopeless and the bad, with the blindly indifferent and slothful, with the selfish and cruel and licentious and treacherous, rather than with the good and with those who have freely devoted themselves to humanity, and with those who believe in the future—then you have it in your power to commit moral suicide, to make an end of hope for yourself, and condemn yourself to the worse part.

Another reason why a man should become a Christian is the equally simple one that there is a Christ—that to become a Christian, to attach oneself to this transcendently

rich and glorious personality, is a possibility. It is a relief to put aside all speculation as to the future of man, and the conditions under which he now lives; it is a relief to put aside even our own observation of the wants and instincts that our own experience has disclosed, and to turn to the palpable human figure of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that He lived, and as little that He has conferred blessings upon the race such as are unique and beyond all estimation. He stands before us the most veritable figure in history, so substantial that to Him must be traced back the greater part of all that now is. He lived, too, not as one who does good by accident, or who in serving Himself casually serves others, but as one devoted to the interests of men. He went about among men as a power and an authority, and yet not ostentatiously and proudly bidding men yield to a cold and unsympathetic supremacy, but veiling His authority under a tenderness that drew men to submit themselves to Him. He assures you He has blessings to confer that none but He can give you; His truthfulness and knowledge are vouched for in many ways; His grace and good intention no one can mistake. This Person, then, who stands alone for the love He bears to men and the blessings He has brought, is He the Person you are to avoid? He deserves gratitude from you—of that there is no question; how are you showing it? He alone puts a hopeful construction on human life, and invites you to partnership with Him in a reasonable and serviceable cause. What must you think of yourself, if you are untouched by love that has expressed itself in the most substantial forms; if you are not practically attracted by the highest, finest and strongest of characters; if you experience no thrill of genuine satisfaction that at least in that one life human nature appears to advantage; if you can know that such a person as Jesus Christ has lived and not be filled with a burning desire to be connected with Him; if you can know that such a friendship is open to you and yet decline it?

3. Lastly, and briefly, How can a man become a Christian? You may become the disciple of an ancient philosopher by studying his works and by adopting his views. Men become Aristotelians by reading the works of Aristotle and adopting his system. Or you may become a Presbyterian or an Episcopalian by entertaining either one or another opinion regarding Church government. But you cannot become a Christian merely by adopting certain opinions. It is rather a person you have to believe in than his views. It is as when a new royal house is introduced to a country; some uphold it, others hold aloof. So in order to be a Christian, what a man has to do is to give in his allegiance to Christ. Christ says, “Come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

We must go to Him as His first disciples went; not merely seeking something from Him, but seeking to be His—meaning to put ourselves entirely at His disposal, to live entirely as members of His Body, finding our all in Him, delighting that we are permitted to do His will and work His work and none other in this life. We must give ourselves thus in humility to Him as our true Lord. It is not enough that we pray for the help of Christ’s Spirit when we are in difficulties, to give us the victory over degrading sin: we must become Christ’s men, and be prepared to live in partnership with Him. In order to receive His Spirit we must become members of His Body. As little as we ourselves can truly and permanently animate with our spirit anything beyond our body, so little does He possess with His Spirit any who do not find their life and happiness in being members of His Body, that is, in being wholly His. What we have to do is to go to Him—to turn to Him in thought and in heart, and ask Him to receive us. We cannot do more. It lies with Him to receive us. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to Him. Or rather, the only way to make ourselves acceptable to Him is to go to Him as we are.

You may say, How are we to know that we are received? You are in the first place, and above all else, to believe that you are received, because He has given His word that He receives every one who comes. In primitive times men were assured by baptism. When they professed faith in Christ they were forthwith baptized to convey the assurance that the Holy Spirit was given to them. And this undoubtedly must have been very helpful. Yet if a man had not the inward witness of the Spirit, if his conscience was not at ease, if he became aware that he remained as bad a man as before, with no higher longings and purer thoughts, then the outward sign of baptism would not do much to give him confidence. It is, therefore, on the seal, not of baptism, but of the Spirit we are thrown back when we seek for some evidence that Christ has received us, and that we are Christians.

If, then, any one wishes to become a Christian, there is no difficulty in becoming one. There is a difficulty before this point, and there is a difficulty after this point, but in the thing itself there is no difficulty. There is a difficulty before—the difficulty of making up one's mind to be a Christian; and this is serious indeed. It is often said that it is an easy thing to become a Christian: it is easy in the sense in which it is easy to let go when you are hanging by your hands to the edge of a cliff, or in which it is easy for a man in power to sign the death-warrant of a friend. The actual thing to be done is easy, but it involves an internal disturbance, a severance from cherished hopes, a life-changing decision which no intelligent and honest man can find easy.

But this difficulty is already past, when one has reached the point of desiring to be a Christian. There is a difficulty *after* becoming a Christian—the difficulty of continuing to be one: the difficulty of maintaining faith in Him in the midst of failure, and against temptations to worldliness and pleasure. But in the thing itself there is no difficulty. You have but to open your heart to Christ, to tell Him as you would tell a friend, what you are, what you need, what you desire. You have but to ask His Spirit, and His Spirit you will assuredly receive.

The way is open before you. Christ invites you to follow Him. He leads you to purity and dignity of character, to the best possession a man can have, a life well spent. Not to follow Him is to refuse the best when it is put within our reach.

XII. The Gentleness Of God

"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench."—*Matt.* xii. 20.

"Thy gentleness hath made me great."—*Psal.* xviii. 35.

It is a great point gained in our intercourse with any one, when we see with perfect clearness even one salient feature of his character; when we feel sure that there is one quality which we may certainly count upon finding in all his dealings with us. In these verses we receive the assurance that in all our dealings with Christ and the Father we may count upon *gentleness*. Let us endeavour, then, to set more vividly before our minds what this quality is, and what manifestations of it we are likely to experience.

To any one who has ever been in great bodily pain it is needless to explain the value of gentleness. In some diseases a loud voice jars the whole frame; sometimes even the softest footstep or most careful approach of the best-known relative causes the morbidly sensitive patient to shrink with inexplicable pain. Where there is a wound to be dressed, a broken bone to be set, a shattered frame to be lifted it is, above all, gentleness that is needed. Gentleness alone will save the flickering flame of life: roughness is death. And in a thousand everyday mechanical operations, in fishing, painting, chiselling and so on, it is delicacy of touch, pliancy of hand and not force that is needed. Force or roughness or impatience entangle and spoil and destroy, where quiet, patient, gentle persistency would have disentangled and saved. Not only in kindling a fire from a single spark or in landing a salmon or breaking a horse, but in fifty things besides force does positive injury and defeats the end we have in view; success belongs only to the man who knows how to give way, who has persistence to give way again and again, who can yield at the slightest hint and yet hold steadily to his purpose, who can bide his time and does not hurry matters, because he knows his own powers of endurance.

This is a quality which is sometimes mistaken for weakness, or softness, or irresolution. But on the contrary it is the method by which strength and resolution commonly accomplish their ends. In lifting a patient filled with acute rheumatism it is only the strong man who can be sufficiently gentle. The weak arm cannot bear the slow, steady strain; it trembles when half its work is done, and sends a twinge of pain through every joint of the sufferer. And it is the method of resolution as well as of strength. Irresolution can never give gentleness. It changes its purpose, grows impatient, takes summary measures and spoils all. But the resolution that clearly sees the end to be attained, that knows how it can be attained, and is determined to attain it, this resolution can afford to be gentle.

And when we pass from material to spiritual things, when we look away from the methods by which we accomplish our ends in the physical world to the higher region of character, we still find that gentleness is indispensable, and that it is the exhibition of strength, not of weakness. It is indispensable, for there are many states of mind which are amenable only to gentleness. You cannot *scold* a man out of his grief; if you wish a man to love you, you do not use violent language and insist on his loving you; if you wish to bring a man over to your way of thinking, you deal gently with him and

are careful not to offend his prejudices or ride roughshod over his feelings. Instinct tells us that in many cases nothing but gentleness will win.

And here, too, gentleness is the method of the strong.

The figures in which this gentleness of Christ and of God in Him is described are significant, and yield unfailing encouragement. There is no rough and inconsiderate handling of us, no loud fault-finding. He picks His steps and so little forces His way that, as we say, the grass does not bend under Him. The bruised reed is no more bruised by His foot than it was, the smoking flax that barely smoulders is not trodden out and quenched. No heavy-shod and awkward carelessness damages what is liable to be damaged. The man whose faith has almost gone out is not exposed to the blast of strong temptations that may be very helpful to the full-flaming Christian, but his individual temperament and circumstances are considered; he is shielded from temptations greater than he could bear, and his little spark of faith recovers itself. That which lies smouldering in the path, and which might seem to us only an offence in the nostrils—the wretched soul that is always quenching the Spirit in carnal indulgence and that has again and again died down to the lowest flicker of spiritual life,—Christ regards, and will, out of that smouldering, foul-smelling, drossy soul, bring a glory and a radiance that will shine as the stars for ever and ever.

Some have fancied that in the bruised reed there is a reference to the reedy pipes, such as shepherds of a musical turn like David used sometimes to make in the fields. If not a true interpretation, it at least gives much the same meaning as if it were: for thus backsliding or weak Christians are compared to bruised reeds because in this state no pleasant sound can be drawn from them; they are useless; the little rift makes all their music mute: but even so our Lord will not make an end of them by completely breaking and casting them away, but will rather pick them carefully out of the path, and, blowing into them with the breath of His own Spirit, will fill out again their bruised form and make them melodious once more. In whatever sense the words be taken, we have at all events assurance that the might of our Lord is not like the brute force of behemoth crushing through the cane-brake and leaving a track of bruised desolation, not like the power that conquers by sheer physical force or mere authority: but His is the highest *moral* power; He is in possession of, and can use, the deepest moral influences; He exercises a patient discrimination, not compelling all into the same mould and measure nor ruling by mere general law, not forcing His will upon the reluctant nor driving His measures through by compulsion, but winning men to be His willing servants, waiting until we shall do gladly and spontaneously what He might compel us to do by the terrors of His authority. Able to use violence, He prefers to use the slower influences of love, gentleness, persuasion, manifestation of His own nature; and He prefers this method because what He aims at is not victory nor the having His own way because it is His own way, nor the service of persons who have no heart for the work He sets them, but the eternal good of those He loves, their reasonable service, their spontaneous choice of righteousness and God.

This gentleness of God, then, we must acknowledge in our own past and count upon in our future. Entering as it does into all God's ways and doings, it must have substantially modified our life and altered our experience. This method of God's whereby He deals with us as reasonable creatures, who need not be driven because we can be led, and who need not be commanded and forced because we can be reasoned with and inwardly converted, this method of unobserved kindling and careful nursing of the little spark of good in the soul, what has it done in our own

life? Do you not in looking back upon your past career see that God Himself is the great Fisher of Men; and does it not cause your whole being to thrill with joy that you also have been apprehended, and that through all these variations of past experience the skilled hand has but been playing you, never wearied, never deceived, never too quick and never too tardy, but ever drawing you nearer to Himself, gently checking you in your wild rushes back to your old haunts and freedom, gently guiding you back once and again until weary of all resistance you come more and more rapidly to yield yourself as wholly and for ever His own? Often have you gone back and resisted drawings to a purer, higher life; often have you swerved and gone aside, hiding yourself from God in outbreaks of your own evil nature; often have you sunk deep among the slime of sensuality or have lain beneath the cold stone of doubt, and all connection between yourself and God would seem to have ceased: but the watchful, undeceivable Eye was upon you, and soon you felt the gentle pressure of some thought of better things, some relenting and growing feeling that you cannot give God up, some loathing of the place you are in, some gleam of sunshine from above penetrating your sullen retreat; and again you are slowly drawn back, your face to God once more, and are scarcely or not at all aware of the undiscernible influence that so persistently wins you. In childhood, before you could rightly know God or weigh the issues of that knowledge, He had begun His work upon you. Those wondering thoughts at His presence which haunted your mind, those first conscious transgressions and the questionings of conscience and bitterness and shame that followed—these were the beginnings of His efforts to secure you to Himself. In after years has not His quiet, unobtrusive persuasive method been ever at work? What are the marked passages in your past? Where does your memory linger? What has made thought most busy? What has formed your ideas of God's providence? Look at those events, and you see how God has actually won you. We see how He has waited till we sickened ourselves of sin; how He has come in when we had wearied and hurt ourselves with running from Him and fighting against Him. He has come in and healed our hurts as if we had been fighting for and not against Him. He has been deeply concerned that we should live spiritually; and if we go on living as the flesh and the mind dictate, yet He is not exasperated. In all things He has dealt gently, as a nurse with her children (as Paul says), with each of us, adapting Himself to us at every point of our career.

We may more clearly see the value of gentleness and how it operates if we look at two of the relations in life in which it is conspicuously displayed and by which God reveals Himself, the parental and the priestly. Some parents mix a great deal of this quality in the upbringing of their children; others use less gentleness and more compulsion. And the difference of the two methods becomes apparent as the families grow up. Gentleness makes great, but compulsion makes little and mean. Gentleness tends to enlarge the heart and the sympathies with what is good; compulsion tends to contract and narrow down all motives to the one of fear, and to stifle what is generous and ardent. Look at the child with whom no gentle methods are used, who is never allured to well-doing by cordial praise, who receives few tokens of the warm love of his parents, whose upbringing is one mainly of harshness and command, whose best feelings are rarely appealed to—look at him and you see how that discipline is telling upon him, how he is learning to shrink from the parent's eye, how he is learning the worst fault of boyhood, secretiveness, and how the seeds of all future evil are being sown in him. Look again at the child who has felt the power of gentleness, who has been reasoned with and has had love and patience freely dealt

out to him: he has learned to live on frank and easy terms with his parents, has grown up to enter into all their views and feelings, and has his heart enlarged.

Entering still more deeply into the spiritual sphere we come to a function eminently calling for the exercise of gentleness—the function of the priest, in which God's method of restoring sinners to Himself was displayed. It was chiefly through the priesthood that God did deal with men. The priests were neither more nor less than the men through whom God made appeal to all. Putting aside the technical name which is apt to deaden and darken the whole matter to us, all faithful priests were the forerunners of Christ; and He is the perfect expression of God's mode of capturing and captivating sinful men. But in the equipment of a priest this quality of gentleness was fundamental. "*Every* high priest," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "must be one who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them who are out of the way." The word here used for "having compassion" is a rare and carefully chosen one. It means sympathy and something more—sympathy of the profoundest kind; it means that moderation of one's feelings, that restraining of natural indignation, contempt, disgust, hatred, which is naturally aroused by the sight of wrong-doing or by having to do from day to day with dull-headed and dull-souled moral obliquity, perversity, duplicity and self-deceiving greed of both worlds; it means that self-command and self-subduing adaptation of oneself to the need of others which is, above all else, requisite in those who are to help men out of the slime and darkness of sinful habit and a corrupted nature. A high priest who should storm at the frequent penitent, who should sulk and gloom when he came back, month after month, with the same stain, who should deal harshly and repressively with any sinner had far better not be there at all. He was not to be a man of unchastened disposition, quick in rebuke, always chiding, eager to fix blots on the character and find reasons for discouraging sinners; he was to be of infinite gentleness, of inexhaustible patience, willingly spending himself on dull-minded, obtuse sinners, on men with ill-educated consciences, on men who could not see the greatness of sin's evil, nor hold it so in mind as to give effect to their resolutions against it. The high priest was to be a man able to fan into flame the merest spark of grace, quick to detect and make the most of the faintest beginnings of good in the heart and life of men. He was the sure resort of the unbefriended and outcast, the one open heart for the unloved, the one always dwelling in Israel's midst, at the very heart and centre of the kingdom, sustaining, as it were, the whole fabric, at the very hearth of God's dwelling-place and close to His glory, to whom all who were out of the way, all who had strayed far might return and be sure of a welcome.

This gentleness, this self-restraining consideration of others, this smothering of all natural revulsions and prejudices, this ability to meet with delicacy the suspicious eye of the scarred leper, who would have detected the faintest shudder of revulsion or the faintest expression of dislike, this frank giving of the hand to the criminal and the low was bred in the high priest by his office, and was the outcome of God's method of gentleness. This quality was essential in the high priest, *because* he represented God.

So when God Himself appeared on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, gentleness was so conspicuous that men could not understand it; they had not depth enough of soul to understand the strength that works by patience and love. They could not understand a God waiting upon men, a God suffering contradiction, a God baffled and thwarted, a God without the thunderbolts and chariots of fire, a God pleading and beseeching, weeping and moaning in the anguish of ineffectual love, a God doing nothing by violence, who neither strove nor cried, whose voice was not heard in the

streets. How little have men ever known what is most Divine! They looked for one shod with blazing brass, trampling underfoot all that is unworthy and hostile; and He came not breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax. This lightness of step was unintelligible to them; this considerateness of all that was weak made them presume instead of worshipping. They did not see that the love which could uphold this infinite patience and prompt to this quiet, compassing gentleness was *the* proof of Divinity, was a greater thing and more impossible to every one besides than the might that called worlds into being, was the last evidence that could be given that God is *God*—the source of all good, the strength of all His creatures, in whom there ever remains capacity to repair all moral disaster, love enough to overcome all hatred in His creatures, an all-enduring, untemptable gentleness which will not be provoked, will not retaliate, will not give up hoping and loving.

And in our future it is still this quality of God we shall need and may count upon. In times of doubt, in hours of anxiety and pain, in temptation, in death, there will be no harsh driving of us by an unsympathetic power, no hard indifference to our condition, but a gentleness that leaves nothing undone which can encourage and hearten.

In our time few thoughtful persons can escape attacks of unbelief, and many are aghast at the small amount of faith that is left to them. In such circumstances it is well to know that we have to do with One who does not quench the smoking flax, who has said that if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed it will avail; that it is not the quantity that we believe but the quality of the faith with which we believe it that tells; and that the minutest faith sifted from what is spurious, precarious and unstable, the minutest faith that feels its feet firm on the rock of personal conviction and is sure of itself, is healthier and more hopeful than a faith that embraces all the articles of the creed, but is merely the echo of other people's opinions and founded on sand. Genuine living faith, even though confined to one article, is bound to grow. The tiny spark will quicken into bright flame. If you believe in nothing more than that there is a spiritual, personal God, and if you believe this with a genuine, intelligent, living conviction, this simple belief will develop into many branches laden with precious fruit. I do not say, Be content with this; but I do say, Be glad and thankful you have it, and trust in Him who will not quench the smoking flax.

And if it is rather an undefined sense of unworthiness and discouragement that depresses us, let us take heart. We feel that the broken reed, the smouldering flax are fit symbols for our condition. Christ cannot lean upon us, cannot place dependence on us for any important purpose; if He seeks for flaming zeal it must be to other men He looks and not to us. We are disappointing. He meant us to be lights shining in dark places, to guide our less well-circumstanced fellows; and He finds us smouldering and betraying unhappy ones on to the cruel rocks. He planted us fairly and nourished us with all that could strengthen and make us great, enough has been done for us to give us perfect knowledge of duty, and the secret of all strength has been disclosed to us; but when our Lord needs a man and comes to find vigour and growth, He finds a bruised reed, drooping and unable to hold up his own head and wholly unfit to sustain the weakest of His plants. How often have we thus failed him! Does it not concern you at all that it should be so? Is it nothing to you that your path should be marked by no good as you go through life—that for all the highest purposes of life you should be a failure; that you can but eat and drink, buy and sell respectably, and leave the world and your own family history slightly worse than you found it? Even a little fire, James tells us, kindles a great matter. What has your fiery

zeal accomplished? what worldly ties has it burnt through? what sinful habits has it consumed? what time of darkness has it illuminated? what other dark and cold souls has it kindled? Or has Christian life in your soul scarcely sustained itself; is it now scarcely visible, visible only to the loving eye of your Lord? It has perhaps long been so; we seem to improve scarcely at all, no warnings have found us out, no appeals have moved us, no gentle breathing of God's love has brought out at last the clear, aspiring flame; we are still the same cold, useless creatures we ever were. Yet Christ is not provoked to have done with us, to set His foot on the smoking flax that never kindles, never glows, never passes the stage of weakness, of promise, of mere and frail beginnings. He has borne long with us. He has seen how but lately we seemed to wish all grace quenched in us, so eager were we about worldly success. One wonders whether in all His charge He can ever have had sinners so thoroughly unspiritual, so little like Himself, so difficult to foster, so freely receiving much and making so little of it, so content to smoulder, so afraid to blaze. He sees how unreal and heartless we are, how we take all His work as our right and do not seek to understand the deep love that prompted it. But He has borne, and does bear, with us; and under all this deadness, among the ashes of extinct resolves and burnt-out fervours, amidst the defiling smoke of a love fast dying out, He will seek out the tiring spark of right feeling that His own love once kindled in you, and will nurse it into a genial and strong devotion.

XIII. Forgiveness

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."—*Coloss*. i. 14.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."—2 *Cor*. v. 19.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, which our Lord intended to illustrate the return of man to God, and which, by its pathetic truth to nature, has found its way to many a heart, there is no allusion to any third party whose work and intercession were needed to effect the reconciliation of father and son. The son was brought to repentance by his circumstances and his remembrance of former happiness, and the father met the penitent with full forgiveness. The question, therefore, naturally arises, Why should any work of a third party be in our case necessary? Why might we not have found our way back to God without the intervention of Christ, and why might not God forgive us without any sacrifice or propitiation on Christ's part? We know that God is absolute love, and that whatever Christ has done is the expression of that love. The origin of Christ's interposition is to be traced to the longing of the Father for us His strayed children. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Any representation which sets God before the mind as implacable, and requiring to be appeased by Christ is manifestly and of course false. The enduring, persistent love of God is the grand foundation on which we can always build. Why, then, was the appearance and sacrifice of Christ needful? Why should we lay such stress on Christ's work? Why may we not deal with God irrespective of Christ?

To understand the necessity of Christ's appearing in the world and intervening between God and us, we must understand what is necessary before we can be forgiven. Forgiveness of a very defective kind is so common among men that it is apt to obscure our view of Divine forgiveness. A man thinks he forgives another when he says to the wrong-doer, "Well, I forgive you, but never let me see your face again." A man tells you he has forgiven one who has done him a permanent injury, but that he can never forget it—which means that he can never be the man's friend, though he condescends to inhabit the same planet with him. Or you forgive a poor wretch who has stolen your coat, because he is beneath your notice. But, of course, it is no such forgiveness that will serve our turn when we awake to the perception that we have sinned against God. When we see the horror of being alienated from God, and understand that in God is the spring of all good, we crave a forgiveness that means perfect reconcilement and abiding acceptance into peace and harmony with God.

Plainly enough, then, there can be no forgiveness where there is not genuine repentance. A man who does not repent cannot even wish to be forgiven; a thoughtless man may say he wishes to be forgiven, although he still loves his sin; but the man who recognizes the meaning of the words he uses, and understands that forgiveness means reconcilement to the Holy God, also and necessarily understands that a longing for forgiveness is merely one aspect of a true repentance. He turns from sin precisely in proportion as he turns to God. A drunken lad may in a maudlin

mood beg his mother's forgiveness, and may get it, though the very next night he goes back to his vice; but such forgiveness is futile, meaningless, ineffective and rather hurtful than helpful to the sinner. It offers no sufficient analogy to the forgiveness of God. If a man has cheated you, you may forgive him if he shows genuine contrition, seeks to repair the loss he has occasioned, and plainly shows that he is inwardly resolved never again to sink so low; but you do not, or at least you ought not to, forgive him if he asks your pardon with a grin on his face, unhumbled and unabashed, and if you have every reason to believe he will serve you the same turn again as soon as he conveniently can. Much more so is this true of our sins against God. To beg forgiveness while we are not truly repentant is to use words without meaning; and it is impossible to conceive that God should forgive the impenitent. His holiness, His justice, His mercy, His wisdom, all equally forbid such forgiveness.

But if the forgiveness of the impenitent is inconceivable, it is equally inconceivable that God should not forgive the penitent. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." It cannot be otherwise. The great object of all God's government of us and dealings with us is to bring us to a perfect moral condition, in perfect sympathy with Him and perfect hatred of sin. And when the sinner actually repents, when the light of God's holiness is shed on sin, and he sees it as it is, when above all other desires there grows up in his heart the desire to be entirely reconciled to God, and when he bewails sin as that which has blinded him and spoiled his life and separated him from God, God hails his return as eagerly as the father hailed the prodigal's. However seriously a person has injured you, and however clearly you see the reckless selfishness or the malignant forethought he has used to injure you, and however keen your displeasure and resentment are, you cannot cherish these when you clearly see that he thoroughly repents of what he has done, that he is haunted and crushed with shame, that all joy is taken out of his life by the knowledge of what he has been, and that no man would now serve you so eagerly and faithfully as he. To cherish resentment against such a man is to cherish resentment against a person who is dead; for the feelings which prompted him to injure you are dead. It is another man who is now before you, a man who hates his past, and seeks only opportunity of repairing it. To cherish resentment in such circumstances is not human, but devilish. True penitence is, in short, irresistible. It is the true solvent of past discord and alienation. When the wrong-doer condemns his wrong done as heartily as you yourself do, what more can be said? When he feels as keenly as yourself the pain of your lost friendship, and begs restoration to it, how can you refuse?

Thus, also, is our alienation from God removed, and our right relation to Him restored. Repentance avails with God, much more than with man. He has no doubt about the truth of the penitent's contrition as we have doubts: He has no suspicion he will fall back into his old courses as we have suspicion. He receives the penitent quickly and fully, because He has been waiting and working for his return. Him that cometh He cannot cast out. The man seeks a refuge from his sin and a help against it: God presents Himself as his help and refuge. It is always and uniformly thus: when the prodigal returns, his father is there to meet and forgive and welcome him.

But where is there room here for the intervention of Christ? To this question various answers are given. Among these the commonest is that our sins were laid upon Christ and punished in His death, so that no punishment is now exacted from us. We are forgiven when we repent because Christ has paid the debt which God would

otherwise have exacted from us. But no sooner is Christ's work stated in this form than difficulties arise. When I am told that Christ suffered the punishment of my sins, I cannot but ask, Why then am I still punished? Why am I pursued throughout life by the penalty of past transgressions? Why am I made to possess the sins of my youth, reminded of them every day in substantial and painful ways? Forgiven I may be, but freed from punishment I assuredly am not. I am in the position of the prodigal who returns from abroad, where he has exhausted every device for procuring a livelihood, who works his passage home, and reaches his father's house with the seeds of fatal disease, only to be forgiven and to die. The father's forgiveness cannot reverse the past or stem its inevitable consequence. A man has only to consider his own life to see that it is so. He is not saved from the penalty of sin by Christ's death. The very things that He suffered we are called upon to suffer. The death He died we also must die. To say that in this sense we are saved from punishment by Christ undergoing it for us is to use a form of words which is contradicted by our own experience, and which, therefore, only obscures the work of Christ.

But though we suffer our own punishment in this life, may it not be that Christ delivers us from suffering in the future life? Indirectly He does so, enabling us to abandon sin and carry with us into the future a purified and sinless character. We shall not suffer in the future, because we shall not sin in the future. Even in this life as a man by Christ's help works clear of sin, so to a proportionate extent does he work clear of punishment. But so far as this life, with its very legible experience, teaches us, we can be free from punishment only by being free from sin. God does not in this life directly interpose to inflict punishment: He leaves that work to the great laws which He has imbedded in the nature of the world and of man. These laws are self-acting, and are the actual government of God. And we have no reason to believe that in the future it will be different. They who are fitted for life eternal will possess life eternal: they who are not so fitted cannot in the nature of things possess it—any more than a fish can live on dry land or a bird fly under water. Christ saves us by fitting us now for a higher life, by giving us now the means of growing up to holiness. He enables us to leave punishment behind us by leaving sin behind us.

In what sense, then, did Christ bear our sins and our punishment? When we look at the actual life and death of Christ as exhibited in the Gospels, we see that the consequences of sin fell upon Christ, not by any direct divine interference such as is not concerned in the lives of other men, but as the necessary consequence of His coming into the world. By His very position as man, He was involved on all hands in the consequences of other men's transgressions. Given the incarnation, all Christ's sufferings flow naturally from it. This entire earthly condition is penal: no man is born separate from those who have gone before him; but has to bear in his person and in his condition the penalty of old sins. And his growth into the world is a growth into connections, associations, relationships, each and all of which, in a greater or less degree, compel him to bear the penalty of other men's folly and sin. What we by our birth are compelled to undergo, Christ voluntarily underwent when He became man. And as the curse of sin finds action in each of us, not by anything extraordinary happening to us, not by God interposing to add a special burden to our life, but simply by our living through human life and dying a human death, so the curse or penalty of sin was borne by Christ, not by the interposition of God to lay upon Him a burden He could have escaped, but by His living among men and accepting the necessary consequences of living a holy, divine life among sinful and blinded men. Christ bore the punishment of our sins by coming into a world in which he was on all

hands involved in the consequence of sin. But His bearing of this punishment did not exempt us from also bearing it. We have the same life to live through, the same death to die—a life made more tolerable, no doubt, by His having lived, and a death more hopeful since He has died, but still a life and a death in which there is much suffering and very obvious punishment of sin.

The question, then, remains, Why was the intervention of Christ necessary? How has it facilitated our forgiveness? Plainly, the appearing of Christ in this world, His life and His death, have in the first place given us such knowledge of God as prompts us to seek His forgiveness. The prodigal of the parable needed no messenger from his father's home to tell him of the painful blank his absence still made there, of the yearnings of his father's heart for the lost son, or of the joys of his father's presence. All this and much more was taught him every hour of every weary day by his own memory. He had lived till manhood with his father, and knew him. What memory was to him, Christ is to us, showing us in His own joyful obedience how happy a service the service of God is, and in his devotion to men how the heart of God goes out to us all. Knowledge of God of a kind there was before Christ came, but such knowledge was the mere grey streak of dawn eclipsed in the bright light of His coming. Christ for the first time reveals a God we can with our whole heart and mind choose and worship; a God who appeals to our reason, our conscience, our heart alike. No sooner do we seriously apprehend that God is in Christ than we long to be reconciled to Him. To be sundered in spirit from such a God is, we feel, the deepest ignominy. To shrink from a God who surrounds us with so faithful and sacrificing a love is unreasonable, and proof that we are capable of the darkest ingratitude. The God revealed in Christ appeals to all that is best in us, and our reason loudly calls upon us to be reconciled to Him. The knowledge of God conveyed to us by Christ, and by Him alone, conveyed, too, in the forms of human life most intelligible to us, produces in us the true repentance that craves forgiveness. We have only to know God to see the hatefulness and folly of sin. We have only to recognize what perfection is to be humbled by our own shortcoming.

How this knowledge could otherwise have been conveyed to us, we do not know and cannot imagine. What we required to know about God was that He is supreme in the moral world, supreme in holiness and in love. Merely to tell us that He is so would not serve our turn. We must see Him for ourselves, and we must see Him in such circumstances as give us opportunity to judge. We must see His holiness and His love tested. We must have proof of His love and of His holiness which appeal to our own sense of what love and holiness are. A manifestation of God's love in some transcendental form altogether different in kind from what we know as love would not suffice. A manifestation of His holiness in some easy exercise of Divine grace would not carry conviction to our tried and tempted spirits. But when God comes and meets us on the plane of human morality and needs, when He exhibits holiness in dealing with the veritable temptations of human life, when He expresses His love in the terms dictated by the wants and miseries and yearnings of men, when we see that Divine love is intenser human love, and that Divine holiness is perfect human holiness, we recognize that this is the true God and our God. We know God, and we owe it to Christ that we know Him. If we have any longing to be known of God, to be in His thought and care and training and service, if the heart fills with inexpressible emotion when we think of the various goodness and indefeasible holiness and love of God, if we turn with ever growing satisfaction to the hope and prospect which connection with such a God opens to us, if with ever purer penitence and desire we seek God's face and favour; all this we owe to Christ, who alone has given us the

knowledge of God, who alone uttered God in human life, who did not merely tell us about God, and speak to us of a remote, unattainable Power, but brought God into human life and lived God out in human forms.

It is thus Christ helps us to take the first great step in seeking forgiveness. He shows us the God from whom sin is separation. He brings keenly home to our consciousness the sense of what we have lost in losing God. Looking at Christ, we feel that not to be connected in any real way with this, not to be in the same cause, in the same stream of life, in the same hopes, in the same spirit as this person, is loss indeed. All else drops in value when estimated in this presence. But there is another aspect of sin: it not only entails loss upon us—the loss of God, and therefore eventually the loss of all—but it entails guilt. We are impelled to ask forgiveness of the person we have injured, not merely because it is our interest to be reconciled to him, but also because it is our duty to acknowledge our offence and truly to repent of it. We owe that to the injured party, justice demands it of us. Whether we can make reparation or no, but much more if we can make no reparation, ought we to acknowledge our fault.

But how are we to be brought to feel as we ought regarding sin? Our sense of the wrong we have done is infinitely different from the judgment which the Holy God necessarily passes upon it. We cannot determine what sense of sin God accepts as adequate. We cannot say from what confession of sin He would withhold His recognition and pardon on the ground of its superficiality or insufficient sense of guilt. But certainly our own conscience bids us strive after the truth, and prompts us to seek the most distinct impressions of our own guilt which we can attain to. Sin being universal, is thought of more as a common misfortune than as individual guilt. To think lightly of it is natural. A tender and sensitive conscience, that registers every change in the moral atmosphere, is one of the rarest natural virtues. The best of us are apt to endure sin as a necessary evil, to make little determined resistance to it as a thing that must not be, to leave it as a chronic ailment which only removal from this life can remedy.

But here Christ steps in and wholly alters our view of sin. The same life and death which disclose to us God's love and all we have lost in losing that love and that God, disclose to us at the same time the reality and awfulness of sin. It is one thing for us earth-born and sin-stained persons to be in constant contact with the consequences of sin: another thing for the purity and blessedness of heaven to be brought down to this level, and to be smirched and trodden upon by the foulness of this actual world. It is one thing for us to bear the consequences of our own sins, or of the sins of men whose guilt is similar to our own: another thing to see that we have involved in the miseries and degradation of our sinful life One who is purity itself. To bear the penalty of our own sins is what conscience bids us expect: but to find that our sins have involved our God in suffering is unexpected. To find that as among ourselves love between two persons means that they suffer in common, are ashamed in one another's failure, and crushed under one another's woes; so with God love means that He is involved with us in all that affects us, feels with us and for us, cannot stand off from our misery and shame, but is compelled by His love to take part with us, to share our lot and be entangled in the consequences of our sins—it is this that brings serious and humbling thoughts about sin into the heart. We may laugh it off in our hours of reckless worldliness, we may refuse to be broken in heart on account of transgressions no worse than our neighbours, we may persuade ourselves it matters nothing to God what kind of life men live; but still stands the cross of Christ,

scattering from the eye of him who will consider it all such views of sin. This is what our sin has brought Christ to. There is the actual consequence of sin. He who loves me, and who is naturally out of reach of all that hurts and pollutes, has been brought by my sin to this.

The man who cares little that his own face should be scarred by small-pox, is terror-stricken when he finds he has carried the disease to his child, and that the first duty of his restored health is to bury the victim of his carelessness. The man who thinks little of his own evil habits takes a very different view of them, and feels it were better he had never been born when he wakes from his drunken stupor to find he has killed the one woman who loved him, who alone was patient with him, and whose lot her love for him had made a lot of shame, degradation, injury, wretchedness and death. And the sinner who thinks little of his sin so long as he believes it concerns himself alone, is dismayed and humbled when he begins to understand that the God who loves him and is faithful to him, the One on whom at his worst and lowest he may depend, has been brought by his sin to distress, to anguish and to death.

Two reflections are naturally suggested by this subject. 1. That God's desire to reconcile us to Himself shows us to be destined for immortality. We cannot closely apply our minds to God's work in Christ, cannot look at it as real, without the thought flashing through the mind, that this work would not be undertaken for persons who are to die to-morrow and for ever be blotted out. To be worth all this pains and divine effort the result must be lasting. If I am forgiven and brought into reconcilement with God, then I feel sure that God has some further purpose with me.

2. That this purpose can be served only by those who are so truly reconciled to God that they become holy and righteous. We are forgiven, not that we may go back and stain ourselves with sin, but that we may abide in harmony with God. For this God has made provision. It is for this He grants us pardon, and admits us to real fellowship with Himself. There is no such thing as a forgiven person who is not being carried forward to holiness. There will one day be no such thing as a forgiven person who is not perfectly holy.

XIV. The Leaven

"Another parable spake He unto them: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."—*Matt.* xiii. 33.

Two points regarding the spread of Christianity are here noted: first, the *kind* of change which Christianity works in the world; and, secondly, the *method* by which this change is wrought.

1. Our Lord here points out that the change which He meant to effect in the world was a change, not so much of the outward form, as of the spirit and character of all things. The propagation of His influence is illustrated not by the figure of a woman taking a mass of dough and baking it up into new loaves of a shape hitherto unseen, but by the figure of a woman putting that into the dough which alters the character of the entire mass. She may set on the table loaves that are to all appearance the same as the old, but no one will taste them without recognizing the difference. The old shapes are retained, the familiar marks appear still on the loaves, but it is a different bread. The appearance remains the same: the reality is altered. The form is retained, while the character is changed.

There are two ways in which you can revolutionize any country or society. You may either pull down all the old forms of government, or you may fill them with men of a different spirit. If an empire is going to ruin, you may either turn the empire into a republic, or you may put the right man in the emperor's office. A watch stops, and somebody tells you it needs new works; but the watchmaker tells you it only needs cleaning. A machine refuses to work and people think the construction is wrong; but the skilled mechanic pushes aside the ignorant crowd and puts all to rights with a few drops of oil. "Your bread is unwholesome," says the public to the baker; and he says, "Well, I'll send you loaves of another shape"; but the woman of the parable follows a wiser course and alters the quality of the bread.

The distinction is of wide application and concerns us all whether in our social, political, or religious capacity. Many of us take a huge interest in the institutions of our country, and are ready to lay our finger on this or that as needing reform. This parable therefore should haunt the ear with the question: Is this or that institution radically and necessarily evil; or, supposing right men and a right spirit were working it, would it not serve an excellent purpose? Generally speaking, what is wanted in the world is not so much new forms as a new spirit in the old forms. New forms, new institutions, new regulations, new occupations, new trades, new ways of occupying our time are really as little to the purpose as putting the old make of bread into new shapes. What our Lord wants us to consider is the possession which Christian feeling and views should take of all previously existing customs, institutions, relationships, amusements, occupations. It is the regenerating rather than the creative power of His spirit that He here calls attention to. His spirit, He would say, does not require a new channel to be dug for it; its fuller stream may flood the old banks, may wear out corners here and there, may break out in new directions; but in the main, the channel remains the same. The man has the same arteries, but now they are filled with

health-giving blood. The lump is the same lump and it is broken up into the same shapes, but it is all leavened now.

The coming of the kingdom of heaven upon earth does not, then, consist in an entire alteration of human life as we know it. The kingdom of heaven comes not with observation, but is *within* you. It does not alter empires into republics, it does not abolish work and give us all demoralizing ease, it does not find fault with the universal frame of things, or refuse to fit itself in to the world as it is, but accepting things as it finds them, it leavens all it touches. It does not demand that the family shall be broken up, that business shall cease, but only that all relations of life be purified. The outward forms of the world's work, its offices and dignities, its need of work and ways of working, would be little altered if all men were suddenly to become truthful, sober and industrious; and similarly the change proposed by Christ is inward and on the individual, and is only influential in society through the individual. Our Lord, in establishing a kingdom on earth, did not intend to erect a vast organization over against the world, but He meant to introduce into the world itself a leaven which should rule and subdue all to His spirit. The Church itself may become too visible—has in many respects become too visible—and has thus unfortunately succeeded in at once separating itself from the world as a distinct and alien institution, and becoming entirely "of the world" by imitating the institutions, the ambitions, the power, the ostentation of the world. It has learned to measure its success very largely by the bulk it occupies in the eyes of men, by its buildings, its costly services, its creeds and laws and courts; and it has too much forgotten that its function is of quite another kind, namely, to be *hidden* among the flour.

2. But in the second place this parable directs attention to the precise method by which the world is to be Christianized. That method is here said to be, not compulsion of any kind, not authority, but *contagion*. The Christian religion is to be communicated from man to man. No doubt there is a direct agency of God in each person, but God works through natural means; and the natural means here indicated, under the figure of the leaven, is personal influence. It is not the agency of God in the matter which our Lord here wishes to illustrate, and therefore He says nothing about it. He is not careful to guard Himself against misrepresentation by completing in every utterance a full statement of the whole truth, but presses one point at a time; and the point here pressed is that our Lord depends on personal individual influence for the spread of His spirit. The Church often trusts to massive and wealthy organizations, to methods which are calculated to strike every one; but according to the Head of the Church His religion and spirit are to be propagated by an influence which operates like an infectious disease, invisible, without apparatus and pompous equipment, succeeding all the better where it is least observed.

And indeed there exists no mightier power for good or evil than personal influence. Often it is mightiest in those who least intend it and seem least capable of exerting it. The little child that cannot stand alone will work tenderness in the heart of a ruffian who has been only embittered and hardened in crime by prison discipline and police regulations. By his confidence in your word, the child is a more effectual monitor of truthfulness than the keen and suspicious eye of the man who distrusts you; the child's recklessness of to-morrow, his short sadnesses and soon-recovered smiles, his ignorance of the world and its misery, are the proper balance of your anxiety, and insinuate into your heart some measure of his own freshness and hope. What can reflect more light on God's patience with ourselves than the unwearying love and repeated forgiveness that a child demands, and the long doubting with which we wait

for the fruit of years of training? So that it is hard to say whether the parent has more influence on the child or the child on the parent. Or take those who have been pushed aside from the busy world by ill-health or misfortune and who seem to have lost all influence; have not their unmurmuring patience, their Christian hope, their need of our compassion, done much to mould our spirit to a sober and chastened habit and to teach us what is essential and what accidental, what good and what evil in this present life?

This influence of man on man is not only powerful, but constant. We can as little prevent certain results in our character arising from our daily intercourse with one another as we can prevent our persons from giving off heat when we enter an atmosphere colder than ourselves.

"The world's infectious: few bring back at eve
Immaculate the manners of the morn.
Something we thought is blotted: we resolv'd,
Is shaken: we renounced, returns again.
Each salutation may slide in a sin
Unthought before, or fix a former flaw."

Precisely as a fashion or a contagious disease passes from man to man with inconceivable and sometimes appalling rapidity, so does evil or good example propagate itself with as certain and speedy an increase. And this it does all the more effectually because insensibly; because we do not brace ourselves to resist this subtle atmospheric influence, nor wash our hands with any disinfectant provided against those imperceptible stains. There is no quarantine for the moral leper, nor any desert in the moral world where a man can be evil for himself alone. Our comfort is that the leaven of good is as surely propagated as the leaven of evil.

That it may be so, there must be a *mixing*. That is to say, there must be contact of the closest kind between those who are and those who are not the subjects of Christ. No good is done by the leaven while it lies by itself: it might as well be chalk or sand. It must be mixed with the flour. So must those who have the leaven of Christ in them not withdraw from the life of men, but be kneaded up together with all kinds of annoying and provoking and uncongenial and un-Christian people, that the spirit of Christ may be imparted to the world. Had our Lord not eaten with low-minded and gross sinners; had He held Himself contemptuously or distastefully aloof; had He sensitively shrunk from the vulgarity and irreverence of men who called Him "devil," "Samaritan" and "sot"; had He not made Himself the most accessible of men, little of His spirit would have passed into others.

Other things being equal the effect of Christian character varies with the thoroughness of the mixing. The depth of the love, the closeness of the intimacy, the frequency and thoroughness of the intercourse, is the measure of the effect produced. And this intimate mixing is accomplished largely by nature, which sets us in families and mixes us up in all the familiarities and intimacies of domestic life; and by society, which compels us, in the prosecution of our ordinary callings, to come into contact with one another in a close and influential manner. One part of the world is "mixed" with other parts by commerce, by colonization, by conquest, so that there actually is a ceaseless giving and taking of good and evil. One generation also is mixed with others by reading their history and literary remains, and by inheriting their traditions and long-established usages.

But beyond nature's provision, beyond the unavoidable contact with our fellow men to which we are all compelled, there are voluntary friendships and associations into which we enter, and casual meetings into which we are unawares thrown. Such casual and passing acquaintanceships have frequently illustrated the truth of this parable, and have been the means of imparting the spirit of Christ in very unlikely quarters. And it would help us to use wisely such accidental opportunities if we bore in mind that if there are to be additions made to the kingdom of Christ, these additions are chiefly to be made from among those careless, worldly, antagonistic persons who do not as yet respond to any Christian sentiments, but seem rather, like the unconverted Paul, to embody what is hostile to Christ.

But besides the mingling with other men, which we cannot avoid without, as Paul says, going out of the world altogether, and besides the slight and accidental associations with those whom we casually meet, there are connections which we form of our own free choice, and companies we enter, which we might, if we chose, avoid. There is a borderland of amusements, occupations, duties common to the godly and the ungodly, and for our guidance in respect to such intercourse, this parable suffices. Can the occupation be leavened, and can it be leavened by us? Can it be engaged in profitably, and are we sure enough of our own stability to engage in it with benefit? A man of robust physique may scathelessly enter a room out of which a weaker constitution will inevitably carry infection. And it is foolish to argue that because some other person is none the worse for engaging in this or that pursuit, you yourself will find it harmless. You would not so argue if your entrance into an infected house were in question.

But, on the other hand, there is a culpable refusal to mix with ordinary society. Most of us shrink from the responsibility of materially influencing the life of another person. Ask a man for advice on any matter of real importance, and how he will hedge and evade your questions! And most of us also shrink from pressing any one to make great sacrifices even though we are pretty certain that only by doing so can our friend be thoroughly Christian. Then again, some seem so remote from Christ's ways of looking at things and so inaccessible to Christian considerations that we despair of them; though the parable reminds us that while it may be impossible to leaven sand, so long as the meal remains meal, so long as man remains man, the leaven may work. Despair, too, not so much of others as of ourselves, tells in the same direction. We can never persuade ourselves that our influence can do any one good. From one or other of these motives many Christian people seclude themselves from legitimate intercourse with the world and much Christian influence is thereby lost. It is easier to live among our own set, easier to express Christian sentiments and act on Christian principles in company where every one is doing likewise, than in companies where very different sentiments are current and very different conduct applauded. But if every one chooses the easier path and declines mingling with varieties of character, how is the leaven to work?

Another question suggested by the parable remains. The mixing being achieved, how is the process continued? Besides joining freely in all the innocent ways of the world, what is a Christian to *do* in order that his Christian spirit may be communicated to others? The answer is, He is to be a Christian; not to be anxious to show himself a Christian, but to be careful to be one. It has been wisely said that "the true secret or method of doing good is, first of all and principally, to be good—to have a character that will of itself communicate good." That is the very teaching of the parable which says, "Be a Christian and you cannot fail to make Christians or help to make them. Be

leaven and you will leaven." The leaven does not need to say, "I am leaven"; nor to say to that which lies next it, "Be thou leavened." By the inevitable communication of the properties of the leaven to that which lies beside it, and by this again infecting what is beyond, the whole, gradually and unseen, but naturally and certainly is leavened.

We must not, however, press this illustration of the leaven too hard as if the parable meant that only by the unconscious influence of character and not at all by the conscious influence of speech and action, the kingdom of Christ is to be extended. Speech is a necessary expression of character and has its part to play in all human life. Yet no one can fail to observe that the figure of leaven is more appropriate to the unconscious than to the intended influence which Christians exercise on those around them. It is rather the all-pervading and subtle extension of Christian principles than their declared and aggressive advocacy that is suggested by the leaven. It reminds us that men are most susceptible to the influence that flows from character. This influence sheds itself off in a thousand ways too subtle to be resisted, and in forms so fine as to insinuate themselves where words would find no entrance or could not even be used. In many circumstances a man will do more good by acting in a Christian manner than by drawing attention to the faults of others. The less ostentatious, the less conscious the influence exerted upon us is, the more likely are we to admit it. And when we are compelled to reprove, or to advise, or to entreat, this also must be in simplicity and as the natural expression, not the formal and forced exhibition of Christian feeling. The words uttered by a shallow-hearted and self-righteous Pharisee may by God's grace turn a sinner from the error of his ways; the lump of ice, itself chill and hard, may be used as a lens to kindle and thaw other objects; but notwithstanding this, he who does not speak with his whole character backing what he says, may expect to fail. It is man that influences man; not the words or individual actions of a man, but the complete character which his whole life silently reveals.

If, then, you sometimes reproach yourself—as who does not?—for failing to exert any perceptible influence for good over some friend or child, if it disturbs you that you have done less than you might have done by conversation or direct appeal, it may indeed be quite true that you have thus fallen short of duty; yet remember that conduct tells more than talk, and that your conduct has certainly told on the inmost thought of those about you, whereas were you to speak merely for the sake of exonerating your conscience, the chances are that you would speak in an awkward, artificial and ineffective manner. That conversation is often the most religious which in subject is most secular; which concerns bills and cargoes and investments and contracts and family arrangements and literature; and which, without any express allusion to God, the soul, and eternity, secretly impregnates the whole of human life with the spirit of Christ. If that only is to be reckoned religious conversation, in which the topics of religion are discussed, then religious conversation has commonly produced more heat and bitterness and antagonism to Christ's spirit than any other.

While, then, direct address forms one important element in leavening the world, it is to be borne in mind that in the first place you must *be* what you wish others to become. If not, then assuredly nothing you can say is at all likely to compensate for the evil you do by your character. Your friends will say, as Emerson said, "What you *are* speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you say." It does not need that you intend evil to any one: it will be out, whether you mean it or no. If you are yourself evil, and just in the measure in which you are evil, you are making others evil also. Are you

sure that your example has never turned the balance the wrong way at some critical hour of your friend's life? Is there no one who has the right to charge you with having left him in darkness about his duty, when you ought to have enlightened him; with having made him easy in sin by your pleasant, affable, unreproving demeanour towards him? Are there none who now bear the punishment of sin in which you were aiding and abetting; none whom you have encouraged in evil, and who, but for you, would have been clear of guilt which now weighs heavily upon them?

Do not turn aside the warning of this parable by the thought that you are not your brother's keeper, not responsible for any but yourself! Assuredly you are responsible for your own character and for all its effects. If you are not leavening others with a right spirit, it is because you are yourself unleavened; for there is no such thing as leaven that does not impart its qualities to that which is about it. Can you confine the perfume to the flower, or restrict the light of the sun to its own globe? Just as little can you restrain all Christian qualities within your own person; something material, something essential to Christian character is lacking if it be not influencing those within its reach.

It is a glorious consummation which this parable presents. It tells of a mixing which is to go on till "the whole" is leavened. The spirit of Christ is to pervade all things. All national characteristics and all individual gifts, all human institutions and the whole fulness of human life are to be leavened with that spirit. Nothing in our Lord is more remarkable than His absolute confidence in the success of His work. No cause could well seem more hopeless when He spoke this parable; a few men followed Him, and even the few could not enter into His designs, were steeped in mischievous Jewish prejudices, and seemed likely to wreck His cause through ignorance. All the alienation of the world, its blind absorption in earthly matters—all that still brings despair to the missionary and the evangelist—was clearly before Him, yet He is confident not of partial but of complete victory. The leaven is quite lost to sight in the mass of meal, but it is leaven and will work. Strange that men should not be eager to help towards this grand consummation; that this man and that should know the earnestness of Christ in this behalf, and yet never lift a finger or open the lips to aid Him! Strange that we should find it so easy to be in this world of men and not care to see it accomplishing its destiny! Is there nothing you can do, nothing you ought to do, in the way of leavening some little bit of the great mass?

Come yourselves back to the leaven, cultivate diligently, conscientiously, faithfully, that fellowship with Christ Himself, which is alone sufficient to equip you for this great calling. Make quite sure of your own acceptance of His spirit, and then whatever you do, utter, touch, will all be leavened, and communicate that gracious and all-blessing spirit.

XV. Balaam

"Balaam the son of Beor."—*Numb.* xxii. 5.

In Balaam there meet so much of what is highest and so much of what is lowest in human nature, that no writer of fiction would dare to conceive or try to depict such a character. The extraordinary artistic power with which so contradictory a character has been grasped and represented in the biblical narrative, has always excited the wonder of critics. So little, indeed, have some critics been able to perceive the subtle felicities of the picture, that they have blunderingly supposed two hands have been employed upon it, the one striving to convey a favourable impression of the man, the other striving to blacken his character. But it is precisely the coherence of these opposite qualities in one person which makes the picture a masterpiece well worth our study.

The mysteries that surround the origin of Balaam, the sources of his inspiration, his means and methods of divination may all be passed by. He suddenly appears on the page of sacred history as a diviner whose fame had spread from the Euphrates to the Jordan, and probably further. The king of Moab, dismayed by the advance of Israel, and believing that they were divinely guided, supposed it would be of the utmost consequence to get spiritual forces arrayed against them, and sent messengers to secure the services of Balaam. The belief in the efficacy of cursing seems to survive every other form of superstition: so that men who would stand aghast if asked to pray for a blessing on themselves or any one else, may be heard every hour using religious language in the form of a curse. The narrative in relating this embassy and its results implies that this dweller by the Euphrates worships the same God as Israel. And not only so, but the prophet Micah, who lived centuries after Balaam, can find no more profound and spiritual account to give of true religion than that which this mysterious prophet had given. "O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him. . . . Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God? . . . Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" That is Balak's question, and Balaam's answer is, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Had we no other record of Balaam's utterances than this, we could not hesitate to ascribe to him a genius for religion; to think of him as one of the few men who have from time to time been born to see what is centuries ahead of their contemporaries. And what is recorded of his prophecies in the narrative before us gives the same impression of a man of extraordinary religious and poetic genius. Moreover, he was not a mere intellect; he had his sensibilities and his aspirations; he clearly saw the beauty of a well-spent life, and yearned for the peace and hope which accompany integrity of purpose and purity of conscience. It was his ambition and his prayer that he might die the death of the righteous, and that his last end might be like his. He knew that no blessedness equals harmony with God in righteousness of life. Nor was this a mere sentimental longing. We entirely misapprehend the character of Balaam if we suppose he was one of those men of wax whose eyes fill with tears while they

pray, and their lips with anger and calumny and fraud as soon as they rise from their knees; whose religion is merely a matter of imagination and feeling, but never touches the conscience and the deeper springs of conduct. Far from this, Balaam was even heroic in his determined pursuance of what he knew to be right. He was implored by Balak to curse Israel, and yet not one word of cursing passed his lips. He was heavily bribed, honours and wealth were pressed upon him, but his answer was, "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more." The king himself takes Balaam from one hilltop to another, and day after day, in all moods of mind, seeks to find him pliable; and his one uniform answer is repeated in the narrative almost to weariness, "Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that must I do?"

Let us, then, clearly apprehend the strength of Balaam's character if we are to understand it. Few persons can withstand the earnest solicitation of the great, especially if this solicitation is backed by ample offers of what is eagerly coveted. How many statesmen have been won over by the monarchs they served to look at things from their point of view, and how easy for Balaam, while this king of Moab implored him for aid, to admit some blinding considerations! But no! what the Lord impelled him to speak, that only would he speak. And so he went home without reward or honour, having incurred the displeasure of Balak.

How, then, are we to explain this complex character and mysterious conduct? Perhaps the circumstances of the time throw the clearest light upon them. Balaam had attained unusual distinction as a prophet. He was known far and wide, not as a mere diviner, but as a man, to use his own words, "who had seen the Almighty and heard His words." This could scarcely be without his having devoted himself to the cause of God; and probably he had won this distinguished place in men's regard by austerity of life and by conduct which raised him above the suspicion of worldliness. But in the New Testament this man is execrated as a traitor who brought disaster on God's people, and who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Thus he dwelt beside the Euphrates when he heard tidings of the great people whom God had delivered, and whose cause He had made His own. How closely Balaam had studied Israel's fortunes may be gathered from his own words: and yet he had made no move to countenance them, or throw in his lot with them, or persuade the heathen to befriend them. Had he done so, how different might the Eastern kingdoms have been! But though he heard of the tide of fresh life that was flowing, though he could mark the course of this great river that was to sweep so much before it, he did not commit himself to it, but held aloof. This was his first downward step. He *did nothing* when his gifts and knowledge of God's will laid on him the responsibility of doing much. The man outside Israel who of all others might have done most to clear their path, stood apart and observed. He took no side when it was incumbent on all to take a side. The active love of good which had raised him to the position he held was now dormant.

And so when the messengers of Balak came, instead of indignantly repudiating the idea of his cursing Israel, and at once dismissing them, as any man of honour in his circumstances would have done, he takes a downward step, and says he will inquire—as if there were room for inquiry! And although he faithfully conveys to the emissaries of Balak the decision of God, the very terms in which he does so show them that he is already theirs. "The *Lord refuseth* to give me leave to go with you." It required no shrewdness to see in this sullen acquiescence in God's will that they might hope yet to win him, that indeed he was already on their side, and wished to go

with them. By holding himself aloof from the greatest movement of his day, and refusing to take a side, he had already laid himself open to temptation, and really taken the side of evil. “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Balaam did not dare explicitly to disobey God, but at heart he was separated from God’s cause, as it appeared in the world of his own time.

Evidently Balak’s messengers saw through Balaam, and possibly considered his refusal a bid for higher terms, for with such terms they at once returned to secure his aid. And on this occasion, also, instead of curtly refusing and dismissing the men, Balaam bade them stay the night that he might consult God, and now got the answer he desired. This insistence betrays what Balaam’s real intention is: he wishes to do wrong, and to do it with God’s approbation. When we dally long over a decision, and seek for reiterated intimations of God’s will in the matter, there is the appearance of religious scruple, the reality of a corrupt will and a deluded mind. Of course Balaam gets the answer he was resolved to get. “If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them.” He went; and God’s anger was kindled against him.

God is not mocked; but in this second request Balaam was bold enough to trifle with God. He might as well have inquired of God if he was to keep the sixth commandment. He ought to have acted on his own responsibility. And wherever you find a man, under pretence of religion, waiting for providence to guide him where common morality utters already a clear decision, you may be sure that man is in very slippery places. To seek for some extraordinary and personal sign in a case which any man of common honesty could settle offhand by his own conscience, is to insult God and to deceive ourselves. What a man really is doing in such circumstances is this: he is trying to get God to give him leave to do what he himself would not dare to do on account of its immorality; he is inviting God to take the responsibility of an immorality which even he himself dare not commit. If that is how a man allows his religion to stifle his moral sense, he had far better have no religion at all. Balaam’s reconsideration, then, of his duty was merely an attempt to get his duty altered. It was as if he were saying to God, “Think better of it; stretch a point; do not let me lose these bags of money, these honours I can win by going with the men.” Had he been satisfied with God’s will, he would never have consulted God again. But it was not to ascertain but to alter God’s will that he went to Him a second time. After sending the messengers away the first time, his heart had followed their gifts: and when they returned, he was delighted to see them. Here was a second chance. He could not go against God’s command, and so he audaciously proposed to throw the responsibility upon God, and make God a party to a dishonourable action. What can God do with such a man but let him have his way? It was quite obvious where Balaam’s heart was, and this trying to find that it is God’s will he should go is a mockery and a debauching of conscience.

But why is God represented as allowing Balaam to go? God allows Balaam to go because, when evil desire grows to a certain magnitude within us, nothing but reaping its fruit can save us. God is going to let him have his own way, and throws on him the responsibility of choosing. He lets him go, but, even when he goes, He follows him with warning. And warning certainly is needed, for though Balak’s messengers know they have bought him, Balaam himself believes he is obedient to God and neutral because he is resolved to say only what God bids him. But why did he go at all? Was it not with the expectation of pleasing the king of Moab—that is to say, of opposing the people of God? He went, in fact, as a traitor, and must all the way have felt that the only honourable course would be to warn Balak against

opposing the people, and to refuse even to seem to countenance him in such opposition.

Warnings in the course he was pursuing he did not lack. The dumb ass rebuked the madness of the prophet. The poor brute saw what the prophet, with all his discernment, did not see. How constantly are we thus warned! The very inanimate objects around us seem to take voice from the urgency of our danger. One thing after another takes pity on us and warns us; this occurrence and this argument is unpromising; words which strike a chill to the heart are dropped in conversation by persons who know nothing of our purposes; we are hindered, turned from our path, scared, all things remonstrate and oppose our sin and ruin, yet we say, "I'll forward; or show me more distinctly that I ought not; make it impossible for me." How often do we claim, as Balaam did, that the thing we desire should be condemned by some stronger voice than conscience, as if there were a stronger voice! How often regarding some custom we quite well know to be wrong, do we virtually say, "Let it be made physically impossible, and I will give it up." But God cannot relieve us from the responsibility of making our own choice. He sends many an angel with drawn sword to convince us that the path we are on leads to destruction; but it is we ourselves who must turn and go back. And how hard is it to do so when we have once committed ourselves to a certain course, to certain associates, to certain methods of doing business, to certain ways of spending our time; how hard for Balaam to stop halfway and say to Balak's great men, "I can go no further. I should not have come so far." No doubt he would have felt foolish, and fallen greatly in the esteem of the king, but he would have done wisely and well, and would have saved his life.

Time was still given to Balaam to consider his position. During that long ride from the Euphrates to Moab, and while he waited in the city of Arnon till Balak came, he had time to listen to conscience, to review his conduct, to weigh the probable result of associating with Moab and of seeking occasion against Israel. And time to repent was still given him even after Balak came. Indeed, what was more fitted to awaken a slumbering conscience and show both these men their folly and wickedness than to find, day after day, that no matter where they built their altar, and no matter how they appealed to God, the answer was still the same, and that Israel must be blessed. But now in the very presence of the king, and when he has come so far to aid him, it would be wholly out of place to refuse even to try to wring a favourable response from God, and go home dishonoured. And so as at first he had tried to see God's will in a different light, and find out some sanction for coming to Balak, so now he goes with Balak from hill to hill, if by chance from some point of view he may be able to see Israel cursed of God. He will not say what he does not feel about Israel, but he is quite willing to be blinded to Israel's greatness. He feels bound to say what he knows, but he is willing to know as little as possible. He dare not disobey God, but he has no real sympathy with His purposes. He is the father of all Pharisees.

Very characteristic is the manner in which the two thus "shift their ground and take now this point of view, now that, striving to curse, bit by bit, what as a whole is blessed." So men suggest evil motives, and try to curse good by pointing out that this or that part is blemished and faulty, that here there is something hypocritical, or hollow, or mistaken, or fanatical; or that the motive is bad; or that some of the persons engaged in the work are no better than they should be. Thus they walk round and round some great popular movement, the best thing in their time, in which there is most of God, and try to find a reason for cursing it and for justifying their indifference or hostility. And generally they are more successful than Balaam; for

what cause or what individual, however good as a whole, has not parts and aspects which can easily be made a handle by the pitiful malice or foolishness of timorous, unpatriotic, small-souled ungodliness?

Baffled at every point, Balaam was not yet humbled. Dismissed in disappointment and anger by Balak, he went home in sorrow and shame, but Balak's gold he was resolved to earn. He went home, not to repent, but to plot. And speedily he sold to Balak the diabolical scheme that well-nigh ruined the people of God. The men who had struck dismay into the hearts of the Moabite warriors fell an easy prey to the wiles of the priestesses of Baal and their wanton companions, and in the outburst of righteous anger that ensued Balaam fell slain before the avenging sword of Israel.

"Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more triumph for devils and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God."

Such, then, was the dreadful doom which, by a few weeks' infatuation, was reached by a man who "heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High; who saw the vision of the Almighty." No man of his time, not Moses himself, was more splendidly endowed; no man might have been expected to accomplish more or stand for ever as a bright star in the firmament of human history; and yet the end of Judas was scarcely more pitiable than his, and no name passed down through the centuries stained with a darker reproach and odium. God endowed and inspired him as His prophet, showed him things hid from other men, but all this faculty and endowment he was willing to sell to the highest bidder. Let us try, then, in closing, to gain from his treachery some insight into our own hearts.

1. Balaam's first downward step was his remaining by the Euphrates while Israel advanced to its destiny. Knowing what he knew, he should have declared himself, and in that case he would never have been troubled by Balak's messengers. Persons who are not cordially spending themselves on some good work are laying themselves open to temptation. The only way to escape being on the side of evil is to be on the side of good. This is a world in which neutrals have no chance or place at all. Balaam knew that God was in Israel, but he did not act on that knowledge; hence his fall. We also know where God is in our time. When it comes clearly home to your understanding that here or there is a good work to be done, God is speaking to you as He spoke to Balaam. You may not be able to clothe your ideas in such poetical language as Balaam; but there are movements in our society regarding which you can as certainly say, "God is there, and if I mean to be with God and go forward with His kingdom I must be there also." Balaam, of course, had his excuses for not going to throw in his lot with Israel. It was a long way to go; though he did not spare his ass when he had to go as far for money. They had a good leader already, and he could only be second. But he knew that all these excuses were idle, and that in listening to them he was defrauding himself of his true career. And so do we defraud ourselves of our true career and of the happiness and use meant for us, when we know where God and good are and do not, if at all possible, throw ourselves into such movements. Nothing is more fatal to our character and our career than to refuse to do the good we can do. We have all some gift and some opportunity, just as Balaam had; and as he, so have we our temptation. Money was his snare—money, or ease, or applause, or position, or reputation, or social considerations may be ours. If we are yielding to it, and not using our knowledge of good for the advancement of God's cause, we have taken Balaam's first step.

2. Balaam's second downward step was his not at once refusing to treat with those who wished to buy him over to obstruct the good. He was resolved not to disobey God, and yet he had no sympathy with the actual purpose of God regarding Israel; a state of mind very common, but impossible to maintain. He had a sense of duty, a fear of disobeying God, and yet he would fain have made God's will different. This is always the test of religious men. Many of us sincerely desire to keep on terms with God; we know that we must not break His positive commands; but we do not always find ourselves in thorough and active sympathy with the various movements by which He is fulfilling His will in the world. We see that to give ourselves to these means the loss of reputation, money, leisure, and so we listen to the other side. Our soul sometimes turns away from these unremunerative, obscure, arduous, distasteful labours and associations which the forwarding of good in the world calls for. God likes that work, but we do not. Israel has not for us the attractions it has for Him. And so we sell to the highest bidder the gift God has given us. In other words, we let ourselves drift into companies and pursuits that suit and pander to our natural tastes and forward our selfish and worldly prospects, and so the good that is in us is often used to obstruct God's will, and not to forward it. But to have the means of doing good and to use that for the increase of evil, what can be more treacherous, what more certain to end in disaster? Are literary men, are artists, are statesmen as careful as they should be that their good gifts are used for the advancement of good? Estimable men, who would break no commandments, are yet constantly betrayed into false positions and into real antagonism to good by their lack of sympathy with God's purposes.

3. And this leads, as it led Balaam, to a desire to twist God's will into conformity with our desires. Bishop Butler says that though second thoughts may be best in matters of judgment, first thoughts are best in matters of conscience. Overdone solicitude to discover God's will means unwillingness to listen at once to conscience. As Balaam went from hill to hill, so people go from one point of view to another, round and round their own position or purpose in life, to see if from no point of view it will appear right and good, and agreeable to God. They go and consult their friends; they appeal to chance; they let their minds be swayed by the most trivial consideration if only they can be persuaded that duty coincides with pleasure, that they may safely do what they long to do. Many a man who fears to do what is universally recognized as wrong, yet does much harm by refusing to see what is wrong for him. Many a man who would not go counter to what is clearly seen to be God's will, refuses to see what is God's will for himself. The unwillingness of men to believe that to be God's will which runs counter to their purposes, can hardly be exaggerated. "An Arab prince was anxious to avenge the murder of his father. But he wished to do it with God's sanction and blessing. Accordingly he consulted an idol of much repute by drawing from three arrows in his presence. On one of these arrows was inscribed the word 'command,' on the second 'prohibition,' on the third 'delay.' He drew, and drew out 'prohibition': dissatisfied, he shuffled the arrows a second time, and the second time drew out the same. Twice again he shuffled them, and each time with the same result. In his anger he broke the arrows in pieces, and threw them at the idol's head, exclaiming, 'Wretch! if it had been thy father who had been killed, thou wouldst not have forbidden his being avenged.' "

Thus, even when we seem to be devoutly waiting to know God's will, it is our own will we are resolved to have.

4. Finally, Balaam would fain have enjoyed the rewards of innocence, though living a guilty life. Looking at Israel, whom he is retained to curse, and seeing the happiness of a God-guided destiny, he cries, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” Most pathetic is it to see a man in full view of happiness and yet conscious it is not his; separated as by an impassable gulf from the state he recognizes as alone worth living in; feeling in the very depths of his nature that the service of God and life with God are joy and felicity, and yet held back by his own attachment to evil from attaining that state. It is supreme misery for a man to see a good and happy condition, from which he himself is by his own weakness excluded. No man needs to be persuaded that in the time of judgment it will be well with the righteous, that the consequences of sin and the consequences of righteousness are not the same. The profit or gratification which sin brings, the sinner would rather have if he could with innocence. And because we wish to reconcile a careless, indolent, unreal life with the rewards of earnestness and self-sacrifice, we gradually think or live as if we thought these incompatible things can be reconciled. But, to quote Bishop Butler again, “things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be.” You cannot alter the great laws and facts of your own life by merely wishing them altered, or by seeing how lamentable the results of your conduct are likely to be. To live the life of the sinner and die the death of the righteous is commonly attempted, but it is impossible. The only way to die the death of the righteous is to be righteous.

XVI. Salvation For The Chief Of Sinners

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."—1 *Tim.* i. 15.

Were we asked to name the chief of sinners, probably the name of Paul would be about the last to occur to us. The Emperor Augustus, alarmed at his own prosperity, and fearing that happiness so unmixed as his might create jealousy, attired himself once a year as a beggar, and sat asking alms in a crowded part of the city. It is with similar feelings of voluntary humility, and as if apologizing for their exceptional comfort, that some persons profess themselves "miserable sinners," although surrounded with everything that can make life easy and pleasant to them. There is in the human heart an obstinate superstition that God grudges us happiness, and that if we are happy we should at least wear sackcloth and ashes before Him. And, possibly, it may be fancied that Paul's words ought not to be pushed as if he really meant he was the worst of men, and that all he intended was a decent humility. But if we can suppose that Paul thought there was some virtue in calling himself the chief of sinners, while he was in fact convinced he was much better than others, we have yet to learn both the nature of humility and the character of Paul. Humility must be founded on truth; an affectation of humility is silly and offensive. To call ourselves the chief of sinners with a feeling of self-complacency in our humility is a mark of a nature neither sincere nor simple. And for a man of so clear a spiritual understanding as Paul to make this confession untruly would have gone far to make it true.

Was it, then, Paul's ignorance of the ways of the world and inexperience of the actual sins to which men are addicted, that led him to call himself the chief of sinners? He had, indeed, at one period led the life of a scholar, carefully shielded at the feet of Gamaliel from the villainies of the multitude: and men brought up in this way, and living a retired and refined life, are sometimes wonderfully ignorant of the real vices of the world. They suspect the actual vices of society as little as they suspect that cannibalism, or the flogging of slaves, or the burial alive of female children, is practised in the next street to them. And when such men publish to the world their religious experience, it loses almost all its force, from this very cause, that the sins they deplore seem to us but slight shadows cast by virtues we have not yet attained. When in such biographies we read how, at the age of ten or twelve, the wandering of affection from God was bewailed as lamentable evidence of sin; or when, at the age of thirty, one evil thought was sufficient ground for the humiliation of weeks, one is tempted to envy such men their sins, because they are committed about objects which scarcely enter our life at all. They are committed on so much higher a level of life than that on which we move, that we are discouraged, and think that if these be the kind of people who are saved, we can never be of their number.

But the idea that Paul thought himself the chief of sinners because he had known little of the sins of other men cannot enter the mind of any one who remembers how he had beaten about promiscuously in all the greatest cities of the world, mixing with the tradesmen, the soldiers, the criminals; taking the measure in his own person of their ruffianism; entering their temples, talking in their schools, lying in their prisons, at a time when, if ever, hell was loose upon earth. Paul had passed through

and lived his own keen and intense human life in them: he had been a point of refuge in the last resort for many a heart-broken and paralyzed sinner; creatures with scarce a remnant of human nature discernible in them had come to him and told him their sins, and had shown him in their hopeless soul, their weakened mind, their scarcely living body, the greatness of their sins, and yet he looks at them all and says, "Sinners, of whom I am chief."

What, then, does Paul mean? If it is neither a mere form of speech he uses, nor the utterance of ignorance; if he neither thought it proper to assume a "graceful humility," nor spoke in ignorance of the ordinary sins of men, what did he mean? If in good faith he judged himself to be a greater sinner than any of those foul wretches he had seen in Corinth or in Rome, on what did he ground this judgment? Now, it is a commonplace of religion that in proportion as a man is himself good, he is quick and severe in dealing with his own unrighteousness, and charitable towards other men; admitting all conceivable apology for them, "hoping all things, believing all things" in their exculpation, but condemning himself without a hearing. And this fact, in the first place, must be taken into account in explaining Paul's words. His own sins were his immediate concern, on them the weight of God's law had first manifested itself in his conscience; and in connection with them, and not with the sins of other men, had God's holiness first revealed to him its reality, its penetrative truth, its power, its relation to human life.

And it is so universally. There seems to be less sense of sin in our day than in past generations. Penitence that breaks the heart is supposed to be obsolete, and to have gone out with the Puritans. If this were so, it could only mean that a film has grown over the eye of this generation, preventing it from seeing God; that it is afflicted with spiritual cataract. For he who sees God, sees sin also. And though we know it cannot be true that each Christian is the chief of sinners, yet each Christian is again and again convinced—and not in moody hours, in which everything is seen distorted, but in his hours of clearest vision and most inspiring purpose—that no one can possibly have been quite so bad as himself. In the slums of our cities we may find some who show a coarser brutality, a thorough disregard for appearances, an outspoken blasphemy, and filth and rage; the manifestations of sin may be more violent and glaring; but the inward heart, the real root of sin, is it more noxious in them than in us? Had we been born and brought up as they have been, is there not that in us which would have responded as eagerly to temptation?

"What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

We *know* our own sin, we can only guess at the sins of others. We know *all* our own sinful life, the root and the obstinacy of it; but of others we see only parts and appearances. Excuses that others may make for us, we know to be incorrect and invalid; excuses which we make for others we have no reason to disbelieve. The worst features of sin we cannot see in the case of others: the inward, native propensity to evil, the wicked suggestions that dare not betray themselves in the life, the inveteracy of sin which resists good influences and impressions, all that for very shame we keep to ourselves—all this we are compelled to recognize as characterizing ourselves, but we feel it to be unfair to ascribe it to others. We find it, indeed, hard to believe that persons who have had the same advantages as ourselves, and have lived the same outward life, should resemble us within. We cannot believe that they habitually occupy the same attitude towards sin as we do, and are not more hardened against its incursions, and have not more truly responded to good influences.

What are we to conclude from this inevitable experience, from this fact of the Christian conscience? We must at any rate conclude the greatness of our own sin. We cannot, dare not ascribe such sin as our own to the most abandoned and godless of men; our own conscience, if it be awake, forbids us to lay at any man's door what we know lies at our own. After all that sinners have invented in this world, after the human passions have been let loose in all varieties of circumstances, after sin has done its very worst, even to the wonder and abhorrence of men, we are not able to say that any sinner has offended God more than we ourselves have done; down through all that infamy, that loathsome corruption and depravity we must travel to find our place. We have no other guide than our own conscience, and our own conscience imperatively bids us take our place at the very lowest of all. Do we turn with horror from the depth of ignominy to which we are thus reduced, do we shudder at the company in which we find ourselves, do we cry out at last in unaffected shame, "Surely it cannot be to this we have brought ourselves"? But conscience inexorably says, If the lowest be not your place, point, then, to the man who has more wittingly, more deceitfully, with a more godless self-pleasing, sinned against God. Take the man who has gone to ruin by your side; did God find that man's heart harder to bend to holiness than He has found yours? Did *he* resist God more than you have done, did he overleap more barriers to evil? Can you say that it was not in you to become what he has become? Do you know anything of the way in which sin begins with a man, its quiet, innocent, friendly approach, and can you persuade yourself that you were not open to that, and could not have been so betrayed had God not stood your friend? And if this be so, if you cannot bring yourself to say that any man is a greater sinner than yourself, if in all honesty, and again and again as life goes on, you feel that there is not one sinner who has such cause for shame as yourself, what need have you to come to Christ Jesus, who came to save sinners!

This, then, is to be recognized, that Paul calls himself the chief of sinners just as all men do when really convicted of sin. As every lover thinks no man was ever so happy as he, so every sinner thinks no man can be quite so bad as he. But evidently, apart from all we think of our sins, they have in themselves a definite amount of heinousness, greater or less than those of other men. In one sense, indeed, all sins are equal: for as James says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." He breaks the law if he breaks any part of it. Break one link of the chain, and the weight falls as if the whole were broken. Break down a yard of paling, and the whole fence is useless. Or, as a classical writer says, "Every one vice kills the soul, though every virtue does not make alive; a man is spotted though he have but one stain; he is not clean, unless he be all clean. A cup is broken if only the top is broken; it is not entire unless every part of it is inviolate."

That is true, yet all men are agreed that some sins are much worse than others. The poisoner who plots the removal of those who stand between him and an inheritance is a worse man than he who commits murder in a brawl. The merchant who makes an illegitimate gain is a greater sinner than the pickpocket whose sole education has been in crime. Our moral sense is grievously dulled and misled by the social necessity of marking with special reprobation sins against property. The standard Paul here uses for measuring sins is their relation to God's mercy rather than their bearing on character. We are apt to think those sins worst which bring the bitterest consequences on the sinner, which degrade and sensualize the whole character; and perhaps these are the sins that most seriously threaten a man's own happiness. Others, again, such as want of consideration for other people, the sinner finds it most difficult to forgive himself for. But here Paul calls himself the chief of sinners because

his sins were of a kind which seemed the most unlikely to receive God's pardon. And, indeed, had Paul never been converted, he would have taken rank with Judas and with Herod; his name would as certainly have been the synonym for all that is wicked and destructive in a persecutor, as now it is for all that is devoted in Christian life. He breathed threatenings and slaughters; he could not speak or feel about anything else; he lived upon persecution; he was, as he here significantly says, "injurious," determinedly setting himself to damage the cause of Christ, and devoting his great powers to the task of extirpating it from the world. Perhaps of all the enemies the Christian faith has had, and they have been neither few nor mild, Paul was the most deliberate, the most powerful, and the most dangerous. It is not easy to forgive one who is doing his utmost, and with much success, to wreck our plans, to annihilate all we have lived to accomplish, to injure as seriously as possible those we specially love. Now it was this Christ did for Paul: He met him while he was filled with fury and hate against the persons He loved, and while his hands were stained with the blood of one of the ablest advocates and fairest characters that ever helped and beautified the Church; He met him while hating the name of Jesus, and instead of damning him as a hopelessly hardened sinner, breathed His own spirit of love into his heart, and blessed him with a life of service that far outdoes all other human lives.

All this was so apparent to Paul himself—so apparent, probably, to all who lived alongside of the facts of Paul's persecution and conversion, that he felt he could build on it an incontrovertible argument in favour of Christ's clemency. "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering." If any sinner was beyond the possibility of salvation, he was that man. Other men had sinned more grossly, more licentiously, but none with so defined an intention to injure Christ and His cause. That a man so hostile to Christ should have been raised by Him to a rank second to no other man, stands as a token to all generations that none need despair.

To all persons, then, who feel that theirs has been a very shameful career; to all who have taken so little interest in Christ that they cannot conceive what interest He can have in them; to all who know that they are not the kind of people that do much good in the world; to all who are ashamed to hope for much, or to claim boldly to be heirs of God, and attempt a thoroughly Christian life; to all conscious of great sin, Paul says, "The grace that saved me is sufficient for you." Your sins are great, greater than you think, but not greater than Paul's. More polluting to the character, more debasing, more selfish and silly, they may be; but certainly not greater in the sense of needing more grace and love in Christ to pardon them. You may have tried every kind of sin that was open to you; you may have yielded to every form of self-indulgence that ever tempted you; you may have continued in shameful sin long after you knew something of God's nearness to you, and love for you; you may have carried your sin far on with you into a would-be Christian life, and mixed in your own soul things holy and profane, Christ's purity and your own impurity, until you are horrified at yourself, and cannot but think that exceptional punishment must fall upon you; but Paul says, and says truly, that you have not sinned as he sinned, and that as he found mercy, so may you.

But with many persons the difficulty is not in believing that they can be pardoned, but rather in hoping that they can be cleansed and made a satisfaction to themselves. They feel that they have injured themselves much more than they have injured Christ; they are conscious that they have so really and substantially injured themselves that recovery seems hopeless. They do not despair of being able to

abandon one or two evil habits, nor of being able to do some charitable and self-sacrificing acts; but even after succeeding so far, they are more disappointed than ever. They perceive that there is a constraint, a laboured effort in all they do, and that their virtue lacks the crowning characteristic—grace, beauty, naturalness. A new root of all virtue must be planted within them; and it is the perception of this that makes them feel how insufficient they are for their own salvation.

Now, Christ meets us at that very point to which reason and experience bring us, and He says, "This very thing you need is what I provide for you—a new nature. I mean nothing else than to produce within you such changes as will make virtue necessary to you." Surveying the world, considering the obstinacy, carelessness, coarseness and viciousness of sinners, Christ saw that salvation was possible, and He has come to save us. And He does so by winning our hearts; by inspiring us with a new love, new views, new hopes, new aims, all of which centre in Himself. He proclaims Himself as our life. His consciousness of the greatness of His love for us, and of the steadfastness of His purpose to save us, teaches Him that we can learn to love Him and to be true to Him. Nothing short of this will do; the mere thought of Him may bring a little purity and elevation into your life, but nothing short of becoming His will save you from your sin. Through Him you enter the true life of man. He *is* the Door. This truth that He came to save sinners is worthy of all acceptance; not to be stumbled at and questioned, not to be coldly acknowledged as possibly true, not to be listened to with sadness and reluctance, but worthy of full, hearty, intense, and most grateful acceptation.

And now there is time to make only one remark regarding the salvation from sin that is in Christ.

To those who have believed on Christ, a very serious difficulty may have arisen about the manner in which this salvation is practically effected. You have believed, you say, for ten or twenty years, and you seem to be yet as much a sinner as ever. It is replied that this is your own fault, that you must remember very many occasions on which, so far from watching against temptation, you have courted sin. Well, but, you answer, it was for this very reason I gave myself to Christ, that this instability of mine might be obviated. I knew I could not keep myself from sin, and therefore I gave myself to Him, expecting that He would save me, and it seems I am little better than if I had been in my own hands. If there is any meaning in being saved by another, any reality in this salvation from sin by Christ, must it not mean that He secures that those who believe in Him be not left to themselves? If Christ does not secure that I pray, that I entertain holy thoughts and dispositions, that I watch against temptation; if, in short, He does not take me wholly into His hand, with all my sin, and save me from my own carelessness and folly, can I in any real sense call Him my Saviour? If it depends on my own earnestness and resolution whether I continue to use means of obtaining and keeping grace, then I am only half-saved. I thought in giving myself to Christ that I was giving myself to One who would really effect in me salvation from sin; who would prevent me from becoming careless, and not only provide help, but secure that I should at each stage of my progress earnestly seek and obtain that help.

This is a genuine difficulty that the Apostle James, the most practical of men, thinks worthy of being met. His reply is indeed summary: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God"—that is, let no man lay the blame on God when he sins; let no man think, Christ saw this I was drifting into, why did He not care for me and rescue me, when I was myself so careless and so specially in need of another's kind care and aid? Men of proud tempers, who are ashamed of falling so often into

old sin, grow sulky when they do so, and while they acknowledge their own weakness, they lay the fault at the door of Him who cannot sin.

But because this difficulty lies at the very heart of salvation, let us look at it. The difficulty is—I am not taken wholly out of my own hands, I can still sin; why *is* this, why is it that Christ does not interfere more with my own will; why does He not at once cut the ground from all my sins by putting it into my heart, and keeping it in my heart, to beg His grace continually, and so to hold to Him that I cannot sin? Is anything short of this worthy of being called salvation?

Now, when one looks at it, it is just because the salvation is so genuine that our experience is such as it is. The object aimed at in our salvation is our real moral restoration from our condition as sinners, our real spiritual upbuilding in the image of God. It is we ourselves who are to be changed; it is not only that the lives led by us and the fruit produced by us should be better, but that we ourselves should be perfected—our evil affections deadened, our weak wills strengthened, the whole nature renewed. But this can never be effected by the mere application to us of an external force. We might be enabled by another to produce good fruit for a time, but unless our own nature had been concerned in producing that fruit, unless it had been produced by the real workings of the man's own desires and energies, then we ourselves should be just where we were, no stronger, no better. The child will never learn to walk if the mother gives it too much aid. The aid must be so given as not to interfere with or supersede, but only to support the child's own efforts. Were the object just to get the child to the other side of the room, the mother could do that apart from any effort of the child; but the mother can never teach the child to walk without his own efforts. All these awkward movements, that slow, stumbling, tottering gait must therefore precede the walking; not because the mother is neglectful, but because the object is to let the child find the use of its own limbs.

Just so does Christ save us. With an infinitely finer and more delicate application of His saving power does He excite, encourage and aid our efforts, but never so as to make them not our own. Without Him we can do nothing, but without us He does nothing within us. Each desire to be holier, each purpose to become so, and each attainment is certainly due to Him, but as certainly to us also. Every man is conscious that it does in quite a true sense depend on himself whether he become holy or no; not on himself alone, but none the less on himself. And were Christ to give us such help as should not only move and support, but quite supersede our own efforts, He would thereby destroy, and not save us; He would keep us for ever weak. And because He truly saves us, He inspires us to work out our own salvation. He might interfere more manifestly in our life, He might take us in His arms at a rough or slippery place, and we might thus arrive cleaner and fresher, but certainly weaker, at our destination. The aid He gives is like life itself, deep and hidden, but the spring of all else; not superseding, but giving energy to all our own feelings and actings.

Our salvation, therefore, may be going on while we yet sin frequently; as the tide may be rising steadily though each wave seems to fall back from the point gained; as the battle may eventually be won, though only after you have received many wounds and reverses, and though at many points in it you were defeated. We can be saved from sin: of this God has no doubt. Were the case of that man among us who feels himself most entangled and debased referred to God, He would say, "Yes, he may be cleansed and delivered." Let us not, then, doubt and hesitate, when God has gone before and paved the way for us. Let us for ourselves cordially, and in its fullest sense, accept the saying that Christ came into the world to save sinners.

XVII. Sin Finding Out

"Be sure your sin will find you out."—*Numb*. xxxii. 23.

Whoever knows anything at all of the life he is in must already understand that the law is rigidly true, that what a man sows that shall he also reap. The boy has it in his power to sow truthfulness, purity, courage, self-denial, industry, or falsehood, sensuality, cowardice, sloth; and a corrupt and careless boyhood or youth as certainly leads to a perplexed, anxious, feeble manhood, and to a premature and despicable age, as bad, poor seed of any kind produces a bad, poor crop. There is no way out of it. It is an inevitable, universal law. Evil action always and everywhere produces evil consequences. For a time, these consequences may be hidden or may be inoperative, but nature forgets nothing and never fails. The seed sown may lie for months under the clod; extreme varieties of weather may pass over the apparently irresponsive soil; but sooner or later the blade appears and the rigid justice of nature renders back to the sower his own with interest. Often a man forgets what he has sown in his life. Twenty years pass over his head, thirty years of deep-cutting experience lie between him and his old offence, but at length it springs up and spoils the harvest of his life. Long after the pleasure is forgotten, long after he has learned to fling from him the gain of his sin the punishment comes, so that the sinner cannot but cry out "Thou writest bitter things against me; and makest me to possess the sins of my youth." Sin can never be judged by its immediate effects, for it is a seed sown, and you have yet to learn what it will yield in the reaping-time.

This is a truth which deserves our consideration, for it is natural to us all to fancy that we may enjoy the profit or relief or pleasure sin offers and go securely and comfortably on, leaving the sin for ever behind us; that we may sin and be done with it; that we may turn aside to iniquity and come back and be lost among the throng of those who have held on in the right way. In opposition to this fancy, the truth of the text is that our sin will not be done with us when we are done with it; that however short a time we give to sin, however hastily we flee from it, however skilfully cover our retreat by plunging into a thicket of engagements and good deeds, our sin will track and dog us through every turn of life until it finds us out and pulls us down and compels us to understand that every evil done is evil to him who did it.

1. Sin finds out the sinner, first, with shameful memories. The sinner may flee from the past, but he cannot alter it, and the waters of Lethe are fabulous. "Teach me," bitterly exclaimed Themistocles to the man who offered to improve his memory, "teach me to forget." Here there is no forgetting. The past always stands as you have made it. There are men who from the first have resisted temptation and refused to stoop to folly, who have lived a wise, honourable, aspiring life; but you are not one of these and never can be. If you have spent your youth in a shameful, low, animal, selfish, misguided fashion, no power on earth or in heaven can alter that. You can never live your youth over again. You know what it might have been, you know also what it is. However much you repent, however thoroughly you reform, you cannot undo that piece of your life and replace it with conduct you could now look back upon with pleasure. The shuttle you once so recklessly and eagerly shot across your life has woven into it a pattern which shall now for ever characterize your early life. That and no other stands as what you judged best to be done with the beginning and formative

period of a rational and immortal existence. That is what represents you—your will, your thoughts of life, your purposes. In those years, before the necessities of labour, and the restraints of society and the aids of Christian grace influenced you, you showed what your nature is; and all through life you are pursued by the discouraging latent consciousness that you are a degraded person. You have at your first step in life flung away its greatest stay and comfort, the consciousness of having done your best, of having played your part well, of having earnestly and generously striven for what is right.

In youth especially we are liable to be led into sinful courses under the impression that we are not choosing these as our permanent ways, but are merely experimenting in life and can change if we see cause. We can, by God's mercy, change, but we can never change the part of our life we have led. There it stands condemning our folly, our blindness, our wickedness; and from it all through life there rise voices of self-contempt. That part of our life, we find, was not experimental, but final, irreversible, unchangeable. We cannot try how self-indulgence and self-seeking do and then in their place insert the life temperance and godliness would have made. Your youth you have but once, to make it or to mar it. This fairest portion of your days is now taking its final shape under your hands.

2. But a misspent youth pains us not only by the remembrance of the past, but by crippling and incapacitating us for present duty and enjoyment. Our past is not connected with our present merely by memory. In our past our present is rooted, and from it we are wholly derived. Let no doctrine of regeneration delude you into the belief that at any moment you please you can leap into a wise, virtuous, refined, godly character. It is not so. If you give entertainment to evil thoughts now, they will not be forbidden entrance when you would exclude them. If you accustom yourself to look at things from a worldly, frivolous, impure point of view, that attitude will continue when you would fain be heavenly-minded. The child is allowed to become self-willed, indolent, sensual, passionate, crafty, and all the spiritual strength of the man is consumed in repressing these pitiful vices. The evil which a single correction might once have healed, the lust which one act of self-denial might once have quenched, has now become the man's characteristic. So that Christian people instead of having all their strength free for helping others have enough to do, in nine cases out of ten, to keep their own heads above water. All through life they are pestered by some one infirmity that goes far to counteract their influence; and even when they would do good it turns to evil through the sullying breath of their old nature.

There are two lines upon which sin follows us from the past. Their consequences appear in our life or in our character. They bring misery or they bring moral degradation. Sins which involve transgression of the laws of bodily health bring visible retribution. And would God it were needless to speak of such things here; would God it were certain that in none of our number such retribution shall ever be visible! But what is more obvious in life than that men of finest talents, of good education, in favouring circumstances, sink under the power of some evil passion until with diseased body, wasted intellect and deadened soul they are scarcely recognizable? Sins against the laws of society are punished by loss of social position, by open shame, by poverty and distress. Many a man has been confident that his sin was not of a kind to mar his usefulness or to blast his happiness, and has at last found it to defeat and humble him at every turn. Many a man has supposed that his sin concerned only himself, and when too late finds it touches with serious injury the lives he chiefly loves. In the most subtle and unexpected ways does sin make itself

felt in the life of the sinner, bringing in its train entanglement, difficulty, disaster. The sin you favour will lead you to sins you detest; and the indulgence you allow yourself will wound you in the most vulnerable part. But are we to call these consequences of sin its penalty?

A well-known theologian has argued against the identity of consequence and punishment in the following words: “Two men are equally guilty of drunkenness and profligacy. But one of them is a man of robust constitution: he has wealth and leisure. He sins and sins flagrantly; but he shoots in the autumn, hunts in the winter, and spends his summer in his yacht on the coast of Scotland or of Norway. The other has weak health, and is compelled by his circumstances to live a sedentary life. The one, notwithstanding his vices, lives till he is seventy, and is vigorous to the last; the other is the victim of miserable diseases, and dies an ignominious death long before he is fifty. Where is the equality in the ‘visible’ penalties of sin? The eternal laws appear to receive the bribes of the rich and to trample on the helplessness of poverty.”

Such an argument is specious, but misleading. The consequences of sins against bodily health are of course counteracted by attention to the laws of bodily health. And if the sinner does not transgress these laws he will not suffer in his body. But this merely brings out more conspicuously the much-neglected fact that the chief punishment and consequences of sin must be looked for in the character. All outward disaster, all disease and wretchedness that sin works in the life are but the outward sign of the ruin it works within. It is there the gravest consequences are found; there, in the callousness, the carnality, the cruel selfishness, the wholly degraded nature of the sinner that the true character and the lasting consequence of sin are to be seen. Outward distresses might be borne, outward difficulties might be faced, “if all were well, alas! if all were well at home.” It is when the sinner comes to himself and sees that he is stained all through, that he begins to understand the reality and power of sin. When he finds that not in his circumstances which may be altered, not in his body or any outward thing which he may abandon, but in his inmost self sin has made its deepest mark, it is then he knows the awful consequences of transgression. It is I, myself, who am the worse for sin; it is I who suffer first; it is I who every day reap the fruit of sin in a diseased and disabled spiritual condition, in blindness to the largest realities, in contentment with contemptible attainments, in indifference to the best things and inability to win them. To be a sinner is the sorest punishment of sin.

When this is once clearly seen it is evident that the punishment of sin is inevitable. As sins against natural laws are invariably punished, as fire burns, no matter whose be the hand that is in it, so sin uniformly and in every case brings spiritual degradation. The laws of our spiritual nature are “self-acting,” as are the other laws with which we have to do. No sin is committed without leaving its mark.

But you say, “There is repentance.” You know little of the power of sin if you thus glibly promise yourself repentance. Listen to the confession of one who has a foremost place in English literature and who was not judged by his contemporaries to have sinned to any dangerous extent. “Of a change in my condition there is no hope. The waters have gone over me. But out of the black depths, could I be heard, I would cry out to all those who have but set a foot in the perilous flood. Could the youth, to whom the flavour of his first sinful enjoyment is delicious as the opening scenes of life, or the entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation, and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man shall feel himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will—to see this

destruction and have no power to stop it, and yet to feel it all the way emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him and yet not to be able to forget a time when it was otherwise; to bear about the piteous spectacle of his own self-ruins; could he feel the body of the death out of which I cry hourly with feebler and feebler outcry to be delivered—it were enough to make him dash aside the most pressing or subtle temptation."

What can such a man make of repentance? Is he not more likely to class himself with those who seek it when the door is shut; who know that others have abandoned sin and have entered into life, but that they are shut out in outer darkness? Repentance is not at our beck; and to sin for a little longer in the expectation that you can repent at pleasure is a complete misunderstanding of the surest laws of your nature. Repentance is never easy, and every day becomes more difficult.

But even if under these agonized words there did run the truest repentance, yet what a task has such a man before him if he is ever to be free from sin! The springs of moral action are broken within him; his will enfeebled, his health gone, his intellect darkened and confused—if saved, it is as a brand plucked from the burning. As soon as he sets himself to the attainment of holiness his sin finds him out and visits him with a thousand disabilities. He finds the truth of the language of Job: "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." He fancied he could use sin as a garment in which for a time he could masquerade and lay it aside in the morning when the real work of life began. He finds it is like the fabled garment of Nessus, which adheres to his flesh and eats with its poison into the inmost springs of his life. The sins he has harboured and encouraged will not now be dismissed by a word. His pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence have engrained selfishness into his character till he wonders at his own callousness to the sufferings and needs of others. His worldliness which he meant to be only partial and temporary has produced permanent insensibility to spiritual interests. His resistance of conviction has hardened him against all good influence, and he has lost the capacity of discriminating between good and evil. At every point he finds how grievous an injury he has done himself by his sin. The wasted youth from which there has followed us into manhood no inward strength, no confirmed habits of virtue, no self-control, no sympathy with God's purposes; the false and foolish steps that have entangled us in a series of difficulties, the opportunities we once for all missed,—these things tell us very plainly that it is easier forgetting the pleasures of sin than its consequences, that the consequences remain when the pleasure is buried, that it is *not* all the same whether we live a godly or ungodly youth if only we turn to Christ afterwards.

If, then, there are any who think lightly of sin and who are encouraged in sin by an implicit understanding that no great harm will come of it, I pray you to be sure your sin will find you out. Be assured that higher thoughts will one day visit you, higher aims will one day win your spirit, a nobler view of life present itself to you; and how are you to respond to those new and higher calls if your nature is debased by sin? You do yourself incredible wrong. There are duties in life, social, domestic, personal, which you will despise yourself if you cannot discharge, and you will not be able to discharge them if in youth you do not act your part well and keep yourself unsullied by the contamination of sin. There are enjoyments in life for which sin unfits you. I do not speak of the highest enjoyments, but of natural enjoyments, *in the same kind* as those you now crave, and which are possible only to those whose conscience is laden with no evil remembrances, whose nature is contracted and withered by no familiarity with sin, who can give themselves to enjoyment with the freedom,

fearlessness and abandonment which are reserved for the innocent only. In vain will you strive to leave your past behind you. If you sin, then no more at all can you have that fineness of feeling which only ignorance of evil can preserve, no more that high and great conscientiousness which once broken is never repaired, no more that courage and wisdom which accompany an upright and steady career, no more that respect from other men which instinctively departs from those who have lost self-respect.

But how does this doctrine tally with the gospel? That our sin will find us out; that what we sow we must also reap; that every man shall receive according to the things done in his body, whether they be good or bad—these are truths legibly written on all human life, they are laws which operate with a regularity and impartiality as unfailing as the rise of the tides or the procession of the seasons. What, then, has Christ accomplished for us? Does He stand between the sinner and the natural consequences of his sin? To answer this question we have but to look to the first sinner saved after His death, the thief who hung beside Him on the cross. What this sinner received from Christ was not immunity from the consequences of sin, but assurance of God's favour and of Christ's friendship. Of the natural results of his life of crime there was no reversal, no mitigation. Christ's power was not put forth to unfasten the criminal from the cross he had earned. There are cases in which this inevitable law is obscured. For in life much is sown besides our sin of which we reap the fruit, and sometimes by the foresight of friends or by the providence of God we are saved from the results of our own deeds. What others do for our good has its result. But the one thing we can calculate on is that we must reap as we have sown, and that Christ's work does not interfere with this law.

What, then, does the work of Christ? Mainly two things: it gives us the pardon of God, and it creates a new spirit within us. The pardon of God, though it does not check consequences or reverse natural law, gives us very different thoughts about the consequences of our sins, and sets us in a new relation to them. The pardon of God carries with it restoration to His favour, but not exemption from punishment. A lad takes out his father's favourite horse and in trying to leap a fence breaks the horse's neck and his own collar-bone. Pained as he is while lying in the field he fears his father's anger more than the setting of the bone. And when he is taken home he is delighted to be assured that his father is filled with pity and readily accepts his contrite apologies. And the restored sense of his father's love, which his fault had clouded, knits the bond between father and son more firmly than ever. But this happy sense of pardon does not lessen the actual pain of his broken bone, though it may help him to bear it.

So is it when we return from sin to God. His pardon does not shield us from the consequences of our sin, but it makes our whole feeling different.

Pardon, in fact, is the beginning of all hope. To know ourselves beloved of God, guided and cherished and trained by Him is to be lifted into a new kind of life. Believing that we are accepted into true and abiding fellowship with the Supreme, we no longer look at the consequences of sin as mere tokens of His anger, but as the wise and kindly and needful discipline by which He forms us as His children. We can face these consequences now with courage and hopefulness, because we know they will work for our good.

Let us not, then, be deceived. Whether we repent or not, whether we become Christians or not, our sins will find us out. They find us out by present failure and

weakness, by coldness, perplexity, corruption and distress of many kinds; and often in punishments even more terrible and disabling. And therefore we are pressed to an early acceptance of Christ. It is not all the same whether you live without Him or not. It is not all the same whether you sin or not, and it cannot in any case be all the same. Still less is it in any case better to sin, better to make no earnest endeavour to cleanse heart and life and meet the requirements of human life, of truth, and of God. Be appearances what they may, be the voices of temptation seductive as they will, it is to your disadvantage, to your moral detriment and grief that in any matter, small or great, you violate conscience and repudiate the higher and better life to which it calls you.

Secondly, Christ produces within us a new spirit. We find in ourselves new forces arrayed against sin, and these forces at once set in motion a new series of consequences and results which counterwork the results of sin. At every point the penitent sees traces of his sin, but every day the new life which Christ gives him is sowing for him seeds which will spring up in happiness, in service, in all that blesses human life. The new life which Christ gives does not at once abolish sinful tendencies, but it gives us power to fight against them; it does not on the spot emancipate us from all the bonds we have formed by sin, but it communicates a hope and a strength which, we feel, will one day effectually deliver us.

The salvation that is in Christ is real and it is perfect, but it works in harmony with our nature and with the nature of the world in which we are. It does bring deliverance from all evil, but it does so by building up in us a sound and patiently developed character and not by magical transportations into an unreal world. Recognize the facts of life and experience, look steadily at the laws of human nature, and you will all the more clearly recognize the truth and suitableness of Christ's aid.

XVIII. The Strait Gate

"Enter ye in at the strait gate."—*Matt*. vii. 13.

That is to say, life is difficult, not easy. To be saved is an exceptional thing. The chances are against us. It is an unwelcome, saddening intimation, yet it is uttered by lips that spoke more comfortingly and more hopefully to men than any others dared. It is not the utterance of a morbid cynic whose own failure in life colours his view of life as a whole; it is uttered by One with whom dejection and sourness were unknown. It is the Saviour of the world who admits that, in spite of all He does, many are destroyed. Our nature makes a strong resistance to such ideas. There is that in us which always says, "Do not put yourself about; you may surely run the chance other men are running; if you are wrong, so are they all, and to err with so overwhelming a majority is probably as safe, and certainly less responsible, than to make an independent choice with the few who choose rightly. Do not burden yourself with the responsibility of finding for yourself the right gate into life; you are begun, you have only to hold on in a seemly and decent way, not trampling on your neighbours, and all will be well. All these warning voices you hear, that tell you to beware of life, to walk carefully,—all these voices are merely the moanings of fear or the ravings of fanaticism. Is it not manifestly absurd to suppose that we are placed in a world in which our first duty is to begin and *correct* everything; that a life is granted to us which is but a veiled death, filled with embarrassing and dangerous situations, a life the first strength of which must be given to altering the entire course and character it would naturally take?"

Every one feels the force of what nature thus pleads. We are conscious of a reluctance to revise thoroughly the whole framework and contents of our life, of a willingness to let things be, to go on as we are and see what will come of it. Is it credible that I should have to begin life at so terrible a disadvantage, that on entering the world I should find everything prepared for my destruction, or at best exposing me to hazards so fatal that the majority succumb? Alas! it is only too credible; it is the conclusion forced upon every one who has observed what men make of life; and even the antecedent unlikelihood of our being born at such a disadvantage is turned into a probability by our knowledge of the terms on which all our fellow-creatures live. All animals born into this world are born into daily hazards and unceasing difficulties, so that it is only under hardship and with struggle they keep their place in life at all. We are no exception to the law; he who does not use all his faculties, who is not thoughtful, alert, painstaking, cannot expect anything but destruction.

Or turn to the conditions of success in any branch of human activity, and you find that there, too, the gate is strait. No eminence is attained without effort, and self-discipline, and watchful attention to the conditions. You pronounce a young man's doom when you say, "He takes things easily." Look at a page of Tennyson's manuscript and you find some fifty corrections to a line. How did R. L. Stevenson become a master of English prose? By rewriting some of his pieces nine times. It is not by easily floating on the tide, not by thoughtlessly falling in with the fashion of the crowd, that any one accomplishes what is worthy and lasting. It is by separating himself from the crowd and becoming exceptional in discipline and in effort that in any department any one rises to the top. And so it is here, for, as some one has said,

“The manufacture of character is the finest of fine arts, and demands of every artist sustained and disciplined effort.”

Yes, depend upon it that in religion, as elsewhere, the primrose path, the broad way, the life that knows no strain, no fatigue, no watchful self-discipline is doomed. “I therefore so run as not uncertainly, so fight I as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and bring it into bondage, lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.”

And, in fact, the truth is recognized by teachers beyond the Christian pale. Hundreds of years before our Lord uttered the words of our text, Greece, the nation which of all others resisted severe and gloomy views of life, had been assured by one of its favourite teachers that without severity and effort no good could be reached: “Badness,” he said, “you may have easily and abundance of it, for the path is plain and she dwells close at hand; but before excellence God has placed toil and labour; long and steep is the road that leads to her, and very rough it is at first.” The broad road and the narrow is indeed an image that suggests itself to the serious observer of life. The difference between the easy life nature asks and the stern discipline Christ requires is the difference between the broad road made by the natural sward of a valley and the little path that takes off from it and threads up the hillside. The one is much pleasanter to follow and apparently quite as safe; there is at least little danger of falling or overstraining oneself; but it gently widens and descends till the stream that runs alongside becomes a marsh covering the whole ground and swallowing up the road, and till the air becomes dead with stifling heat and a heavy gloomy mist hangs over all with disease and darkness; while the little path, which is often no doubt hard to trace, always difficult and sometimes dangerous, yet continues to ascend, giving to us as we go the feeling of conquest and breaths of purer, harder, exhilarating air, till at last the summit is gained and the whole new country lies before the eye, filling it with prospects unconceived before and reviving the energies with new life.

But what do those say who have entered the narrow way and pursued it? Does their account of it encourage us to expect things to be easy? Ask Paul, and he answers, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Ask Thomas à Kempis, that saint whose spiritual experience has been carried as a light into every nook of Christendom, and he tells you, “Every day we ought to renew our purpose, saying to ourselves, ‘This day let us make a sound beginning, for what we have hitherto done is nought.’ ” Or turn to that most different style of religious experience, and ask President Edwards whether his passionless nature and strong will did not make the following of Christ easy to him; read his diary and you find him stirring himself to renewed effort by such stimulus as this: “Resolved,” he says, “so to live and strive as if I knew that only one man of this generation were to be saved, and I were fully determined to be that man.” Best of all, ask your Leader Himself whether to Him the path was not easier to follow than His words imply. What then mean these nights spent in prayer, these long days of tossing and wrestling with temptation in the wilderness, the strong cryings and tears that escaped Him? If *His* strength was taxed to the uttermost so that He felt as if He must give way and saw not how to bear up, are we to imagine that to us life will be easy, safe, victorious? You say, perhaps, that such striving, such resolved self-mastery, such bearing of the cross, is exceptional, and that Christians take life much as other people take it. Do you remember how the King of Israel walked on the wall of

Samaria in time of famine, and how the people were humbled to see when he rent his royal robe in sympathy with their grief that under it he was wearing sackcloth? So do many, who appear not unto men to fast, carry concealed the instruments and tokens of self-discipline.

What is it, then, which makes life so difficult to win? What actually constitutes the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way? First, our Lord represents the gate as so small and the way as so narrow that it may very easily be overlooked. It can only be found by those who very determinedly seek it, and these always are few. It is like a door that forms part of the wainscoting of a room—only to be detected by him that knows there is a door and sounds all round the walls for it. How true this is! How many thousands pass through this world in each generation that never spend one thought on the way to life! Men spend their strength searching for fame, for wealth, for this and that, for anything rather than for life. The great reason why men do not find is that they do not seek. And even of those who do spend thought, how few find the door! For it is one thing to find the way on a map, another thing when we come to walk by it. Things look different, and we get confused and miss the right way. Look at the man who is intelligent and well-instructed but has not yet sought salvation for himself; he is at ease, can tell others the way, and thinks he has only to make up his mind and enter life at pleasure. Look at the same man when he has begun the quest; what distrust and questioning and bewilderment, what dismay, what forgetfulness of all counsel he has given to others, what confusion and perplexity and hesitation! Hear him crying with Bunyan, “Now was I both a burden and a terror to myself; now was I weary of my life and yet afraid to die! Oh! how gladly now would I have been anybody but myself, anything but a man, and in any condition but my own; for there was nothing did pass more frequently over my mind than that it was impossible for me to be forgiven my transgressions and to be saved from the wrath to come.”

Perhaps the truth rather is that the door is missed, as so much else is missed, because it is straight before us. “The word is nigh us,” even in our heart and in our mouth. The wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein. But the very simplicity of God’s methods bewilders us. We expect to find a gate barred, chained and padlocked; we expect to be questioned and cross-examined, and to see the gate swing back and clash behind us, whereas it is only a little open wicket. We have but to commit ourselves to God’s grace where we sit, to yield ourselves to His discipline and spirit, to do this inwardly, that is, really and honestly; and we are in the way of life.

In another place our Lord more explicitly indicates where the difficulty lies. Laying down the terms of discipleship, He says, “If any man will be My disciple he must *deny himself*;” meaning by that not only that he must deny himself certain indulgences, but that he must cease to be guided by his own inclination, must cease to regard himself as his object in life, and must give himself up to Christ as the soldier yields himself to the uses his commander would put him to. In various parts of the world and in some Christian churches, as in Ripon Cathedral, there are large stones with holes in them through which persons used superstitiously to squeeze themselves, supposing that thereby they left their sins behind. These tight passages seem to be a dim groping after the idea that the gate of life is strait, and that one who enters must leave behind him much he has been used to in his former life. But the main difficulty in entering Christ’s service is the leaving self behind, and the apparent abandonment of our freedom. It is not only that we must abandon certain ways and habits, but that we must cease to be our own masters.

In this respect the broad road has superior attractions, and prevails by these attractions. It is wide not only as the obvious, natural way that all are born into; but it is wide as exhibiting a certain unlimited and unconfined freedom. We are not hemmed in by a perpetual series of danger notices, of admonitions and restrictions. The narrow way, no doubt, presents to many persons the aspect of a hard path with a high, blank, unadorned wall on either side, a wall built for no purpose of ornament but for restraint like that of a prison. The path in which Christ leads is considered to be no doubt safe and useful, like the lines of a railway, but admitting of no pleasant loitering and digression to points of interest, giving no pause for rest and recreation such as less speedy and business-like routes afford. “Insipid though safe” is the judgment commonly pronounced on the Christian life—a life perhaps to be resorted to of necessity when the best of our days are past, but presenting no attractions to compete with the unfettered freedom of the broad worldly way. The committal of ourselves to holiness and self-sacrifice and honest whole-hearted fellowship with God, which entrance to it demands, seems to involve the abandonment of all true zest in life, of all that gives intensest pleasure and satisfies our nature.

That there is a measure of truth in this judgment from the outside is implied in the very terms “strait gate and narrow way.” In following Christ there is always involved the sacrifice of much that has hitherto been relished; but this is not the whole truth. Even though there were neither freedom nor joy in the Christian life—and there only is perfect freedom and lasting joy—there is at any rate safety. A man cast away at sea or marooned has freedom of a kind to his heart’s content; he is no longer ordered about by the captain against whom he has mutinied; but probably he would prefer almost any service to that freedom. The climber who has forsaken the path and untied himself from his guide, and is now slipping with ever-increasing momentum down to the abyss, is also free from restraint, but his one thought is, what a fool he has been to loose himself. The restraint and schooling to which Christ subjects us at any rate saves us from destroying all that is God-born in us, and besides is the only way to ultimate freedom. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there alone, is liberty.” Nothing is more obvious than that the man who gives himself up to selfish and sinful ways loses his freedom and cannot develop what is best in him, is led by his lusts to a lower and lower depth of bondage. Freedom to become all that we can be, freedom to love the best and live gladly for it, is to be found only in the narrow way. For us the one path to freedom is through restraint and self-discipline. Each evil desire we repress, each true sacrifice we make, each limitation of natural craving we enforce, brings us nearer to our Leader, more nearly to the spirit of Him who alone does all good with perfect joy as His own free will.

But, supposing the gate to have been found and passed through, no progress is possible without self-denial. Salvation or life very much depends on the purifying of the moral habits, and where there is no self-denial the moral habits are not purified. We are called into fellowship with Christ that we may not only have always the highest type of life impressed upon our mind, but also may have that tenderness and compunction and seriousness and zeal without which no high standard of life can be reached. But these are graces which, root and branch, are involved in and depend upon self-denial. Where there is no severity of self-discipline, no fear of sin, no devout aspiration, there can be no real growth in likeness to Christ; where the man gives free play to his natural inclinations and does not consider whether they forward the work of Christ in his character; where there is no holding of himself in hand and careful repression of evil propensities, there can be no effective purification going on. For between indulgence and self-denial there is no middle place. There is an old and

a true comparison likening the soul to a chariot and the passions to horses; and for the sure destruction of the chariot there need be no applying of the whip if only the reins are laid on the horses' necks. Only neglect to hold in your passions, only neglect self-denial, and the evil is done. Cease to be watchful, cease to be anxious about your spiritual state, cease to spend care on turning away from evil; that is all that is needed, that is the broad, easy way that leads to destruction. "Positive sins gather and fester in the untended moral habit before men are aware they have so much as gained an entrance." They did not go and seek for occasions of sin, they did not court it; only they were not steeled against it by the alertness and skilled severity of habitual self-denial. They have accustomed themselves to go with the stream, to walk in the broad, easy way; in other words, to let their natural disposition, their native propensities and tastes, govern their life instead of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many and many a one could tell you how a blight has seemed to fall upon his whole life in just this way. He seemed to be doing nothing very sinful, he seemed even to be denying himself indulgences which others permitted and to be engaged in some useful Christian work, and yet day by day tenderness of feeling departs from his heart and a wall of separation seems to grow up between his soul and Christ. At first he cannot make it out, he cannot understand why he should be growing worse rather than better and why there is so little spontaneous flow in his religious feeling and life; but gradually he becomes aware that he has not been so denying himself as to bring him into fellowship with Christ. He has indeed been denying himself indulgences which some would allow, but he has not been making fellowship with Christ the standard of his self-denial. If a crew take service with a commander who proposes to push further towards the Pole than any previous explorer, they will not fulfil their contract by going with him until the cold becomes extreme and further progress dangerous; they knew what he proposed and the terms on which they agreed to go with him, and they had far better not have gone at all than stop halfway and become a mere burden and discouragement to their leader. And so it is with us; any self-denial short of that which enables us to hold fellowship with Christ is manifestly unavailing.

This it is which creates the difficulty, which constitutes the straitness of the gate, the narrowness of the way. And we may determine whether we are on the way or not by the self-denial and sacrifice it costs us to go forward. In looking back upon any period of your life when you had to make a hard struggle in order to gain the position you sought, you can distinctly remember the hardships you endured; you remember how you refused a holiday when it was pressed upon you, how you grew pale and thin with overwork. Or, to adapt the figure of the text, in looking back on an expedition to the top of some difficult hill by a steep and not easily found path, you distinctly recall the points where your heart failed, and how you had to use all your strength and courage to go on; you remember the expedients you had to resort to in order to overcome difficulties; various points in the ascent are for ever impressed on your memory by their difficulty. If you have not a similar distinctness of remembrance in connection with your following of Christ, it is to be feared this is due to your having evaded the difficulties and so diverged wholly from the path. Has the pain you suffered in abandoning something that you might follow Christ more freely made an ineffaceable mark in your memory, as clear and vivid as any serious illness you have had? Do you remember how you crossed some deep yearning of the heart that you might have more to lay out on the service of Christ? Does the struggle you had to give up some habit make you tremble still as you recall it? Or where is your self-denial? *How* have you found the way to be narrow?

If in one part of our life we are so continually defeated that victory on that field is really hopeless, and so uniformly sin; if we so uniformly sin when tempted at one point as to convince us that we are still diseased in that part of our life, we must consider whether this is not likely to infect our *whole* life and so make salvation impossible. We must not argue that because one part of life or one activity is useful and innocently engaged in by others, we may engage in it also. Not every man needs amputation, other men may be strong where we are weak. And we must not presume we are healthy and claim the rights of health when in fact we are diseased. A limited life is better than no life at all; better cut ourselves off from a department of life in which we uniformly sin and are inextricably mixed up with evil, than allow its evil influence to spread to the whole of our life, as it certainly will, and so ruin us. Better accept the limitations of the sick man than hide our weakness till it poisons the whole body. Better enter into life maimed than not enter at all.

Let us therefore put from us the idea that the state of this world is not so bad as preachers would make it; that the two ways are not so absolutely exclusive of one another; that though it may be well enough to work on the minds of uneducated people or of enthusiastic and fanciful persons by such alarming figures and statements as we find in the Bible, yet these are not to be applied "to the complex aspects of modern life," and to have a place among the cold, hard realities that influence society. Let us put from us the idea that the strait gate may be left for the ascetic and the devotee, that a life of severity and restraint, of high peculiar and unworldly aims may be very well for an occasional enthusiast, but that still there must be for the mass and common herd of men a "fairly broad and practicable way along which those who are willing to live soberly and morally, but who are too busy to be godly, may still walk with the assurance of reception at the last." Let us put from us the idea that salvation is quite easy and natural, or that it can be accomplished without individual thought, effort, and pain. If *you* are saved, you are an exception to the general rule; there are few that find what you have found, and they who do find it have sought it often with deep anxiety, with long labour, with sore misgivings, with passionate earnestness. You *may* have found it without these; the test of what you actually have is the possession of it and not how you came by it; still, when you find at your very doors what other men have sought almost despairingly you are naturally anxious to make quite sure that what you have found is the genuine article. Do you find, then, that your state stands all the tests applied to it? for if it only stands one and breaks down under others it is false. Does it stand this test: Are you in the narrow way? Do you know something of what it means to have your inclinations crossed by the will of Christ? Do you find yourself separated from the common course of this world? Can you really make out that for Christ's sake you have done things and yet do things which other respectable men would not feel bound to do? Have you left one way and chosen another? Do you see that in your own case this figure represents a reality which from hour to hour appears in your life? Do you see that such and such things are not for you, that such and such a course must be followed by you, not merely because your character requires it, but because a refusal so to regulate your life would throw you out of communion with your Saviour? When you sin do you feel that the first thing to be done is to obtain His forgiveness, to be again at peace with Him?

Does any one, convinced of the propriety of obeying the injunction of the text, say, "How am I to do it? This is figure, a gate and a way; what is the reality?" You know Him who said, "I am the door, I am the way." It is Christ who is the door, giving you admission to the way, and it is by leaning on Him and following in His steps you find

life. Without Him you cannot have life, without Him loving you and you trusting Him you can never have life; until He came and from this earth, from the midst of our sin, made His way to the Father, there was no way; but He going before you enables you to follow Him. He becomes at once your sacrifice and your example, makes the road passable for you and leads you in it; with His own wounded feet treads out the fire that was burning on the path; cuts in the hard, slippery ice footsteps which you had no skill to cut; bruises with His heel the serpent's head that was lying venomous in your path, and makes the road safe for you. Is it a narrow, hard path for you? It was a thousandfold more so for Him. There was no path when He led the way. It is to Him you must go; to Him, that is to say, you must entrust your future and the guidance of your life. He assures you He is willing to save all; you must believe this word of His and trust Him for your own salvation. He knows what is passing in your mind, and if you thus trust Him, if in your heart you turn to Him with glad relief and commit your cares and sins to Him, He knows what you do and responds to your faith. If you desire Him to deliver you from your sins, He does so.

Finally, our Lord warns us of the difficulty of the Christian life not to discourage us, but to stimulate. Did He tell us it was easy we should know it was not worth winning. He tells us the way is narrow and steep that we may be prepared to put forth strength and may not be dismayed when we find it hard to follow. We have everything to encourage us. We are in the same cause as He; all the encouragement, all the comfort, all the hope, all the help that are available in Christ are available for us. And He also means that a thankful, watchful spirit may possess those who are sure they have found the way and are on it. If you are in the way, you are in an exceptional position; you are among the few that find it. You have prospects that few have, you have passed the grand difficulty in human life, a difficulty which few can pass. You may have much to contend with in life, much to put up with, much to depress and sadden; yet if *this* grace has come to you, that you are brought into the way your Saviour trod, and that leads ever closer to Him, no evil can permanently assail or oppress you; every day is putting you more nearly beyond its reach. What multitudes have missed you have won; what has been hidden from the wise has been revealed to you.

XIX. Christian Growth

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing."—*Heb.* v. 11.

At this point in his discussion the writer to the Hebrews is suddenly brought to a pause. He passes through an unpleasant experience. His own mind is bursting with his subject. He sees with absolute clearness an illustrative argument which demonstrates his main contention. But at once it occurs to him that his correspondents may not be able to follow, understand and appreciate what he wishes to say. He is in the position of a lecturer on science who sees a beautiful and perfect mathematical demonstration of his point; but he looks in despair at his audience, and recognizes that not one person will follow him.

Paul had the same experience. To the Corinthians he had to say, "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat, for ye were not able to bear it: nay, not even now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal." This was not the educated man's supercilious disdain of the ignorant: it was, on the contrary, the lament of the sympathetic teacher who recognized the uselessness of revealing advanced truth to men who had not taken the initial steps. As well read Browning or Hegel to children who have yet to learn the alphabet.

Necessarily, the teacher who suffered this experience in its most painful form was our Lord Himself. Even of those whom He had taught with care He is compelled to say, "Are ye also yet without understanding?" And even at the last, when for many months He had day after day sought to widen their view, He had simply to keep to Himself much which was burning in His own heart. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Possibly some of the very points which perplex the modern mind, or which have caused discord during the entire history of the Church might have been made perfectly simple had these first disciples been readier scholars.

This writer, then, addresses the Hebrews in very plain language. He calls them babes. He upbraids them with being content with a milk diet. They had been some time alive, but they had not grown; and no wonder, for they had never discovered that they had teeth. They ate no solid food; they preferred what others had digested for them; they preferred being dandled in the arms of others, and shrank from using their own limbs. That is to say, they were content with rudimentary knowledge of Christian truth and with traditional teaching, and made no effort to think for themselves and to advance into the infinite of spiritual realities.

Is this type of Christian unknown now? Does no interest save what is antiquarian attach to such spiritual infants? Are there none among us who are in any degree open to the same rebuke? Or are not we also familiar with the cry, "Give us a simple gospel: we don't want thought"? Are there not many among us who virtually say, "We consider ourselves justified in going to sleep if doctrine is preached to us; the intellectual difficulties of our time we do not care to trouble ourselves with; critical questions must be left to scholars, and although there are whole books of the Bible we do not know the meaning of, we can get along without knowing these things"?

What lies at the root of this? What do these persons mean when they clamour for a simple gospel? Sometimes they have no meaning, and only repeat a phrase which has a pious sound; but when they have a meaning, probably there is, as usual, a mixture of good and evil, of truth and error in their mind. In so far as they proclaim that it is a very simple gospel that suffices to bring men into connection with Christ, they declare a most important truth. But if they mean that, being in Christ, the Christian mind may go to sleep and think no more and add no knowledge to that which suffices to introduce to Christ, they are in grievous error. The human mind is for the most part indolent, and the pleasure experienced when a simple gospel is preached is partly the pleasure of repose and security thus induced. Persons listening to such preaching are once again persuaded that, in spite of their laziness and practical inefficiency, they are yet saved. This writer tells such persons that they should be ashamed of going over the same ground again and again; that this system of getting consolation from the gospel and then going away to worldliness and coming back to the gospel again, is a deadening process, and that in order to advance in Christian strength we must advance in Christian knowledge. Preachers, then, ought not to seek the reputation of being gospel-preachers by pandering to men's unhealthy craving to hear the gospel long after they have professed to receive it; and hearers must distinguish between steadfastness in the faith and stolidity in the faith, between a love for old truth and a hatred or indifference to new truth and new duty.

In correction of this common fault of backwardness and indisposition to learn, this writer bids us observe two facts: 1. That *growth is expected in the Christian*. In fact, he tells us that if we are not growing we are dying. There is no third condition: he has in view only the alternative, either we are going on to perfection, or we are falling away. "Let us go on unto perfection, *for* it is impossible to renew those who fall away." This is the law of all life. Nothing is born mature. It passes through a period of growth, and it must grow or die. The parent who is delighted with the innocent helplessness of his child, and rejoices in its efforts at speech, becomes seriously alarmed if this lisping, tottering, help-requiring state threatens to become permanent.

Would that cessation of growth in the spiritual life created as much dismay! Would that it seemed as monstrous and unnatural to have our spiritual as our natural growth checked! It would be a startling revolution to us all were our discernment of our spiritual condition as keen and direct, and true as our vision of the body. What do you honestly believe you would see yourself to be? No most painful and threatening disease is so appalling and distressing as the adult of twenty or thirty years in the body of a child of six; have you spiritually made the growth due to the time you have been a Christian, or are you still a child? Have we grown up to maturity? Have we grown beyond our associates, or are we conscious that they stand head and shoulders above us? Physically, we once needed to be lifted if we were to see or touch certain things: we should be humiliated were it so still; but is it so spiritually? Or do we now need to put ourselves into a constrained attitude when we wish to attend to things that once were on our natural level? Are we able to do the spiritual work of the world? Do we find ourselves now standing face to face with things that once towered above us and seemed unattainable? Can we stand alone now? Are we "men in understanding," able for ourselves to see what is good, having within ourselves a strength sufficient for all the needs of life?

The being born again is not everything; the growing after birth to maturity is much more, is the end for which birth is alone valuable.

This writer incidentally furnishes us with two tests of maturity. The one is that the mature are teachers of others. “Considering the time which has elapsed,” he says, “since you became Christians, you should now be teachers of others.” The grown man does not need his father to earn his food, and his mother to take him on her knee to feed him; he earns food for himself and for others. So the mature Christian is independent of his former teachers, and can himself instruct the ignorant. At first sight this test of maturity seems to give a fairly good result. Teachers abound, parents, Sabbath-school teachers, ministers, journalists who volunteer theological instruction, the countless contributors to our magazines, and authors without number. Every one seems to have something to teach. But if you subtract from this mass of teaching all that is mere echo and all that is erroneous, how much remains? How many of us—for this is this writer’s question—how many of us have for ourselves solved the problems of Christianity in our own time, and are therefore able to teach others? How many men are there among us to whom a perplexed soul would go, sure of finding light and help? We all of us feel from time to time the extreme difficulty of believing what our fathers believed; where are the men who can give us a firm footing again? There are such men, happily; but, are they not few indeed in comparison to the mass of Christians? But, according to this writer, every Christian has a duty not only to himself, but to the world. He must grow spiritually, not only to preserve himself from being a monstrosity, but that he may be able to help other men.

The second test is that the mature man “has his senses exercised to discern good and evil.” That is to say, by habitual use his senses have acquired such quickness that he has an instinctive nausea for what is unwholesome, and a relish for what is nourishing. The child in its earliest stage has to be fed, unconscious of what it is getting, and not able to choose; in its next stage the parent has always to be telling the child, not always with effect, what to eat and what to avoid. By the time manhood is reached, experience over a wide range of foods has produced an instinctive sense of what will nourish and what will injure. The adult exposes himself to ridicule if he is always asking, Will this or that do me harm? So, says this writer, the mature Christian should not be dependent on others to tell him whether this or that doctrine is injurious or helpful. The mature Christian does not need to be told what to believe and what to reject. He needs no priest to act as nurse, to taste his food for him and tell him what to receive and what to do, in what sense to understand God’s Word and how to use it. He is a man able to choose for himself, and to discriminate between good and evil.

2. The second fact regarding the Christian life which this writer wishes us to observe is that *this growth, which is essential, depends on the truth we receive*. He compares Christian truth to food: that is, Christian teaching does for the inner man what food does for the body. The body cannot grow without food; neither can the spirit come to maturity save by the reception of spiritual truth. But he divides Christian truth into two grand kinds, and these he represents by milk and solid food. Milk represents traditional teaching: it is the product of that which has been received and digested by others, and is suitable for those who have no teeth of their own and no sufficiently strong powers of digestion. Like infants, they can only receive what others have thought, having no independent power of their own to investigate for themselves and form their own opinion about things. This milk, or traditional teaching, is admirably adapted to the first stage of Christian life, but cannot form mature Christians. The other kind of teaching he compares to solid food, which the individual must chew and digest for himself. It is true, physically, that poor and thin diet makes poor and

thin blood; that if a man is to spend much strength he must eat heartily. Spiritually it is equally true. Growth comes by nutrition. Without partaking of sound and wholesome truth the spirit cannot grow or be strong.

It might be said that all he means is that in order to right moral conduct and growth of character, sound moral principles and suitable precepts are requisite. If the savage who has been accustomed to eat his enemy and bury his own children alive is to grow out of that condition, he must be taught that these practices are wrong. This, however, is not the meaning of this writer. He does not refer to the direct inculcation of duty, but to the teaching of doctrine; and he says that the Christian grows in proportion to his reception of sound doctrine. You may begin with very small and diluted doses, with milk; but if the Christian is to do any good, if he is to grow to a vigorous maturity, he must learn to receive solid food; and what is in the writer's mind is not practical precepts, but the doctrine of Christ's priesthood, precisely such a doctrine as men who know nothing about it are apt to denounce as antiquated, fantastic, technical.

If in the past sound doctrine has been too highly esteemed, the opposite error is more likely to betray our own generation. Men never seem to themselves to be monotonous and wearisome if they repeat six times a week that doctrine has not always been accompanied by genuine spiritual life: as if it were a discovery that milk does not put life into a statue or a doll, or that spring rains do not make posts grow and blossom. No sane person affirms that doctrine gives life, or that wherever there is abundance of doctrine there is a proportionate abundance of righteous living. This were to make the same mistake as to suppose that because without rain the harvest cannot possibly come, therefore the more rain you have, the better the harvest, or that the wettest parts of Scotland are also the most fruitful. What is affirmed is this: that the truth we receive and use is our true spiritual nutriment, without which we cannot make growth.

Our passage, then, from one stage to another of our spiritual history is regularly and necessarily accompanied and determined by our reception of new truth, whether we win it by living or by reading. This is probably verified in the experience and consciousness of every one who has ever made such advances as are here spoken of. A man can live for many years on one truth. It suits his stage of development; he believes in it and makes it a kind of root or heart from which his whole spiritual nature draws energy. Just as a young politician will live for years upon one idea; whether it be the enfranchisement of all ratepayers or the unification of an empire, he finds in it enough to animate and direct him; he lives upon it. So do we all find it possible to live happily and vigorously if so much as one important truth has laid hold of our spirit. A belief, for example, in the truth that God reigns, governing the smallest as the greatest occurrence, may be the prominent article in a man's creed for years, and may strengthen him to do much. Or the belief that God's will embraces all things, and that He can use every individual for the fulfilment of it, or the belief that God is in all things, and is ever putting forth Divine energy, may be the real spiritual nutriment on which a man lives for years.

But what we are here asked to observe is that if such a person is to grow, if he is to have fresh strength infused into his spirit, and a broader light shed upon his field of action; if he is to bulk more largely in Christian society, and make a deeper mark upon his generation; if, in short, he is to be more of a man and less of a child, he must be lifted out of his past state by the apprehension of some new truth, some truth old and effete, perhaps, to others, but breaking upon his mind with all the

splendour and power of a new and direct revelation. The old truths do not pass away, but we no longer exclusively live upon them: like milk, they enter into many of the other preparations we use for our nourishment; but, taken alone now, they seem insipid, and not sufficiently strengthening and stimulating.

Dr. Dale was once writing an Easter sermon, and, when halfway through, the thought of the risen Lord broke in upon him as it had never done before. " 'Christ is alive,' I said to myself; 'alive,' and then I paused. 'Alive,' and then I paused again; 'alive—can that really be true? Living as really as I myself am?' I got up and walked about, repeating 'Christ is living'; 'Christ is living.' At first it seemed strange and hardly true; but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory; yes, Christ is living. It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it, but not until that moment did I feel sure about it. I then said, 'My people shall know it; I shall preach about it again and again until they believe it as I do now.' " For months after, and in every sermon, the living Christ was his one great theme, and there and then began the custom of singing in Carr's Lane on every Sunday morning an Easter hymn.

No countenance, then, is here given to the modern contempt for theology, or agnostic despair of reaching any sure knowledge of divine things. Theology is passing through a strange experience in our time. It is at once denounced and cultivated. Never before have such hard things been said of it, and never before has a more general interest been taken in it. Scientific men abuse it because it did not make scientific discoveries, and compensate during the Dark Ages for the indolence and vagaries of science in those days. They have not a civil word to say of theologians, yet every scientific man of eminence is a theologian on his own account; and much of the interest which their writings justly excite is due to their publishing their views on the relation of God to the world, that is, on the profoundest of all theological problems. Sometimes theology is accused of affecting to define what is infinite and subject to no definition, or of proposing to explain what lies in impenetrable mystery. And no doubt theologians have sometimes transgressed in this direction; but that is no reason why the individual Christian should not attempt to learn as much as he can about divine things. On this side of mystery lies a field wide enough for the strongest intellect to cultivate. Science also runs into mystery, and so does the nature of man; but that is no reason for debarring men from these studies; nay, it is the very outlying and surrounding mystery that attracts the best class of minds.

If, then, we are not to be spiritual imbeciles, if we are to be strong and helpful men in Christ, we must seek nutriment in Christian truth. The vigorous and healthy soul does not need to be told this, as little as the strong, hard-working man needs to take tonics or be directed what to eat. But many of us do need, and most urgently, the direction here given us, to keep the mind feeling about for new ideas. The sea anemone is the emblem of the healthy Christian, fixed firmly to the rock, but with many feelers freely floating around to apprehend all that can be used.

And, strange as it seems, the most mysterious truths are often found to be the most influential on conduct. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the crowning mystery; and yet what source of moral power is comparable to intelligent apprehension of this great truth? When a Christian comes under its spell he takes a leap forward, like the advance from infancy to manhood. We know the power which the sterner truths had on our fathers; how by apprehending God's justice and sovereignty they were nerved to do and dare all things, and how they found in those high doctrines the best nutriment of the least-attained graces.

What nutrition, then, are you giving to your spirit? Is it such as is likely to secure your growth? What do you read? Tell me what a man reads and I will tell you his spiritual condition. Newspapers and magazines admirably serve their ends, but these ends are not spiritual nutrition. The Bible read carelessly and formally, so many verses a day, will work no charm any more than any other book so read. But the Bible read with expectation, interest, thought and personal application will yield nutriment of the most various and stimulating kind.

Perhaps some of us more intensely feel that this passage has a present value for ourselves: some who cannot with any strong assurance turn it off with the words, “But we are persuaded better things of ourselves, even things that accompany salvation.” Some recent experience may have given us the humiliating and alarming consciousness that we are not growing and have not for long been growing. By some experience, known only to ourselves, our whole character may suddenly have been revealed to us, and we may have seen clearly the lurking poisonous sore in our life which makes all healthy growth impossible. Or something may have found a place in our life which has brought with it the conviction that our supposed progress was fancied, not real. Or some temptation has laid hold of the mind, not yet yielded to, but not yet finally dismissed. Or some habit of which you have long since known the evil influence may still assert itself, and even find your resistance weaker than once it was. Or past sins of which we once repented, and for which we have borne much punishment, may still cling to our affections. In one way or other we may be reluctantly compelled to own that we have not grown much, and cannot persuade ourselves we are mature and adult Christians.

To be passive under such intimations of our true state, to let things slide as if the force of nature would give us Christian growth, is culpable and disastrous. No language in the whole Bible is more stringent or alarming than that which this writer uses of those who fall away. So alarming is it, so firm in its prediction of inevitable perdition, that men have striven in every way to turn its edge. But in vain. The fact is, there are conditions of spiritual growth and health as there are conditions of physical growth; and carelessness in the one case is as certainly followed by disaster or by death as carelessness in the other.

XX. The Necessity Of Becoming Like Little Children

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—*Matt.* xviii. 3.

When the rest of the disciples joined Jesus and Peter in the house, it was quite plain from the sullen and offended look of some, and from the excited appearance of all, that some unpleasant collision had been occurring among them. No sooner did Jesus observe the heated and angry way in which they came in, and threw down what they carried, and turned from His eye, than He saw that something was wrong, and asked them what they had been discussing. At first no one would say. Our Lord had assured them this was His last journey to Jerusalem, and they might naturally have been expected to have been expressing affectionate regret or debating the need of this sad close to His career. But the cross had no reality to them. They put it lightly aside, and thought only of the new kingdom, and of their posts in it. Some jealousy of Peter, James and John may have been excited by their selection to be witnesses of the Transfiguration; and to these three themselves this selection may have seemed to promise some exceptional eminence in the kingdom.

To discuss in the abstract the question, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? is a profitable employment. Wherever men of any earnestness meet, such questions as these will turn up: What constitutes human perfection? Is it something a man has by nature, and can never produce by any effort of his own, or is it the fruit of self-culture, and within the reach of all? Is the highest position in the eternal world assigned to him who has been most conspicuous here, or on what principle does promotion there proceed? What is it we must do if we would win eternal glory ere these few years of life are beat out? But when these questions are discussed with a personal reference, and in view of present competing claims, there must inevitably be jealousies and rivalries, vanity and hatred. The heat, the bitterness, the acrimony which the disciples exhibited disclosed to our Lord the temper that would again and again be manifested in His Church by those who seek place and power, by those whose ambition for themselves is greater than their love for the common cause.

That His reply to their question might effectually lodge in their minds and be audible to all generations, our Lord gives it dramatically. He calls a little child to Him, one of Peter's children, I presume, and sets him in the midst, so that every eye of the group is turned on him; and while they thus gaze at the little fellow standing with abashed face and drooping eyes, or playing with the beard of Jesus as He holds him in His arms, He says, "Except ye be converted and become as this little child, ye cannot so much as enter the kingdom of heaven." They saw the child wholly unconscious that he was being held up as a model, and by this very unconsciousness he became their model. They had all been ready to prove their claim: "We can speak, and without Peter's Galilean accent," said James and John. "I can write and manage the business affairs of the new kingdom," said Matthew. "I have foreign correspondents, and can extend the influence of Jesus in remote countries," said Philip. As for Judas, he being purse-bearer, there could be no question that he was indispensable. Every one urged with truth and justice his special utility in the new kingdom; every one thought with

satisfaction that he could do something to help on the cause, could contribute money, could win followers, could exhibit the merits of Jesus, could handle the sword. "Here," says Jesus, "is the one excellence on which My kingdom is founded, and by which alone it can be extended, the excellence of not knowing you have any excellence at all." One almost pities the poor disciples, so suddenly and completely dropped from all their vain notions.

For not only must they clearly have seen that precisely in proportion as they had counted on high place would their place be low; but as they gazed at the child, all unconscious of any merit, and void of all ambition, they must suddenly have felt the very helplessness which Nicodemus uttered in the words, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" They are addressed as if it were yet doubtful, not merely whether they would have the highest, but whether they would have any place in the kingdom. They are assured that, notwithstanding their intimacy with the King, and the apparent prior claim they had on this ground, they were looking in an entirely wrong direction; and unless they faced about, unless they turned, unless they could forsake what they had been so eagerly seeking, they would never see the kingdom. They look at the babe held up as the type of Christ's subjects, and they are seized with a sense of utter helplessness. For what do they see in the child? Not great attainment, which by much striving they might hope to win; not a marvellous purity which stern self-control might achieve; not a consecration of life to God, which the example of their Master and His rewards might help them to; not ability to deal with high subjects and be of great service—none of these things; but an absolute unconsciousness of any ability, of any merit, of any serviceable excellence, of any claim to high place or hope of great reward. It was, in short, true humility they saw; a humility that did not know itself to be humility, and was thereby humble. For to be conscious of our humility is so far to cease to be humble. If a man thinks himself a great man he is by that thought and so far a small one. If a man thinks himself humble, he ascribes to himself one of the highest moral qualities, and thereby shows he has not the humility he claims. To become humble, therefore, is a change that must be wrought upon you while you yourself are unconscious; it is like a new birth. A man feels that of all things this is that which is beyond him. We cannot humble ourselves to serve a purpose: it must come to us as itself the right thing; it must grow in us irrespective of all it brings us to, for if we cultivate it for a purpose it cannot be genuine.

It is the total absence of self-consciousness in the child which makes him the model and the despair of his seniors. But before enlarging upon this we may look briefly at some other instructive features of childhood.

What delights us in children is very much their inability to conceal their thoughts, their artless love, their general simplicity. They have not yet an evil conscience, and they are unaware of anything within them which may not be freely uttered; they are unaware of it because as yet it is not there. "They are naked and are not ashamed." They assume no disguise because they are unconscious of their need of any. The child's past has no grief nor repentance in it; he is a new creature, still clear from actual sin. His future is not gloomy through a sense of past failure and present weakness. What he desires, he asks for; what he thinks, he says; what he feels, he utters. Mistakes have not yet taught him caution; sin has not yet taught him self-watchfulness; the approbation and disapprobation of others are only slowly teaching him self-consciousness. It is this unconscious innocent frankness which refreshes us in children; it blows like a fresh breeze from their presence across our spirits, and

sweeps away the close atmosphere of social restraints and guilty remembrances and evil thoughts. This simplicity is above and beyond us.

Another characteristic of childhood is its ready belief of everything it is told. The child believes in the world, and hears of its wonders with a reverential awe, which, while it amuses, might also instruct us. Look at the earnestness of a child who is listening to a tale, and who stands for a moment when it is done, gazing into your face while his soul is all absorbed, and then asks you some grave question in explanation; and say what you would give for that easy credulity, that belief in the reality of things unseen, in that infinite unknown which lies before him, and out of which every kind of marvel may come. As we grow older we clothe ourselves in scepticism and guard ourselves against deception, till as the climax of wisdom and safety we believe nothing, and are thus, like the heavy-mailed knights of old, stifled in our own armour. We count it beneath us to be astonished, childish to be found lost in reverence and wonder, and gradually train our spirits to believe in nothing but the most obvious, commonplace, physical things, which by their very nature are destined to decay. And the end is that we cannot, if we would, believe in the most tremendous realities, and must still play and act and be formal in our very efforts to be in earnest. Ah! what different men should we be, could we regain the open faith of our early years, and set ourselves before God with the unsatiated, expectant heart of the child; could we again listen to God with the earnestness of one to whom all is yet real, and nothing a mere tale! Surely we would do well to pray God that in this respect our youth may be renewed, and that He would revive within us the feeling that we have but begun to live, to know, and to feel that there lies before us an endless and infinitely stimulating experience. Well may we pray for power to be in earnest, to treat what we hear of as real, to wonder in simplicity and to worship; that God would dip us in the waters of His own regeneration, that so the hard, foul crust in which this world encases us may drop from us, and our flesh become fresh and soft as a child's again. For "if any man is wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise"; and if any man is grey and furrowed with the experience of this world, cold and incredulous, and hopeless, let him become a child that he may be mature.

Coming still closer to the quality our Lord wished to imprint on the minds of His disciples, we recognize in the child that readiness to receive instruction, information, gifts, which arises from humility. Grown-up people receive a gift in one way, children in quite another way. The child is fond of acquisition, of taking hold of things and making them his own, and does not conceal his delight and real estimate of the favour done him. His nature is to accept all that is offered, and even to ask and to claim in the most exorbitant manner. He cannot comprehend that he is not to be promptly and amply satisfied, and complains of every least discomfort as an injury done him, and not to be tolerated. The whole life of a child is reception. He takes gifts naturally, and without at all distressing himself as to his right to them. It never enters his head that he should be treated as he deserves. He is to be fed, because he is hungry; he is to be made happy, because his nature craves it; not at all because he has made good his claim to be so treated: and thus the child shows his superiority and his fitness to be our example. The child really understands, or at least acts upon, the true order of things much better than we do. His instinct is better than our reflection. He believes with Paul that the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children; whereas we must ever be trying to provide for God, to give Him what will satisfy Him, if possible even to pension Him off; we cannot ever learn to let Him provide for us and give all to us. But God *sells* nothing, only gives; and he who will not take the kingdom of God as a little child, freely and

without considering how much he deserves, cannot take it at all. If a man dare not trade with his monarch, nor return gift for gift, so neither will God be bartered with. We must take as the child takes or not take at all. The highest and best things God has to give, forgiveness, His lasting favour, a new heart, help to be upright and useful—everything we must accept at His hand irrespective of our own desert, and simply because we need and He is willing to give.

There are two kinds of children who make their parents anxious. There is a child who does not know the value of what is given him, and leaves it unused or hurls it into the fire. And there is a child who knows the gift's value, but thinks he cannot accept so much from his father, and accordingly goes to help his father with his work, and, when he has spoiled much good material, fancies he has earned his father's gift, and is indebted to no one. But the true child is humble and dependent.

In Christ's own life we see this childlike dependence beautifully exemplified. We find Him cleaving to the obedience of the child, still submitting to His Father, never asserting any right to frame for Himself a life: most clearly apprehending His own position and work, He was yet as one under age, whose will was not to be regarded. Calling Himself a "son" through His whole life, He declined to be considered as representing only Himself or as dependent on Himself, and in the end, with His latest breath, committed His spirit to His Father's keeping. And so you never find Him anxious for to-morrow's food or to-night's shelter, but as the child goes out in the morning to his own little tasks and pleasures, and comes in again expecting to find all provided, lies down to sleep never troubling himself with the straits his father may be in, takes what is given him and does not think of prices, eats his meat and does not dream of helping his father to earn it; so our Lord, carrying with Him into manhood the faith of a child, lived as One who was well cared for by another, and on whom the care of providing for Himself did not rest.

But it is not the innocent simplicity and frankness of the child, nor yet his openness of mind to accept instruction, nor even his humble readiness to receive all he wants, which makes him our model; it is, as we have already seen, his unconsciousness that he has anything to commend him. "We," says our Lord, "must think as little of our own attainments as that child who has none to think of; we must rest as little upon anything we have done or think ourselves capable of doing, as the child who has done nothing and knows nothing he is capable of doing." When you begin to think of what is due to you, either from man or God, you are altogether on the wrong track. When you stand upon your rights, when you seek to be acknowledged and rewarded and deferred to, you shut yourself out of the kingdom altogether. Moral greatness consists in ability to do without acknowledgment and rewards: greatness in Christ's kingdom—that is, true spiritual greatness, the only greatness that is a man's own, and inseparable from his person—consists in that loving regard for other people's welfare which has no thought to spare for its own reward and advantage. The consequential person who will work with you if you make enough of him, if you flatter him and tell him he is indispensable—that is not the great man in the kingdom of heaven. The vain and envious creature who cannot bear to be second, but will have the first place or none—he is not great in the kingdom of heaven. The active and gifted man who attracts many to the kingdom, and manages its affairs well, and thoroughly understands its laws, is he the greatest? Alas! no; he is possibly not in the kingdom at all; he is not in it if it is his own reputation he seeks and not the good of others. He is great who does not seek great things for himself; who is so absorbed in the pursuit of a good object that he does not notice the slights put upon him, or know

whether a high or a low place is given to him; who, like Paul, is content to be thought a fool if thereby he can do some people good; who, like Christ, makes himself of no reputation, seeking ever not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

The production of this humility is an invariable and essential accompaniment of conversion. It is involved in the very nature of conversion. Conversion is a turning completely round; it is the alteration of all that is most influential upon character and conduct, of our views, of our principles, of our aims in life. The converted man makes a fresh start, and he does so in the humbling conviction that his old course and his old character were radically wrong. He recants his whole preceding life; he lays down all he has acquired, and stands stripped to begin life afresh and in a new direction. Formerly he lived on his own strength and for himself, framing his own plans, seeking his own ends. Now he feels he is not his own, but God's; born of God, kept by God, for God's uses, beginning from God and ending in God. In presence of that Being, glorious in holiness and love, he abhors his own sensual and selfish life, and abases himself utterly. He has no claims to urge, no promises to make, no pretensions, nothing at all to show. And for this very change itself he feels he is dependent on God; he knows he cannot produce in himself a new spiritual life. What this child seemed to say to these helpless disciples he says to us all: "You must turn, you must strive with your whole souls, you must pray, but convert yourselves you cannot; not your turning, not your striving, not your praying, but God only can give you a new heart." The man prays; but he prays not because he knows it is right to pray, not because God will be pleased with him for praying, but because his soul is in peril, and he is helpless and must cry out. He reforms his life, not because he fancies this will let God see he is in earnest, and induce Him to look favourably upon him, but because he abhors his past life, and finds in it only food for humiliation and sorrow.

And if within the kingdom, do we, then, beside this little boy seem small or great? Measured by the standards we set for one another, we may perhaps be satisfied with our attainment. It is well to look steadily at this standard set before us by our Lord Himself, and measure ourselves by it. The child has everything to learn; he does not profess to have seen to the bottom of everything, and to be quite sure of God's meaning and ways of working. The child has no idea that his opinions or his person is of much importance; he *is* the greatest because he does not seek to be the greatest, and has no thought about himself and his own relative position. The child never dreams he has to earn his father's love; he takes for granted that he has it, and proceeds upon that understanding. The child is at once audacious in his demands, and utterly unconscious of his own worth—audacious *because* never connecting his expectations with his desert, not once conceiving that he is to have only what he deserves. When our Lord, then, sets this child before us, it is as if He said, "Away with all self-consciousness and pretension. If you fancy yourselves much, you make yourselves little. To *claim* priority is to produce a stain. Don't be thinking of what you have, but of what you lack. Self-complacency, the measuring of yourselves with other men—these are feelings of this world, not of My kingdom."

To be simple-minded, to be natural, to be humble,—this is our calling; to make ourselves of no reputation, to hold ourselves cheap, to take everything as a gift, nothing as pay—this is of the essence of Christianity. A loud, contentious, wrangling, self-obtrusive spirit feels no sympathy with Christ; the temper that condemns other men, and implies that its way is the only way, is not the temper of the little child. If we would follow Christ, we must be meek and gentle, we must not strive, nor cry, nor

let our voice be heard in the streets; we must learn to be emptied of self and seek what redounds, not to our praise or to our gain, but to the real good of men; we must learn to love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We must go apart with Him who set the little child before His disciples, and we must keep saying to Him, “Teach me also, O Lord, and lead me in Thy way.”

And how is it with those who have really no sympathy with the kind of character which is best represented by the child; who have not sought and are not seeking as the highest human attainment a true lowliness of mind and a humble expectation that they will receive from God far other things than they have deserved? Is it a small thing to you that you are losing the kingdom of heaven; that however a shallow self-assertion and consciousness of strength and self-sufficiency may succeed in this world, it is consciousness of insufficiency and of weakness that brings us within the kingdom of heaven?

Can you, then, recognize in yourself anything that corresponds to this great change, to this conversion which is equivalent to entrance into the kingdom of heaven? Can you from your own experience perfectly understand what the humility is of which our Lord speaks? Have you been brought to a true dependence on God, so feeling the guilt of your past life and the evil of your natural character that you can but leave yourself in the hand of God and His grace for pardon and for renewal? Have you been compelled to cry to Him to save you from your sin? Have you so learned His fatherly compassion and love, and have you thus been drawn into that true love of Him which makes it your pleasure to live for Him?

This kingdom of heaven that is being formed out of each generation of earth’s inhabitants, this kingdom into which is drafted all that is eternally good and worthy, admits only those who are willing to receive all from a Father, who have been, by some process in life, turned into little children, emptied of all and truly humbled before God. Has it been so with you; or do you persevere in maintaining a bold and cheerful front to the world, when within all is sad and broken, like those who are dying of famine, but fling their few loaves over their besieged wall to indicate a make-believe abundance? Are you showing by the very recklessness and loudness of your enjoyments that you dare not quietly enter your poor, hapless, benighted soul, where so many uneasy spirits of dead joys flit? If any such case be yours, then may God in His mercy teach you to own your poverty, and that He is your wealth; may He give you the heart of a child, simple, frank, humble, expectant.

XXI. Emancipation From The Fear Of Death

"That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."—*Heb.* ii. 14, 15.

Death is a subject which may at present be remote from our thoughts, but it is an experience in which we shall all one day or other be interested. To be frequently in the contemplation of death is perhaps the mark of a feeble rather than of a robust spirit, yet we ought not to refuse the calls which in God's providence invite us to consider death. And, if it be extravagant to demand that a large part of our life should be consumed in contemplating its end, we may, like Nelson, while fighting on deck yet keep our coffin in our cabin. For it is a grosser and more dangerous blindness entirely to ignore our latter end than even to be too much absorbed in it. And indeed it is a fact, although a humiliating one, that it is to death we owe much of our interest in religion. This one benefit at least we derive from the grand enemy, that it compels us to question it, what it hides, what it commits to, what it means; whereas if life were continuous on earth and in the flesh we should feel it impossible to resist the temptation to find all our contentment, here and now, in what appeals to sense. But as one by one men are irrevocably summoned from earth even the most worldly are compelled to follow them with inquiry. Each man knows that the day is coming when for himself and by himself he must make trial of the vast unimaginable beyond. Suspended over the dark abyss he cannot but question what it contains, what forms of life may there exist. Shall we find there fellowship with an all-powerful and loving Spirit? Shall we find there a life continuous with the present, governed by the same moral ideas, fulfilling similar purposes? Or shall we be launched into we know not what chaos of hostile influences, and adverse and calamitous conditions, or at any rate into a life for which the present is no preparation? Is our conscious connection with things and persons for ever broken when we cease to take part in this visible world?

It is well, then, to be assured that one of the purposes served by the mission of Christ was to dispel the fear of death by destroying that which gave it power to terrify. The fear of death is here represented as a bondage, a condition of slavery out of which every child of God must be emancipated. There is an old Talmudic legend that the dimple on every man's and woman's upper lip was impressed by the hand of God, who in creating all human flesh whispered, "It is well," but pressed His finger on our mouths to prevent us telling each other what we know. This legend aptly enough expresses the thought that every child of God should live with absolute fearlessness, however little he may be able to justify his confidence to those who challenge it. The freedom with which the truth makes free is rarely enjoyed, rarely even conceived. Men are content "to grunt and sweat" under the bondage of the world, its anxieties, its restraints, rather than live with God in perfect freedom. A life here and now that is but the full expression of our own will and spirit, a life that verifies that "all things are ours," that everything is for the children of God, is the rarest kind of life. But it may be expected that at least in one particular we throw off the spirit of slaves and

rise to the conception of a life that is arranged for our good; we may be expected to live free from the fear of death.

A casual reading of the words before us leaves the impression that this writer ascribes to the fear of death an influence wider and more profound than is warranted. No doubt there are instances known to us all in which the fear of death has mightily influenced men's actions. Galileo, threatened with the stake, renounced opinions which he knew to be true, and could only in words repudiate. Cranmer, good man as he was and ultimately a martyr for the truth, was terrified into recantation by the prospect of the fire in which his friends suffered. In sudden and alarming emergencies, in shipwreck, in pestilence, in accidents, we see how the natural and needful instinct of self-preservation has become debased into a selfish and craven fear of death. We have heard soldiers confess how in their first engagement they trembled and lost self-possession. And a man is considered heroic if, without dismay, he can look upon the ghastly face of death, as it draws aside the veil. But is it true that this fear weighs upon men throughout their lifetime? is it true that, apart from the emancipation effected by Christ, men are in bondage throughout life to this ruling fear? Doubtless there are persons of a nervous temperament or debilitated by disease who may justly be said to be all their lifetime in bondage through fear of death. Their anxiety finds food for itself in the most trivial occurrences, their timidity cuts them off from almost all the enjoyments of life. They are like the miser who is so anxious to have money that he loses all the advantages of having it; poor in abundance, they make life not worth having by their intense anxiety to keep it. Their life is made up of imagining possible dangers and using precautions against them; there is no ailment which they do not think themselves liable to, no form of death which they do not fancy may be their own. And thus, though they have but one life to live and one death to die, their morbid fancy makes them in fear and anticipation endure the woes of many lives and the horrors of many deaths. But these, happily, are exceptional cases.

If we analyze this fear we find that there are various causes producing it. 1. First of all there is the bodily pain, which frequently precedes death, and may in our own case do so. Dread of pain increases with age, as we learn more of the capacity for suffering which our body possesses, and as we see more of the terrible forms of disease by which life is slowly worn out. It is human nature to shrink from long-continued and hopeless weakness, from months of uselessness and slow decay, from the gradual extinction of all the functions of life, and the constantly renewed misery of the medical or surgical appliances which we know can but prolong for a short time a life that has become torture. But this cause of fear may be left to be dealt with by common-sense and nature. For it is unreasonable to distress ourselves with prospects of such a kind. For all we know, death may find us in sleep or may have passed before we were conscious of its approach, or in our case it may come with none of these attendant horrors. Dr. Hunter, in his last moments, grieved that he "could not write how easy and delightful it is to die." The late Archbishop of Canterbury quietly remarked, "It is really nothing much after all." Persons saved from drowning after passing through all conscious struggle have declared it was not the drowning, but the restoration which was painful. It is quite likely that we may pass away in a state of semi-consciousness, not unpleasantly dreaming over again the scenes of our active life, like that old teacher, venerated by all who knew him, who on his deathbed conceived he was still in school, and after some expressions of applause or censure, said, "But it grows dark—the boys may dismiss," and instantly expired. Or like Dr. Cairns, whose last words, "You go first, I will follow," showed to those around

him that his mind was occupied with nothing harsh or distasteful, but with reminiscences of past meetings and platforms. For death is very often in keeping with the life it ends, and to disturb ourselves at the manner of our dying is not merely un-Christian but unreasonable, is to import into our life a needless and ungrounded anxiety and overburden an already sufficiently weighted existence, and "feel a thousand deaths in fearing one."

2. A second cause of this fear is a more reasonable one. We fear death because it brings to an end the only life we know experimentally. No amount of argument will lead men to think cheaply of this life, and it were a pity if it did. For we have this life but once, and many of its familiar, well-tried joys come back never again. Even from eternity we must look back on it as a man looks lovingly back to the scenes of his childhood and traces to these thoughtless, careless, happy days much that is in him now. As the child is father to the man, so is this life the seed-bed of all that is to follow, and has therefore an unrivalled interest of its own. There are opportunities which are peculiar to this life, enjoyments which we must have here or not at all, exhibitions of human nature and an experience of men which no other life can afford, relationships which, if they do not lose their beauty, are at least altered in their character in the world to come. No wonder, therefore, that men should grudge to be taken out of this life before they have tasted all that is peculiar to it, before they have seen this present world as it now is, before they have studied the ways and habits and learned what is worth learning from the minds of their fellows on this side death. Besides, as there is a kind of sadness in all terminations, in the consciousness that we quit this particular thing for ever, so death which brings to an end all we have been used to is especially sad. There is a regretful feeling when we abandon an occupation never to return to it, when we put a book on the shelf knowing we shall never again have time to open it, when the daughter of a family goes to her own new home, when we leave a house, though it has been inconvenient; the mere fact of things ending brings an autumnal feeling into the spirit, much more when death ends all we have experienced and lived in. Whatever else life has done for us it has accustomed us to itself, formed habits which make things easier; we go through the same routine daily, walk in the same streets, see the same people, bear the same griefs, expect the same rewards; but death ends all such habits, abruptly lifts us out of all that we have learned of this world and makes useless all our acquired facility of dealing with it. It throws us altogether on our very selves, on what we are inwardly; all that is not of the very essence of the soul is stripped off, and we stand unsupported by old habits, unguided by old associations, uninfluenced by friends and a world's opinion; we are ushered into and called to deal with a wholly new order of things, an order of things purely spiritual from which we can find no refuge in an external world or body of our own.

But if we believe what both nature and Christ teach us, that this life is but the training-ground for another, that the powers here cultivated and the tools here whetted are for use in a larger and intenser existence; if we consider that once *this* life was as strange and new to us as any other can be, and that death is really the bursting of the shell that hinders us from entering the ampler air of our true and eternal life, we have surely cause enough to throw such regrets and fears to the winds, and even long, as some have longed, to learn what the true life of God and God's children is.

3. But this leads us to the most fruitful cause of fear, the consciousness that after death comes the judgment. Whatever men hold regarding the last judgment or the

mode of it, all men feel that at death there *is* a judgment, that death ushers them into a fixed, final, eternal state. This is the instinctive apprehension of untaught men as well as the warning of revelation. Men have felt themselves to be running on all through life to a destiny; they have been conscious, as we all are conscious, that the years form us as we live through them, and that character is becoming fixed beyond redemption. And men fear death because they know that then the end has come, that the time is past for weighing opinions, for choosing principles of conduct and discovering what to believe, for framing resolutions and amending their life, for introducing new aims into their spirit and underpropping their character with new foundations. They know that their time of trial is over and that now "all which was once possible has become either actual or impossible." They go out now into the light and the truth, and have their eternal destiny fixed not according to what they have known, or intended, or wished, or professed, but according to what each in his inmost soul is. And this light and truth become more terrible to men because embodied in the undeceivable eye and incorruptible justice and holy government of a personal God. To Him, who is Himself perfectly righteous and who has given them the means of becoming so, who has watched, cherished, patiently loved them, they must give account. To Him who knows all and the exact value of all we have done, to Him who told us His will regarding each part of our life, and who spoke to us every day through our own conscience, and who remembers all the secret thoughts and bold transgressions of our childhood, boyhood, youth and manhood we must now give account; and give account when it is too late for repentance and time only for judgment. It must be an awful hour to every human being when at last, after all the thoughts we ourselves have had about our life and prospects, God, the infallible, is to pronounce upon us—is to say whether we have been mistaken or enlightened, deceived or true, double or sincere, righteous or unrighteous, unregenerate or Christ-like. Whatever capacity is in each of us for solemnity, for fear, for conscience, will be awakened when we are summoned before our Judge and feel that the moment has come when all is settled for us. "We speak boldly of death, and of calm hopes, and of willingness to depart and the like; but when the time really comes we shall find it something different from our sincere but shallow imaginations."

The natural boldness which confronts death cheerfully, or sullenly submits to the inevitable, disappears when this added knowledge of the significance of death enters in. Mere natural courage is irrelevant in facing judgment. This letter was written "to the Hebrews," to men who had lived under a legal religion, and who could expect to escape punishment only if they had complied with all that the law commanded. But to be sure of this was impossible, and the result was that we find them exclaiming, "In this life death never suffers a man to be glad."

But this is not a case of which we can say, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The courage which comes of ignorance is no true courage. The man that is blind and deaf walks boldly on while onlookers tremble at his inevitable fate. That only is true courage which, knowing all that is to be known about the dreaded object, can yet go forward to meet it. And where an infallible judgment of life is to be faced it is only the fool who can be courageous. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; and he who apprehends that beneath these words there lies a reality as inevitable as death itself, he who believes that the life beyond is continuous with this life and takes its character from this life, cannot and ought not to look at death without dread if he has not found in Christ a reason for courage.

Our emancipation from bondage to this fear is accomplished by "the destruction of him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The devil was considered to be the counsel for the prosecution, the embodiment of an accusing conscience. Death was looked upon as the result of the primal curse, as separation from God and from all good on account of sin; a just and true view. The devil had the power of death in the sense in which the state has the power of the sword to inflict punishment on evildoers. The devil used the common idea of death to terrify and appal and separate from all hope in God. The Jew was haunted with such visions as Zechariah had when he saw the high priest himself clothed in filthy garments. This was the sting of the serpent; but in Christ the primeval promise was fulfilled, the serpent's head was crushed. The devil's weapon is struck from his hand. He can no longer persuade the children of God that death means separation from God and entrance upon a life of suffering.

This great deliverance our Lord accomplished "through death." So necessary was this death that in order to die He became man. How His death rendered all other death harmless we can in part understand. For the very fact that He, the beloved Son, passed through death convinces us that even those whom God loves and cannot abandon may have this experience. To Christ death was a necessary part of His work, without which His life would have been incomplete. It was the instrument by which He achieved His purpose. To us it may be equally important, and at any rate it cannot be considered as final separation from God. Rather it is the path which Christ chose to the happiest of all conditions, and the path by which His followers have ever cheerfully followed Him to be with Him where He is.

Besides this, the death of Christ being undergone for our sakes, we have in it not only a pattern of our own, but that which gives another character to our own. By dying Christ meant to free us from all slavery and make us true children of God. The death He died was the death due to us as the result of our sin; on Him were laid our iniquities, and by His stripes we are healed. There is now no condemnation to them that are in Him; and death, instead of launching us into outer darkness which no light can penetrate, is our birth into the full understanding and enjoyment of our Father's love.

But it is Christ's resurrection which effectually alters our view of death. The fact of death cannot be sufficiently counterbalanced by a surmise, a hope, a longing, but only by a fact as solid as itself. Such a fact is Christ's resurrection and entrance upon a continued human life. From this fact spring strength, consolation, hope. Already there lives beyond the grave One in whom we live. "Because I live, ye shall live also," said our Lord on the eve of His own death, confident that He would rise again. Whosoever receives His words is armed against all the graver terrors of death. Whosoever believes that Christ is now alive has a future life to look forward to, that may well be an object of hope and desire to the most prosperous of those that live on earth.

Through faith in this Deliverer many weak and naturally timorous persons, although fully alive to their own faultiness, have by the manner of their death left on the mind of their friends as clear a persuasion that Christ was with them as if He had been seen. If any are still in bondage, haunted by the thought that one day this hateful experience of passing to another life must be theirs; if the flesh has claimed the man almost to the entire exclusion of the spirit, so that a spiritual world cannot be relished; if the future presents itself as a bondage, a destiny you would fain escape but cannot, these are hints or even loud calls to you to enter the full and free life of

God's children. Do not lightly presume that in the time of your utmost need help will come to you; do not call wicked, worldly, fleshly presumption faith, nor believe that having all your life resisted the Spirit you will in the end be able to relish things spiritual. Faith in Christ is no such presumption, but a living union to Him by which you become one spirit with Him.

This being so, death, whatever you think of it and however it seems to strip you, will be the time of your greatest gain, the fulfilment of all righteous hope, the attainment of often-defeated aims. We cannot, any of us, stand on the other side of death, on the eternal side, and look back on it and see its changed aspect; but looking at the risen Christ we can somewhat understand the ecstasy of triumph with which we shall find all foreboding and doubtful struggle for ever at an end. It is sin and the world that now prevent our knowing God fully, and it cannot but be that every pang of severance from this life must be absorbed in the joy of at last being wholly at rest in our Heavenly Father. Should we be afraid to pass to Him from whom has come everything we have found to be good, our faithful Creator who has fought against all our evils, and to whom our exile from Him has been more painful than to ourselves, and who takes us back to Himself that we may at length learn to lay aside all fear and taste that God is good? Is it not reasonable to believe that the eternal condition to which supreme love calls us, and which alone can satisfy this love, must be infinitely happier and fuller of life than this time of preparation for it, in which our glimpses of true happiness are continually blurred and blotted by sin and failure?

"Mysterious Night! When our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue?
Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo! creation widened in man's view
Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find,
Whilst fly and leaf and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind!
Why do we then shun death with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?"

XXII. The Last Judgment

Matthew xxv. 31-46.

It is said that in the days of the martyrdoms a Christian, the night before his suffering, fell asleep in his prison and dreamed of Paradise. He was walking in a garden of delight, where all was made of the purest transparent glass, clear as crystal. The people themselves who moved up and down were also transparent, and as he passed among them he perceived that all eyes were turned upon him and fixed with surprise and dismay on his breast. On looking down he is horrified to see that he has become transparent, and that a dark stain in his heart, a shadow amidst all this brightness, has drawn all eyes upon him. Instinctively he raises his hand to hide it, but his hands, too, are transparent, and heaven is for him no longer heaven. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed." Similarly in the wonderful description of the Last Judgment which Plato gives he represents God as providing that both the judge and the judged shall be stripped of all the appearances and disguises of this life, and of the body itself, so that the judge with his naked soul shall pierce into the naked souls of those that are brought before him and see their very essence, nothing intervening. This is to be done with absolute impartiality, the judge not knowing whose are the souls brought before him; but, tracing in the scars and stains and prints that mark the soul the ill-living and selfish cruelty and luxury and insolence which have characterized the life, the judge marks each as curable or incurable, and dispatches them ignominiously to the punishment deserved.

This has been the instinctive declaration of all thoughtful races. They have uttered their belief in very various forms, but they agree in looking forward to a time when each man shall be known for what he really is, and shall be rewarded according to his deeds. The ancient Egyptians were not more familiar with the sight of their own Nile than with the picture which represented the judgment of the dead: the great scales set up in the judgment hall, the soul of the dead in one, the symbol of truth in the other, and the impartial scribe standing by to watch the wavering tongue of the balance, and record the result. Other races, with more or less impressiveness, have depicted the meeting of the soul with judgment; the stripping away of all disguise and appearance, and the laying bare of the actual man in his worth or worthlessness. It is the instinct of the race that a time must come when reality and appearance coincide, when condition and character correspond. The sense of justice which is innate in all men clamours for a time when there shall be a rectification of all wrongs endured on earth, retribution on all oppressors, compensation to the myriads of our race who have suffered innocently, and generally such an eternal adjustment of human affairs as will vindicate God and proclaim Him a righteous ruler.

In the picture here given us by our Lord we need not concern ourselves with what is merely pictorial, but should endeavour to reach the substance. In the representations of the final judgment contained in Scripture there is much to stimulate the imagination—the great white throne set in the heavens, the voice of the archangel ringing like a trumpet through heaven and earth, restoring to the long dead a sense of outward things, and summoning them with strengthening command to assemble before the presence of the Supreme, the generations of all time gathering from all quarters, and with lives and characters so various—yet all this scarcely touches the

essence of the matter, and is rather the drapery helping to make an inconceivable scene visible. It matters little how much of what is figurative cleaves to the mind, so long as we are convinced of the fact of judgment and perceive the principles that determine it.

But as it would seem that some persons, who might be expected to be more careful, dismiss the fact of judgment because they cannot credit the form in which it is presented, it may be well to emphasize that this picture is a picture, and that we must interpret it as we interpret any other picture or parable, putting aside the adjuncts and details which are needful to complete the scenery, and grasping the essential truth it is meant to embody. And this essential truth may, I think, be summed up in the following statements—

1. That there is a judgment to come.

2. That it is a final judgment.

3. That it is carried through by Christ.

4. That it proceeds on the conduct of man to man.

1. There is a judgment to come. Setting aside much that is here spoken of as mere representation, helping to make a judgment conceivable to us; setting aside the throne, the gathered multitudes, the summary separation, the actual words uttered, it remains that there is a judgment to come. And by this it is meant that a time is coming when each man shall stand in the light of truth, and shall recognize what he has made of himself, and shall enter upon a condition corresponding to his character. For a judgment not only implies that the difference between sin and goodness is recognized, but that it is declared and acted upon. Sin will be seen to be sin. The sinner will himself see its evil, and will recognize that the judgment of God is not an overdone and exaggerated estimate of it, but the simple, absolute truth. The sinner will see himself to be that hateful thing which sin really is. All that has blinded us to the true character of sin will be removed.

How this judgment is to be brought about is a matter of less moment, and, like much that concerns the future, is necessarily obscure. Yet it is not difficult to perceive possibilities, especially if we are content to be guided by what we see of God's government now. Reasoning from what we see of God's judgments in this world, and from what we know of our own nature, we should consider it probable that in the future, as in the present, judgment is automatic: that is to say, God does not require to interpose in any special and abnormal manner in order to judge men, but He has so constituted the world and ourselves that judgment necessarily and naturally arrives. Punishments are inflicted upon us in life without any special interposition; punishments of the severest kind, which compel us to see how real a factor in human life sin is; they are inflicted in the order of nature, by our passing into circumstances where we need what we have wasted, be it time, strength, money, or friendship; or where we find duties awaiting us for which we have unfitted ourselves; or where we find that influences which we have set in motion have gone quite beyond our control; or where we would be spiritual, righteous, or unselfish, but find that through long habituation to carnal, worldly, and selfish ways we are unable to be so. At such times we are judged; the difference between a sinful and a sinless career is pressed upon our conviction, and we recognize that we are ourselves the authors of our own undoing.

The mere ongoing of the world and our passing into new conditions judges men, and either accepts them as duly prepared for better things or rejects them as unfitted. The man that goes to the Arctic regions lightly clad and unprovided is judged by the frost; the idle boy is judged and finds his level as soon as he competes with others seeking good posts in life.

The judgment which is partly visible in this life will be continued and completed in the future world. The conditions of that future world we cannot forecast; but this we know, that the Spirit of Christ will there rule. And this means that those who by truly adopting His Spirit here are prepared to find their happiness in what is self-sacrificing and promotive of the good of others will be happy, while others not so prepared must be wretched. Those who have found their happiness here in carnal enjoyments, in bodily comfort, selfish ease and outward prosperity must necessarily be judged by their entrance upon a life where all is spiritual, where the flesh no longer exists at all. There is no deeper distinction among men now than that which the opposition of flesh and spirit defines. The fleshly man is judged by passing out of the flesh into a spiritual world. He has no capacity to fit him for it, no capacity for enjoying it.

2. This judgment to come is final. The finality is here expressed in the words: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.” These words launch us into a most unwelcome subject, and have stirred much angry controversy. That there should be many in every generation who cannot reconcile everlasting punishment with God’s goodness cannot surprise us. It is not easy to understand how any person, and least of all God, could be happy if multitudes were suffering in hopeless misery. No doubt we manage to enjoy ourselves in this world, though so many thousands of our fellows toss in anguish and are involved in utter wretchedness. But this is partly due to our dulness of imagination and partly to the knowledge that the miseries of this life are not endless. So long as we allow the doctrine of everlasting punishment to be a mere verbal statement, so long as we do not fill it with reality, it is of course easy to accept it; but there are men of a sensitive nature, or perhaps we should say of a more Christian spirit, who cannot muffle their imagination and prevent it from vividly conceiving what actually exists, and to whom life is rendered an intolerable misery by the prospect of suffering which lies before so many of their fellows. Rather than resign all mental comfort and happiness of spirit such persons naturally resign belief in everlasting punishment, and thus attain a life free from visions so discomposing. And if only we could be persuaded that all men will one day be restored to God and to the happiness of loving Him, who would not rejoice? But there are enormous difficulties in the way of such a belief.

The difficulty of believing in everlasting punishment is the difficulty of believing that a God of love would not by His love ultimately win the sinner. Undoubtedly it is right and relevant to argue from the goodness of God. That goodness will continue and will manifest itself towards sinners in the world to come as well as in this world. But the goodness of God is, unfortunately, not the only factor in human life. This world sufficiently shows that other influences are at work, and that, notwithstanding God’s goodness, human lives may become tragic in the extreme. And unless free will is to be a name and ourselves puppets, it must be so. No one questions that if repentance is possible in the world to come, pardon is also possible. No one questions that if in the darkest place of punishment a sinner sought reconciliation with God and purity of character, he would find those blessings. The question is, Is that a possibility? Is repentance always possible? Is there or is there not such a thing as fixity of

character? A man's body cannot grow a second time, and use more wholesome food, more developing exercise, healthier influences. Is it so or is it not so with his spiritual growth? Is there a time when his probation closes, and when the sinner's character becomes fixed beyond possibility of alteration? Seeking for an answer to this all-important inquiry, we cannot but take into account the fact which both nature and Scripture affirm, that sin has its stages of growth, and that these are marked by increasing insensibility. Nature on all hands exhibits instances of the law that faculties unused decay, and finally become extinct. This process is visible in the human soul. And the close of probation is reached when this condition is reached, when moral irresponsiveness has become moral inability, and when moral inability has passed into natural inability. So that the true "terminating probation is a moral rather than a temporal one," and may in some cases require to be drawn on this side death rather than in some remote future.

While, then, we must acknowledge that there is much that is quite hidden from view, and while we must always bear in mind that God's love may find modes of manifestation quite inconceivable by us, we must not blind ourselves to obvious laws of human nature, and remove all uneasiness and wise anxiety from our minds by the easy belief that God is loving. Other men we may confidently leave in the hands of the Judge of all the earth, who will assuredly be just and merciful; for ourselves, it were the crowning folly and wickedness to exonerate ourselves from the utmost of effort now on the ground that our probation does not end, nor is our character fixed in all essentials at death.

A word or two must suffice on the language of our Lord in this place. So far as I have ever been able to make out, He meant to convey the impression which every simple-minded and unbiassed reader receives from them—that the duration of the punishment and of the blessedness spoken of were the same. The word translated "everlasting" in the one clause is the same as that translated "eternal" in the other. In books and periodicals which are at present popular it is commonly urged that the proper meaning of the word used by our Lord is not "eternal" or "everlasting," but "age-long," and that what is meant is that the punishment spoken of and described as "age-long" will last through the age or dispensation which immediately succeeds this present world, but not for ever.

This is not the place to discuss the meaning of a Greek word, but it has become necessary to warn the unwary against accepting such an account of the word in question as sufficient. It was one of the words most commonly used to express what was lasting in contrast to what was temporary. It is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews to characterize the New Testament dispensation as real and eternal in contrast to the Old Testament, which was symbolic and passing. The word is similarly used by the most accurate Greek writers. When Plato, for example, wishes to bring out that the heavens and earth pass away, but the idea of them in the mind of God does not pass away, he falls into almost the same language as Paul, and says that these visible things are temporal, but the unseen are eternal and do not come to an end; and to express this idea of permanence he uses the very word used by our Lord. It is quite legitimate—nay, it is our duty—to seek for some door of hope for those on the left hand; but it is certainly not legitimate to break a door through the words of our Lord in this passage. However ignorant we are of the future, and whatever possibilities remain open to the love of an infinitely wise and gracious God, there is certainly no hope to be extracted from these particular words, and nothing can be gained by shirking the truth.

3. Christ is here said to be the Judge. In the Gospel of John we read that God has given all judgment to the Son because He is Son of Man. By this it is meant that as Christ has embodied in a human life and character the perfect righteousness required of all men, He has necessarily become the Judge of all. It is by their similarity or dissimilarity to Him that men stand or fall. It is not only that He sets the standard for all men; but by making perfect righteousness a visible actuality, and by offering to make all men like Himself, He becomes their Judge. For men are necessarily judged by their manner of dealing with Christ or with goodness as offered to them by Christ. If a man does not know what goodness is, or if he has no means of attaining it, you cannot tell whether he is good or bad. But as soon as goodness is presented to him and made possible, he is judged by his acceptance or refusal of it. Christ came with His fan in His hand, separating the chaff from the wheat, necessarily, because by His presence among us He divides us into two classes, those who are mere outside, who have the appearance of good grain but nothing more, and those who are really good; between those who cannot make up their minds to be as He was in the world, who can at the best only seem to be like Him, and those who in heart are like Him, who love their fellows as He did, and aim at spiritual results as He did.

It is in the person of Christ that God has been accepted or rejected of men, and it is fit that in this person also men be accepted or rejected of God. The terrible doom of the wicked will therefore not be the ignorant stroke of one who does not know what life on earth is, but the calm decision of One who by His own experience has learned accurately to estimate all that extenuates guilt. Every allowance will be made, justice will not be strained, harshness and partiality will have no place; we shall be judged by One who will look into our eyes and read our soul with His own human eyes and His own human knowledge of men and their ways. Think of one of your wisest, kindest friends, and consider what it would be to have to tell all your sin to him—to put in words all the detail of it, to mark his growing amazement and pain; such will it be to be judged by Jesus, who Himself stood where you have fallen, and who can measure your fall by human knowledge.

4. This judgment proceeds on the conduct of man to man. The friends of mankind are to share the destiny of the great Friend of our race; the haters of mankind are to partake with the great enemy. At first sight the duties here taken account of seem among the easiest and most level to natural capacity, unaided and unregenerate; they are the common humanities of life that men as well as God are ashamed of us if we do not attend to. It is no high flight of spirituality, no apostolic devotedness, no unremitting, ill-sacrificing zeal that is required at the last judgment as a test sufficient to determine to what side we belong; the question which here determines all is, How have we discharged the common charities of life? The spirit of Christ is that which induced Him to pity us, which led Him to feel for us, which drew Him to come down and give us help and comfort; it is this spirit of love which is fundamental, it is this which has produced all else that is good and gracious in His life and work; and the man who is like Him in this will one day be like Him in all else—the man who is touched as Christ was with the miseries of others and seeks to relieve them, the man who does not forget griefs that are not staring him in the face, but goes and seeks out and visits the distressed, the man who can be most readily characterized as one who lives for others rather than for himself—this man has the very spirit of Christ, however much he may be astonished to hear it, as these men were. “Love is of God,” and will still be recognized by God as belonging to Him.

And it is especially to be remarked that those who were thus richly rewarded for these deeds of charity were not aware that in doing them they had been serving Christ. The surprise expressed alike by those on the right and the left hand is an essential element in the scene. It was because of the thing itself and their true charity in doing it that they were rewarded, and not because they had deliberately intended to serve Christ. They pleased Him without being aware of it, and while obeying the inward promptings of their own benevolence.

This is very remarkable, and has, I think, not been sufficiently accepted. That which determines the place of the righteous is, not their knowledge of Christ, but their likeness to Him; not the fact that in this life they professed His name, but the fact that in this life they were animated by the same principles and wrought for the same ends as He. Our Lord's statements are bold, so bold that we are sometimes afraid to take them as they stand. But if we are to take this description as it stands, then those who are set at His right hand are those who, whether they have known Him or not, have yet served Him by aiding humanity.

The self-identification of Christ with all that is pitiable and wretched and outcast on earth is not altogether imaginary, but has its basis in the substantial facts of His earthly life. His life was entered on and spent with a view to the relief of men. But His earthly career was merely one part of the fulfilment of an eternal purpose. His love now is as strong as then, and He is no less desirous to relieve the suffering of this present age than He showed Himself desirous to relieve the miseries of those who were around Him upon earth. He now participates in the misery of wretched men, just as do the pitiful and feeling among ourselves; and whoever relieves the wretched, whoever heals the sick, whoever lessens the sum of human misery, though it be but by a kind word spoken to a child, or a crust given to the least of the poor, this man helps his Lord. So to the loyal Christian every human being in need is Christ.

It is with indignation, therefore, that our Lord hears the attempted apology from His left hand: "When saw we *Thee* an hungred or sick or in prison?" As if there were any way of serving Christ but by serving men; or as if those who truly and intelligently loved Christ could help loving men; as if, indeed, His great claim to our love were not simply this, that He puts Himself wholly at the service of men, and constrains and wins all His followers to do so likewise. These men were self-condemned; they showed that they supposed personal homage was what Christ seeks of His followers; and did not understand that the service He desires from us is just the service He Himself came to perform, the lightening of others' woes, and the helping others to whatever good it is in our power to bestow. What claim have such men to go on living among men, if their chief aim is to make use of other men for their own comfort and pleasure? What claim have they to a place in that eternal society which is held together by fidelity and love?

How, then, are we prepared for this judgment, this declaration of absolute truth regarding our actual condition of soul? Are you willing to become transparent, that all your imaginings, your desires, the real bent of your disposition may be apparent to all? To what do your thoughts and desires gravitate in your times of unguarded, unconstrained leisure? Is it to things spiritual or to things of the flesh? Which presents itself to you with the greater zest and attractiveness, your own advantage or the growth of good in the world? Christ's self-sacrifice and devotion from first to last to the interests of the whole body of men, His aim in life and spirit are not what we may or may not adopt as we please. His spirit and aim are the only right spirit and aim, the only test which will be put to us in judgment. We shall not be asked what we

have felt or thought or believed or hoped, but what we have done. Have we spent our life in trying to gather comforts round ourselves, or have we, in a wider or narrower sphere as God has appointed, striven to lessen evil of every kind, to remove sin, distress, want?

XXIII. The Work Of The Ministry

Address delivered at the close of session, New College, Edinburgh, on March 28th, 1907.

I do not know whether more to pity or to envy those who are proceeding to a ministry which may naturally be expected to cover the next thirty or fifty years. Always a vocation which wrings from men of conscience the cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" it will in the coming time demand increased independence of judgment, sincerity of faith and diligence; independence of judgment, because when all authority is called in question and those to whom we have been accustomed to look for guidance differ from one another in opinion, the individual is compelled to think for himself; sincerity of faith, because nothing short of personal and undeniable experience of the grace of Christ will carry us through when the very foundations of the creeds are threatened with destruction; and diligence, because though the pulpit must always remain a magnificent vantage-ground for the convinced and warm-hearted speaker, it is now judged simply on its merits and has to face the competition of influences unknown to the past.

But as these difficulties of the ministry increase, so grow its importance and its invitation. It is in a time of transition such as this, when every old belief is called in question and when the traditional moorings are sunk, that men feel their need of guidance and the expert finds his opportunity. When all things are fused and ready to take new shapes, the hand that can form the mould has the control of the new world that is making. One man in his single strength and modest shyness will think that the utmost he can do will still be inconsiderable and insignificant, but it is only when each does the part assigned him that the purpose of God is fulfilled in its completeness and perfectness. If men looked back to the French Revolution, when all Europe was thrown into the melting-pot and a new and better Europe began to be, and looking back could see that it was bliss even to be alive in those days, while to be *young* was very heaven, the same language may be used of the time on which we have entered and in which a more silent but profounder revolution is being accomplished—a revolution from which Christendom will emerge either old, worn out, and shattered, with hopes blasted and faith dead, or with the glory of a new dawn upon its face, remade, renewed in youth, immovable in a re-found faith, nearer to heaven and God, and with a sure and certain hope that the kingdom of the world is to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

The perennial Antichrist—the world, the flesh, and the devil—has grown and matured with the world's progress, and assumes to-day more formidable proportions. The world is always the world: a solid, firmly knit, colossal mass, more successful in converting the Church than the Church has ever been in converting it, absorbing without sign of change all that the Church pours into it as the ocean absorbs the raindrops. Looking at its inveterate customs, its unquestioned assumptions and conventions, its easy self-sufficiency and pride of life, its appeal to all that is greedy in human nature, its sense of stability and superiority as being precisely the product of man's inherent desires and ambitions, does not our task of subduing it to Christ seem hopeless? Were we called to tilt with even a Lancelot we might have some hope, but who can unhorse the centaur? Man and horse are one. So

seem the world and the heart of man. Can you draw out leviathan with a hook; can you hold a whale with trout-tackle? He who would bring men out of the world into the kingdom of Christ must reckon on the pull of forces of the greatest known strength, and on a hold deep and inveterate. The preacher must be conscious that the force that is with him is greater than all that can be against him, that he is not going out with ten thousand to meet him that is coming against him with twenty thousand, that he can make the spiritual world and its joys as palpable and appealing as the joys that attach to sport, to social position and gaieties, to the excitement and gains of business, to power, to martial enterprise. He must be sure that there is working along with him a force whose power he knows is able to counteract the enormous, overwhelming momentum with which this world pursues its own affairs.

The world in our day has added to its normal seductions many which can only exist in prosperous and progressive times. There is, for example, a childish craving for money and the excessive pleasure and vulgar display that money commands—a veritable poison in our social life; there is the foolish, bragging spirit that tricks itself out in the garb of patriotism and cries for more territory before it has learned to govern itself and what it has; the gambling that brings fool and knave together in a common snare, and is eating out of the nation's heart an honest love of hard work and all generosity of disposition; the alarming lust for pleasure that tramples on everything sacred which stands as an obstacle to its gratification; the appalling intemperance that spends on a pernicious appetite over £160,000,000 in a year; the lowered and debased moral sense that has lost the power of discriminating between fair and foul, what is pure and what is filthy; the prurience that applauds dances and plays which even the hardened theatrical critics blush to describe. With our growing material prosperity and progress there have arrived new means of pleasure and of gain, and new habits impossible to our fathers are rapidly being formed.

Now it is useless to protest against new ways, and to suppose that having done so our whole duty is discharged and our hands clean. These new ways have come to stay; they are, if not an essential part of the progress we are making, at any rate so associated with it as to make it impossible for us to object to them in the mass. Our business is, so far as conscience permits, to adjust ourselves and our methods of promoting Christ's kingdom to the new conditions. Some new customs must simply be resisted and, if possible, done away with; but in many respects and with relation to many altered conditions of social life, it is we who must change, and not the new conditions. Like the machinery against the introduction of which the hand-loom weaver so violently protested; like the new implements of war which put the weakling and the coward on a level with the bravest and strongest, these new social ways will abide, and we can neither go back to the old ways nor act as if no change had taken place. To hold to our old methods without addition, alteration, or adaptation is suicidal. It is to arm our soldiers with Brown Bess and send them to face Mausers and Maxims. I cannot myself respond to the charming of Salvation Army tambourines, but at any rate the Salvation Army has read us a most important lesson by its effort to meet existing conditions, has burst the bond of ecclesiastical conventions and struck out for itself methods more likely to satisfy the actual needs of part of the community. How we can best win those who are deeply involved with the world or with vice is hard to tell, but it is a step in the right direction to see the problem and at least try to solve it. Successful ways are often very unlikely ways; but they always have at the root of their success a human heart and honest endeavour and self-sacrifice, even if little obvious wisdom. Let us open our eyes to the actual

men and women who form our society, and not go on writing sermons for ideal congregations which nowhere exist.

The present outstanding evidence of the inefficiency or incompleteness of our methods is the lapse from the Church of so large a proportion of the people. In London four out of five people do not go to Church, and although in Scotland things may be slightly better, there is no doubt that a large proportion of our population is beyond the pale. The statement recently made on a German platform that faith in God is fast disappearing even from the Church was received with loud applause. And a German writer assures us that there is growing up, especially in the great cities of North America, a heathenism which does not deny the Son of God only because it knows nothing at all about Him. Of course much may be said to deaden the force of this fact. It may be said that in all ages the majority of men desire to be free to follow their own devices unchecked by religious scruples. We may be reminded that it is not two centuries since a great and responsible Frenchman said, "There is no such thing as religion in England; if one speaks of religion every one begins to laugh." It might be said that it is not to be expected that the claims of Christ will receive patient and anxious consideration from men whose heart is set not "first on the kingdom of God and His righteousness," not so much on purity of character and harmony with God as on achieving the material well-being of their class. It may also be said that the Church has already done much to reclaim the sunken and neglected, and that its efforts have by no means been fruitless.

All that is true; and it is invidious and useless to try to apportion the due amount of blame to all the parties concerned. The thing which matters is, that we recognize the actual conditions in which our ministry is to be exercised and prepare to meet these conditions. I would be the last to underrate the importance of preaching; but perhaps we in Scotland have too much pandered to the extraordinary appetite of Christian people for this form of self-indulgence. Probably in the past the claims made on the energy of our ministers by the preparation of sermons and other intellectual products have debarred them from the active intercourse with the people and from their engagement in the practical relief and prevention of distress which are now demanded of them. Your opportunities of helping in social matters will vary with the positions you are called to fill, but given the opportunity it will weigh heavily on your conscience in later years if you have done little or nothing by your own practical endeavour to lighten the burden of the poor, to introduce justice and mercy into the relations of employer and employed, to replace squalor, disease, and hopelessness by comfort, health, and enjoyment of life; in a word, to bring in the kingdom of God on earth. Our Lord not only Himself cared for the sick and the outcast, but in sending out His Apostles to preach the kingdom gave them power also to heal and to cast out devils. The human being consists of body and soul, the one acting and reacting unsearchably on the other. It is idle to adjust their relative claims. No doubt character can transfigure the most squalid conditions, but there are conditions in our social economy so vile and inhuman that one is ashamed to see that such things are possible in a so-called Christian land. Happy the man who can do anything to humanize and Christianize the world around him and make life a little easier to any of his fellows!

But it is not only the social questions of to-day which make the work of the minister so laborious, but the *instruction* of the people is involved in difficulties of considerable magnitude. One everywhere meets with doubt of matters which a few years ago were unquestioned. This doubt is in one aspect of it a hopeful sign. It

means that men will not now believe a thing merely because they are told to do so. They wish to be in touch with reality, with that which can make good its claim to be believed even in the face of doubt and questioning. Religion is no longer a mere traditional inheritance received without question. So far, all such inquiry is good; but too often it ceases as soon as begun, and either lapses into indifference, as if no truth were attainable, or it accepts any fashionable form of scepticism or anti-Christian sentiment. So that what began with apparent inquiry and the assumption of superior knowledge often ends in shameful neglect of inquiry and discreditable ignorance.

But after deducting the whimsies and vanities of shallow minds there remains a large amount of hesitation and bewilderment and honest doubt. And if the men of this generation, tossed and bewildered with the tempest of new ideas, are not to find us helpless in the time of their need, unable even to sympathize with their difficulties because we ourselves have shrunk from facing them, unready with any counsels which they can recognize as tested and sufficient, we must gird ourselves for serious, solitary, sustained thought. Saving faith is one and the same, unchangeable in all ages. The gospel is to-day what it was when it fell from our Lord's own lips. But to deny that the last century of the most enlightened and resolute inquiry ever in this world's history devoted to one subject has resulted in considerably altering our views regarding some articles of faith is to talk nonsense, and nonsense which the progress of thought will utterly disregard, and is utterly disregarding. Moreover, any one who has lived through these years of transition, or who by his reading has brought himself into its current, is well aware that the force of this extraordinary theological movement has by no means spent itself, and that problems of the most momentous kind still await solution. In America a house is sometimes shifted bodily to a new site. That is always a precarious operation. But still more fraught with risk and consequence is the shifting of theology from the basis of a book to that of a Person. To disregard these problems and their relation to the gospel of Christ may possibly be the path of wisdom which will commend itself to a devout layman, but is certainly not that which will satisfy the conscience of a Christian minister. To play the ostrich and with fast-closed eyes declare that no important modifications of belief are demanded, is wholly unworthy of a minister of Christ. At bottom it means unbelief, failure to recognize that God is in all truth and is ever seeking to lead His Church to its fuller discernment. To be afraid of the truth in any department of knowledge is not merely to discredit the teaching in this College, it is to distrust God, it is to believe in the stagnant God of Deism, not in the living God of Christianity.

There are two obvious remarks which will occur to any one who considers the duty of our ministry in relation to this spirit of inquiry which at present prevails. The first is, that it is our duty as ministers of Christ to make ourselves acquainted with the results of recent investigation into the origins of Christianity. If we read at all, there is no department of literature that has a prior claim. To know what earnest and prolonged and scholarly research has ascertained regarding the career, the teaching, and the person of Christ is surely our first business. In almost every congregation in our Church you will find some persons, and these possibly of most spiritual influence, who need help and guidance in their consideration of such matters as the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, the Divinity of Christ, the limitations of His knowledge, the accuracy of the Evangelists. You are sure to meet with persons who do not understand what saving faith is and who confound it with belief in various theological propositions, and unless your own mind is clear, both regarding these propositions and their relation to saving faith, you run the risk of turning a possible apostle of Christ into a bitter and resolute unbeliever. That has frequently happened

where the doubt and perplexity which necessarily beset every thoughtful and reading man at the present day are met with unintelligent, unsympathetic denunciation or irresponsiveness where helpful light and leading were expected. Never has the ministry had a greater opportunity or a stronger call to magnify its office. Never has any generation of the ministry had the same incentive or the same material for its work. You begin where we leave off. You accept as your birthright what the passing generation has fought for and spent itself in striving to attain. But the work is always going on and always seems but begun. And to you is this great grace given, to help with quiet, cautious steadiness in the task of leading the people of Scotland into a sure standing in Christ Jesus, a standing which can bear the test of the fiercest light that beats upon it. It is a hard and precarious task. You are called not merely to interpret Scripture and systematize its teaching, but to build up a theology round the Person of Christ, to act at last on the axiom of Paul, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

A second remark which the present condition of theological opinion suggests is, that while the minister seeks to enlighten those under his care, and make permanent additions to their knowledge as well as to their spirituality of life, he must spend much consideration on the best method of doing so. A professor of theology addresses a group of men, all of whom are supposed to be at the same stage of education; a minister addresses children and old men, uneducated and educated persons at every stage of spiritual experience, persons wholly indifferent to present-day problems and persons whose whole intellectual interest lies in their solution. This composition of his congregation enormously increases the difficulty of his task and the need of caution. For a needless and indiscriminate thrusting of unfamiliar thoughts of our own upon persons unprepared for their reception is quite as likely to do harm as the unsympathetic treatment of doubt. The mother who forces beef or bread on her child a month old can scarcely be surprised if disagreeable or fatal consequences ensue. Instruction given from the pulpit should not be of debateable matter: it should be more or less of the nature of preaching, proclaiming the gospel and illustrating its applications to the whole of human life.

But the instinct of the ministry in recent times has given birth to the Bible-class, in which any amount of instruction is suitable and which furnishes an audience at least comparatively of equal attainment. In our own Church the Bible-class, utilized, not as it too often is for literary instruction, but for teaching in subjects closely connected with Christian fact and doctrine, is an instrument of quite immeasurable power. I believe the lapse of the Scots peasant from church-going habits is largely due to the want of adequate instruction of the young, and that where that is given nothing is more successful in bringing the people back to the Church. Everybody wants to *know* something, and a religion dissociated from knowledge loses much of its power.

Yours, then, is a calling which demands all the effort you can make. The best thing you can do for Christ is to be diligent in your business, fervent in spirit. Let yours be no languid, forced service, but a service prompted by zeal. Don't allow yourselves to be put to shame by men of affairs or literary men, even by a Lord Macaulay, of whom it was said, "He reads twenty books to write a sentence; travels a hundred miles to make a line of description." Probably there will always be those who find the ministry an easy life; certainly there are always those who make it so; possibly a few who choose it because they expect it to be a sheltered, leisurely, safe career. Dr. Chalmers, before he experienced the great spiritual change which so deeply marked his life, found it possible to write the following: "The author of this pamphlet can assert, from

what is the highest of all authority, the authority of his own experience, that after the satisfactory discharge of his parish duties a minister may enjoy five days in the week of uninterrupted leisure for the prosecution of any science in which his task may dispose him to engage. . . . A minister has five days in the week for his own free and independent exertions, and it would be a most ridiculous display of argument to prove that there is anything in the employment of the remaining two calculated to extinguish his mathematical ardour, to stupify and degrade his faculties, to shut his mind against the fascinating enjoyments of science, or to destroy any of those vigorous and decided tendencies which nature or habit may have implanted. There is almost no consumption of intellectual effort in the peculiar employment of a minister. The great doctrines of revelation, though sublime, are simple. They require no labour of the midnight oil to understand them, no parade of artificial language to impress them upon the hearts of the people."[2] If a man like Chalmers fell a victim to this misconception of the work demanded by the office of the ministry, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

[2] Dr. Chalmers' pamphlet, "Observations on Mr. Playfair's Letter to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh relative to the Mathematical pretensions of the Scottish clergy."

Very different was Chalmers' after-life. Day after day for years he records in his diary, "Started at six." Even on Monday mornings, "Started at six and wrote half a sermon before breakfast," which reminds us of Thackeray's, "Began *Newcomes* 7th July, 1853, finished 20th June, 1855. Seven o'clock in the morning. That is your true secret!" Chalmers, even when he found two days a week sufficient for ministerial work, gave himself eagerly to other pursuits. And there is one more reprehensible being than the minister who finds his main pursuit and chief joy outside his professional work, and that is the minister who has no pursuit and no intensity at all. What Carlyle says of the idler should ring in our memories as persistently as the striking of the hour that beats out our little lives: "Hast thou," he says, "looked upon the Potter's wheel—one of the venerablest objects, old as the prophet Ezekiel and far older? Rude lumps of clay, how they spin themselves up, by *mere quick whirling*, into beautiful circular dishes. And fancy the most assiduous Potter, but without his wheel: reduced to make dishes, or rather amorphous botches, by mere kneading and baking! Even such a Potter were destiny, with a human soul that would rest and lie at ease, that would not work and spin. Of an idle, unrevolving man the kindest Destiny, like the most assiduous Potter without wheel, can bake and knead nothing better than a botch; let her spend on him what expensive colouring, what gilding and enamelling she will, he is but a botch. Not a dish; no, a bulging, kneaded, crooked, shambling, squint-cornered, amorphous botch—a mere enamelled *vessel* of dishonour. Let the idle think of this. Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness." I may add, "Thrice blessed is he who finds his joy in the work of the ministry." In this work more than in any other, every faculty you possess will find scope and expression. And we do not need an Aristotle to tell us that the happy man is he who most freely spends all that is in him.

Will you allow me in a closing word to urge upon you the necessity of cultivating personal purity and devotedness? The vitality of a ministry depends upon the vitality of the minister's personal religion. It is the preaching that flows from a personal and widening experience that is at once interesting and convincing. Age does not stale its infinite variety. Neither do you need to have many years in order to have much experience. The most deeply cut experience known to us and the most fruitful is that

of a young man—the young man Paul of Tarsus. It is not years, but reality that tells. With his unique experience Paul enriched a world, but even Paul was fully aware of the possibility of losing his own soul while saving others. That is very possible. There is no salvation in your *profession*. A minister has his own soul to make—even as the layest of laymen; and while there is in his calling much to stimulate and guide him, there is also much to tempt and to blind. He is stimulated to personal discipline by finding that his work refuses to get itself done mechanically. He will often wish he could get it done without his heart being in it, but it is impossible. Lessing, in a plaintive letter to his brother, says, "Of all pitiful creatures I believe the most pitiful is he who must work with his head, when he is not conscious of having one." But there is a more pitiful creature: and that is he who must work with his soul, when he is not conscious of having a soul. It is this that is pictured by Thackeray in one of the most terrible passages in English literature. He shows us the magnificent genius of Swift, torn by his own scepticism, poisoned by the cassock he had assumed, strangled in his bands, dying at last, as Swift himself says, like a rat in a hole. "What a night it was," says Thackeray, "what a lonely rage and long agony, what a vulture that tore the heart of that giant! . . . One hardly anywhere *reads* of such a pain." That is true. All imagined tragedies fall short of the actual. One hardly anywhere reads of such a pain; but in lesser men than Swift a life of torture results from entering the ministry with selfish motives or unconquered sin. There is no happier life than that of a minister who is truly Christ's servant delighting in the service; none much more miserable than that of him who cannot "lose his life" for Christ's sake, but is still seeking recognition, applause, comfort for himself; who knows the purity demanded of those who represent the Holiest, but who still carries with him into the most sacred services a sin against which he has not the heart to take final measures of extinction.

Keep yourselves, then, in touch with Him in whom dwells all the virtue of your ministry. Keep yourselves in touch with those who have most ungrudgingly served Him—with Henry Martyn, and Dale, and Selwyn, and Walsham How, with all who illustrate what a consecrated life is, what it costs and what it does, and above all others with him in whom the Christian life is seen at its highest, with Paul. It is so easy to live at the world's level and to work hard to save our own character and maintain our place in the respect of our fellow men; so extremely difficult to postpone all such considerations, and in all we do to seek the good of our fellows in the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth. Never forget, even in the smallest detail of your calling, that it is part of that task to which all the earnest thinkers and workers of our world have given themselves, because it is the aim which God has set for Himself in the whole history of mankind—to bring into perfect vision of His beauty and absolute harmony with Himself all His blinded and dying children.

"Servants of God!—or sons
Shall I not call you? Because
Not as servants ye knew
Your Father's innermost mind,
His, who unwillingly sees
One of His little ones lost—
Yours is the praise, if mankind
Hath not as yet in its march
Fainted, and fallen, and died!"

THE END

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