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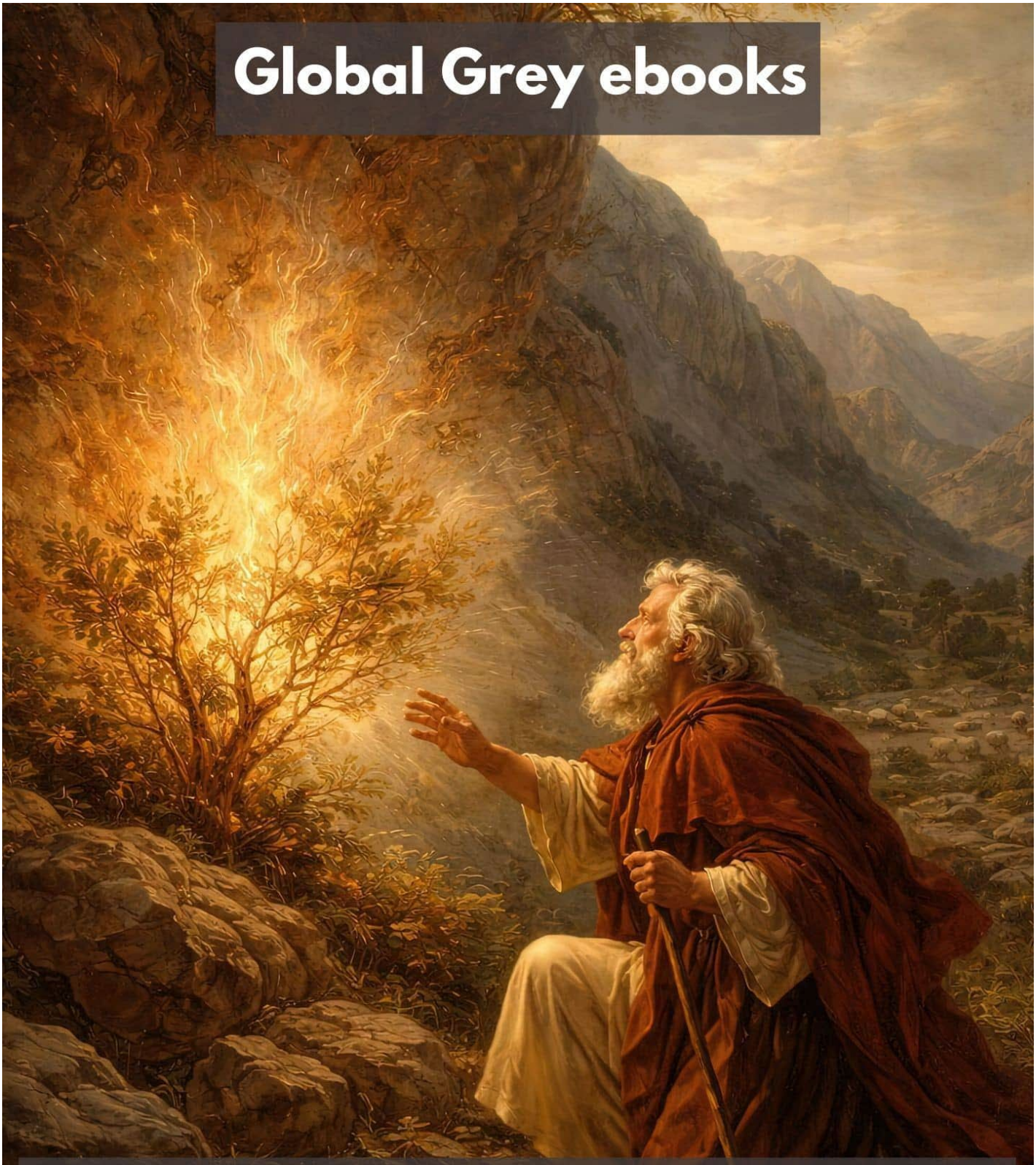

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, AND NUMBERS

Alexander Maclaren

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Genesis

The Vision Of Creation

'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.' —GENESIS i. 26-ii. 3.

We are not to look to Genesis for a scientific cosmogony, and are not to be disturbed by physicists' criticisms on it as such. Its purpose is quite another, and far more important; namely, to imprint deep and ineffaceable the conviction that the one God created all things. Nor must it be forgotten that this vision of creation was given to people ignorant of natural science, and prone to fall back into surrounding idolatry. The comparison of the creation narratives in Genesis with the cuneiform tablets, with which they evidently are most closely connected, has for its most important result the demonstration of the infinite elevation above their monstrosities and puerilities, of this solemn, steadfast attribution of the creative act to the one God. Here we can only draw out in brief the main points which the narrative brings into prominence.

1. The revelation which it gives is the truth, obscured to all other men when it was given, that one God 'in the beginning created the heaven and the earth.' That solemn utterance is the keynote of the whole. The rest but expands it. It was a challenge and a denial for all the beliefs of the nations, the truth of which Israel was the champion and missionary. It swept the heavens and earth clear of the crowd of gods, and showed the One enthroned above, and operative in, all things. We can scarcely estimate the grandeur, the emancipating power, the all-uniting force, of that utterance. It is a worn commonplace to us. It was a strange, thrilling novelty when it was written at the head of this narrative. *Then* it was in sharp opposition to beliefs that have long been dead to us; but it is still a protest against some living errors. Physical science has not spoken the final word when it has shown us how things came to be as they are. There remains the deeper question, What, or who, originated and guided the processes? And the only answer is the ancient declaration, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'

2. The record is as emphatic and as unique in its teaching as to the mode of creation: 'God said … and it was so.' That lifts us above all the poor childish myths of the nations, some of them disgusting, many of them absurd, all of them unworthy. There was no other agency than the putting forth of the divine will. The speech of God is but a symbol of the flashing forth of His will. To us Christians the antique phrase suggests a fulness of meaning not inherent in it,

for we have learned to believe that ‘all things were made by Him’ whose name is ‘The Word of God’; but, apart from that, the representation here is sublime. ‘He spake, and it was done’; that is the sign-manual of Deity.

3. The completeness of creation is emphasised. We note, not only the recurrent ‘and it was so,’ which declares the perfect correspondence of the result with the divine intention, but also the recurring ‘God saw that it was good.’ His ideals are always realised. The divine artist never finds that the embodiment of His thought falls short of His thought.

‘What act is all its thought had been? What will but felt the fleshly screen?

But He has no hindrances nor incompletenesses in His creative work, and the very sabbath rest with which the narrative closes symbolises, not His need of repose, but His perfect accomplishment of His purpose. God ceases from His works because ‘the works were finished,’ and He saw that all was very good.

4. The progressiveness of the creative process is brought into strong relief. The work of the first four days is the preparation of the dwelling-place for the living creatures who are afterwards created to inhabit it. How far the details of these days’ work coincide with the order as science has made it out, we are not careful to ask here. The primeval chaos, the separation of the waters above from the waters beneath, the emergence of the land, the beginning of vegetation there, the shining out of the sun as the dense mists cleared, all find confirmation even in modern theories of evolution. But the intention of the whole is much rather to teach that, though the simple utterance of the divine will was the agent of creation, the manner of it was not a sudden calling of the world, as men know it, into being, but majestic, slow advance by stages, each of which rested on the preceding. To apply the old distinction between justification and sanctification, creation was a work, not an act. The Divine Workman, who is always patient, worked slowly then as He does now. Not at a leap, but by deliberate steps, the divine ideal attains realisation.

5. The creation of living creatures on the fourth and fifth days is so arranged as to lead up to the creation of man as the climax. On the fifth day sea and air are peopled, and their denizens ‘blessed,’ for the equal divine love holds every living thing to its heart. On the sixth day the earth is replenished with living creatures. Then, last of all, comes man, the apex of creation. Obviously the purpose of the whole is to concentrate the light on man; and it is a matter of no importance whether the narrative is correct according to zoology, or not. What it says is that God made all the universe, that He prepared the earth for the delight of living creatures, that the happy birds that soar and sing, and the dumb creatures that move through the paths of the seas, and the beasts of the earth, are all His creating, and that man is linked to them, being made on the same day as the latter, and by the same word, but that between man and them all there is a gulf, since he is made in the divine image. That image implies personality, the consciousness of self, the power to say ‘I,’ as well as purity. The transition from the work of the first four days to that of creating living things must have had a break. No theory has been able to bridge the chasm without admitting a divine act introducing the new element of life, and none has been able to bridge the gulf between the animal and human consciousness without admitting a divine act introducing ‘the image of God’ into the nature common to animal and man. Three facts as to humanity are thrown up into prominence: its possession of the image of God, the equality and eternal interdependence of the sexes, and the lordship over all creatures. Mark especially the remarkable wording of verse 27: ‘created He *him* male and female created He *them*.’ So ‘neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman.’ Each is maimed apart from the other. Both stand side by side, on one level before God. The germ of the most ‘advanced’ doctrines of the relations of the sexes is hidden here.

How Sin Came In

'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? and the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said onto the serpent. Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'—GENESIS iii 1-15.

It is no part of my purpose to enter on the critical questions connected with the story of 'the fall.' Whether it is a legend, purified and elevated, or not, is of less consequence than what is its moral and religious significance, and that significance is unaffected by the answer to the former question. The story presupposes that primitive man was in a state of ignorant innocence, not of intellectual or moral perfection, and it tells how that ignorant innocence came to pass into conscious sin. What are the stages of the transition?

1. There is the presentation of inducement to evil. The law to which Adam is to be obedient is in the simplest form. There is restriction. 'Thou shalt not' is the first form of law, and it is a form congruous with the undeveloped, though as yet innocent, nature ascribed to him. The conception of duty is present, though in a very rudimentary shape. An innocent being may be aware of limitations, though as yet not 'knowing good and evil.' With deep truth the story represents the first suggestion of disobedience as presented from without. No doubt, it might have by degrees arisen from within, but the thought that it was imported from another sphere of being suggests that it is alien to true manhood, and that, if brought in from without, it may be cast out again. And the temptation had a personal source. There are beings who desire to draw men away from God. The serpent, by its poison and its loathly form, is the natural symbol of such an enemy of man. The insinuating slyness of the suggestions of evil is like the sinuous gliding of the snake, and truly represents the process by which temptation found its way into the hearts of the first pair, and of all their descendants. For it begins with casting a doubt on the reality of the prohibition. 'Hath God said?' is the first parallel opened by the besieger. The fascinations of the forbidden fruit are not dangled at first before Eve, but an apparently innocent doubt is filtered into her ear. And is not that the way in which we are still

snared? The reality of moral distinctions, the essential wrongness of the sin, is obscured by a mist of sophistication. ‘There is no harm in it’ steals into some young man’s or woman’s mind about things that were forbidden at home, and they are half conquered before they know that they have been attacked. Then comes the next besieger’s trench, much nearer the wall—namely, denial of the fatal consequences of the sin: ‘Ye shall not surely die,’ and a base hint that the prohibition was meant, not as a parapet to keep from falling headlong into the abyss, but as a barrier to keep from rising to a great good; ‘for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.’ These are still the two lies which wile us to sin: ‘It will do you no harm,’ and ‘You are cheating yourselves out of good by not doing it.’

2. Then comes the yielding to the tempter. As long as the prohibition was undoubted, and the fatal results certain, the fascinations of the forbidden thing were not felt. But as soon as these were tampered with, Eve saw ‘that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes.’ So it is still. Weaken the awe-inspiring sense of God’s command, and of the ruin that follows the breach of it, and the heart of man is like a city without walls, into which any enemy can march unhindered. So long as God’s ‘Thou shalt not, lest thou die’ rings in the ears, the eyes see little beauty in the sirens that sing and beckon. But once that awful voice is deadened, they charm, and allure to dally with them.

In the undeveloped condition of primitive man temptation could only assail him through the senses and appetites, and its assault would be the more irresistible because reflection and experience were not yet his. But the act of yielding was, as sin ever is, a deliberate choice to please self and disobey God. The woman’s more emotional, sensitive, compliant nature made her the first victim, and her greatest glory, her craving to share her good with him whom she loves, and her power to sway his will and acts, made her his temptress. ‘As the husband is, the wife is,’ says Tennyson; but the converse is even truer: As the wife is, the man is.

3. The fatal consequences came with a rush. There is a gulf between being tempted and sinning, but the results of the sin are closely knit to it. They come automatically, as surely as a stream from a fountain. The promise of knowing good and evil was indeed kept, but instead of its making the sinners ‘like gods,’ it showed them that they were like beasts, and brought the first sense of shame. To know evil was, no doubt, a forward step intellectually; but to know it by experience, and as part of themselves, necessarily changed their ignorant innocence into bitter knowledge, and conscience awoke to rebuke them. The first thing that their opened eyes saw was themselves, and the immediate result of the sight was the first blush of shame. Before, they had walked in innocent unconsciousness, like angels or infants; now they had knowledge of good and evil, because their sin had made evil a part of themselves, and the knowledge was bitter.

The second consequence of the fall is the disturbed relation with God, which is presented in the highly symbolical form fitting for early ages, and as true and impressive for the twentieth century as for them. Sin broke familiar communion with God, turned Him into a ‘fear and a dread,’ and sent the guilty pair into ambush. Is not that deeply and perpetually true? The sun seen through mists becomes a lurid ball of scowling fire. The impulse is to hide from God, or to get rid of thoughts of Him. And when He *is* felt to be near, it is as a questioner, bringing sin to mind. The shuffling excuses, which venture even to throw the blame of sin on God (‘the woman whom *Thou* gavest me’), or which try to palliate it as a mistake (‘the serpent beguiled me’), have to come at last, however reluctantly, to confess that ‘I’ did the sin. Each has to say, ‘I did eat.’ So shall we all have to do. We may throw the blame on circumstances, weakness of judgment, and the like, while here, but at God’s bar we shall have to say, ‘*Mea* culpa, *mea* culpa.’

The curse pronounced on the serpent takes its habit and form as an emblem of the degradation of the personal tempter, and of the perennial antagonism between him and mankind, while even at that first hour of sin and retribution a gleam of hope, like the stray beam that steals through a gap in a thundercloud, promises that the conquered shall one day be the conqueror, and that the woman's seed, though wounded in the struggle, shall one day crush the poison-bearing, flat head in the dust, and end forever his power to harm. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning,' and the Christ was promised ere the gates of Eden were shut on the exiles.

Eden Lost And Restored

'So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.' —GENESIS iii. 24.

'Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.' REVELATION xxii. 14.

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning.' Eden was fair, but the heavenly city shall be fairer. The Paradise regained is an advance on the Paradise that was lost. These are the two ends of the history of man, separated by who knows how many millenniums. Heaven lay about him in his infancy, but as he journeyed westwards its morning blush faded into the light of common day—and only at eventide shall the sky glow again with glory and colour, and the western heaven at last outshine the eastern, with a light that shall never die. A fall, and a rise—a rise that reverses the fall, a rise that transcends the glory from which he fell,—that is the Bible's notion of the history of the world, and I, for my part, believe it to be true, and feel it to be the one satisfactory explanation of what I see round about me and am conscious of within me.

1. *Man had an Eden and lost it.*

I take the Fall to be a historical fact. To all who accept the authority of Scripture, no words are needed beyond the simple statement before us, but we may just gather up the signs that there are on the wide field of the world's history, and in the narrower experience of individuals, that such a fall has been.

Look at the condition of the world: its degradation, its savagery-all its pining myriads, all its untold millions who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Will any man try to bring before him the actual state of the heathen world, and, retaining his belief in a God, profess that these men are what God meant men to be? It seems to me that the present condition of the world is not congruous with the idea that men are in their primitive state, and if this is what God meant men for, then I see not how the dark clouds which rest on His wisdom and His love are to be lifted off.

Then, again—if the world has not a Fall in its history, then we must take the lowest condition as the one from which all have come; and is that idea capable of defence? Do we see anywhere signs of an upward process going on now? Have we any experience of a tribe raising itself? Can you catch anywhere a race in the act of struggling up, outside of the pale of Christianity? Is not the history of all a history of decadence, except only where the Gospel has come in to reverse the process?

But passing from this: What mean the experiences of the individual-these longings; this hard toil; these sorrows?

How comes it that man alone on earth, manifestly meant to be leader, lord, etc., seems but cursed with a higher nature that he may know greater sorrows, and raised above the beasts in capacity that he may sink below them in woe, this capacity only leading to a more exquisite susceptibility, to a more various as well as more poignant misery?

Whence come the contrarieties and discordance in his nature?

It seems to me that all this is best explained as the Bible explains it by saying: (1) Sin has done it; (2) Sin is not part of God's original design, but man has fallen; (3) Sin had a personal beginning. There have been men who were pure, able to stand but free to fall.

It seems to me that that explanation is more in harmony with the facts of the case, finds more response in the unsophisticated instinct of man, than any other. It seems to me that, though it leaves many dark and sorrowful mysteries all unsolved, yet that it alleviates the blackest of them, and flings some rays of hope on them all. It seems to me that it relieves the character and administration of God from the darkest dishonour; that it delivers man's position and destiny from the most hopeless despair; that though it leaves the mystery of the origin of evil, it brings out into clearest relief the central truths that evil is evil, and sin and sorrow are not God's will; that it vindicates as something better than fond imaginings the vague aspirations of the soul for a fair and holy state; that it establishes, as nothing else will, at once the love of God and the dignity of man; that it leaves open the possibility of the final overthrow of that Sin which it treats as an intrusion and stigmatises as a fall; that it therefore braces for more vigorous, hopeful conflict against it, and that while but for it the answer to the despairing question, Hast Thou made all men in vain? must be either the wailing echo 'In vain,' or the denial that He has made them at all, there is hope and there is power, and there is brightness thrown on the character of God and on the fate of man, by the old belief that God made man upright, and that man made himself a sinner.

2. *Heaven restores the lost Eden*.

'God is not ashamed to be called their God, *for* He hath prepared them a *city*.'

The highest conception we can form of heaven is the reversal of all the evil of earth, and the completion of its incomplete good: the sinless purity—the blessed presence of God—the fulfilment of all desires—the service which is *blessed*, not toil—the changelessness which is progress, not stagnation.

3. *Heaven surpasses the lost Eden*.

(1) Garden—City.

The perfection of association—the *nations* of the saved. Here 'we mortal millions live alone,' even when united with dearest. Like Egyptian monks of old, each dwelling in his own cave, though all were a community.

(2) The richer experience.

The memory of past sorrows which are understood at last.

Heaven's bliss in contrast with earthly joys.

Sinlessness of those who have been sinners will be more intensely lustrous for its dark background in the past. Redeemed men will be brighter than angels.

The impossibility of a fall.

Death behind us.

The former things shall no more come to mind, being lost in blaze of present transcendent experience, but yet shall be remembered as having led to that perfect state.

Christ not only repairs the 'tabernacle which was fallen,' but builds a fairer temple. He brings 'a statelier Eden,' and makes us dwell for ever in a Garden City.

The Growth And Power Of Sin

'And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering: But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength. A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth: and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore, whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.' GENESIS iv. 3-16.

Many lessons crowd on us from this section. Its general purport is to show the growth of sin, and its power to part man from man even as it has parted man from God. We may call the whole 'The beginning of the fatal operations of sin on human society.'

1. The first recorded act of worship occasions the first murder. Is not that only too correct a forecast of the oceans of blood which have been shed in the name of religion, and a striking proof of the subtle power of sin to corrupt even the best, and out of it to make the worst? What a lesson against the bitter hatred which has too often sprung up on so-called religious grounds! No malice is so venomous, no hate so fierce, no cruelty so fiendish, as those which are fed and fanned by religion. Here is the first triumph of sin, that it poisons the very springs of worship, and makes what should be the great uniter of men in sweet and holy bonds their great separator.

2. Sin here appears as having power to bar men's way to God. Much ingenuity has been spent on the question why Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's rejected. But the narrative itself shows in the words of Jehovah, 'If thou doest well, is there not acceptance?' that the reason lay in Cain's evil deeds. So, in 1 John iii. 12, the fratricide is put down to the fact that 'his works were evil, and his brother's righteous'; and Hebrews xi. 4 differs from this view only in making the ground of righteousness prominent, when it ascribes the acceptableness of Abel's offering to faith. Both these passages are founded on the narrative, and we need not seek farther for the reason of the different reception of the two offerings. Character, then, or, more truly, faith, which is the foundation of a righteous character, determines the acceptableness of worship. Cain's offering had no sense of dependence, no outgoing of love and trust, no adoration,—though it may have had fear,—and no moral element. So it had no sweet odour for God. Abel's was sprinkled with some drops of the incense of lowly trust, and came from a heart which fain would be pure; therefore it was a joy to God. So we are taught

at the very beginning, that, as is the man, so is his sacrifice; that the prayer of the wicked is an abomination. Plenty of worship nowadays is Cain worship. Many reputable professing Christians bring just such sacrifices. The prayers of such never reach higher than the church ceiling. Of course, the lesson of the story is not that a man must be pure before his sacrifice is accepted. Of course, the faintest cry of trust is heard, and a contrite heart, however sinful, is always welcome. But we are taught that our acts of worship must have our hearts in them, and that it is vain to pray and to love evil. Sin has the awful power of blocking our way to God.

3. Note in one word that we have here at the beginning of human history the solemn distinction which runs through it all. These two, so near in blood, so separate in spirit, head the two classes into which Scripture decisively parts men, especially men who have heard the gospel. It is unfashionable now to draw that broad line between the righteous and the wicked, believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats are all one. Modern liberal sentiment—so-called—will not consent to such narrowness as the old-fashioned classification. There are none of us black, and none white; we are all different shades of grey. But facts do not quite bear out such amiable views. Perhaps it is not less charitable, and a great deal truer, to draw the line broad and plain, on one side of which is peace and safety, and on the other trouble and death, if only we make it plain that no man need stop one minute on the dark side.

4. The solemn divine voice reads the lesson of the power of sin, when once done, over the sinner. Like a wild beast, it crouches in ambush at his door, ready to spring and devour. The evil deed once committed takes shape, as it were, and waits to seize the doer. Remorse, inward disturbance, and above all, the fatal inclination to repeat sin till it becomes a habit, are set forth with terrible force in these grim figures. What a menagerie of ravenous beasts some of us have at the doors of our hearts! With what murderous longing they glare at us, seeking to fascinate us, and make us their prey! When we sin, we cannot escape the issues; and every wrong thing we do has a kind of horrible life given it, and sits henceforth there, beside us, ready to rend us. The tempting, seducing power of our own evils was never put in more startling and solemnly true words, on which the bitter experience of many a poor victim of his own past is a commentary. The eternal duty of resistance is farther taught by the words. Hope of victory, encouragement to struggle, the assurance that even these savage beasts may be subdued, and the lion and adder (the hidden and the glaring evils—those which wound unseen, and which spring with a roar) may be overcome, led in a silken leash or charmed into harmlessness, are given in the command, which is also a promise, ‘Rule thou over it.’

5. The deadly fruit of hate is taught us in the brief account of the actual murder. Notice the impressive plainness and fewness of the words. ‘Cain rose up against his brother, and slew him.’ A kind of horror-struck awe of the crime is audible. Observe the emphasis with which ‘his brother’ is repeated in the verse and throughout. Observe, also, the vivid light thrown by the story on the rise and progress of the sin. It begins with envy and jealousy. Cain was not wroth because his offering was rejected. What did he care for that? But what angered him was that his brother had what he had not. So selfishness was at the bottom, and that led on to envy, and that to hatred. Then comes a pause, in which God speaks remonstrances,—as God’s voice—conscience—does now to us all,—between the imagination and the act of evil. A real or a feigned reconciliation is effected. The brothers go in apparent harmony to the field. No new provocation appears, but the old feelings, kept down for a time, come in again with a rush, and Cain is swept away by them. Hatred left to work means murder. The heart is the source of all evil. Selfishness is the mother tincture out of which all sorts of sin can be made. Guard the thoughts, and keep down self, and the deeds will take care of themselves.

6. Mark how close on the heels of sin God's question treads! How God spoke, we know not. Doubtless in some fashion suited to the needs of Cain. But He speaks to us as really as to him, and no sooner is the rush of passion over, and the bad deed done, than a revulsion comes. What we call conscience asks the question in stern tones, which make a man's flesh creep. Our sin is like touching the electric bells which people sometimes put on their windows to give notice of thieves. As soon as we step beyond the line of duty we set the alarm going, and it wakens the sleeping conscience. Some of us go so far as to have silenced the voice within; but, for the most part, it speaks immediately after we have gratified our inclinations wrongly.

7. Cain's defiant answer teaches us how a man hardens himself against God's voice. It also shows us how intensely selfish all sin is, and how weakly foolish its excuses are. It is sin which has rent men apart from men, and made them deny the very idea that they have duties to all men. The first sin was only against God; the second was against God and man. The first sin did not break, though it saddened, human love; the second kindled the flames of infernal hatred, and caused the first drops to flow of the torrents of blood which have soaked the earth. When men break away from God, they will soon murder one another.

Cain was his brother's keeper. His question answered itself. If Abel was his brother, then he was bound to look after him. His self-condemning excuse is but a specimen of the shallow pleas by which the forgetfulness of duties we owe to all mankind, and all sins, are defended.

8. The stern sentence is next pronounced. First we have the grand figure of the innocent blood having a voice which pierces the heavens. That teaches in the most forcible way the truth that God knows the crimes done by 'man's inhumanity to man,' even when the meek sufferers are silent. According to the fine old legend of the cranes of Ibycus, a bird of the air will carry the matter. It speaks, too, of God's tender regard for His saints, whose blood is precious in His sight; and it teaches that He will surely requite. We cannot but think of the innocent blood shed on Calvary, of the Brother of us all, whose sacrifice was accepted of God. His blood, too, crieth from the ground, has a voice which speaks in the ear of God, but not to plead for vengeance, but pardon.

'Jesus' blood through earth and skies, Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries.'

Then follows the sentence which falls into two parts—the curse of bitter, unrequited toil, and the doom of homeless wandering. The blood which has been poured out on the battlefield fertilises the soil; but Abel's blasted the earth. It was a supernatural infliction, to teach that bloodshed polluted the earth, and so to shed a nameless horror over the deed. We see an analogous feeling in the common belief that places where some foul sin has been committed are cursed. We see a weak natural correspondence in the devastating effect of war, as expressed in the old saying that no grass would grow where the hoof of the Turk's horse had stamped.

The doom of wandering, which would be compulsory by reason of the earth's barrenness, is a parable. The murderer is hunted from place to place, as the Greek fable has it, by the furies, who suffer him not to rest. Conscience drives a man 'through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none.' All sin makes us homeless wanderers. There is but one home for the heart, one place of repose for a man, namely, in the heart of God, the secret place of the Most High; and he who, for his sin, durst not enter there, is driven forth into 'a salt land and not inhabited,' and has to wander wearily there. The legend of the wandering Jew, and that other of the sailor, condemned for ever to fly before the gale through stormy seas, have in them a deep truth. The earthly punishment of departing from God is that we have not where to lay our

heads. Every sinner is a fugitive and a vagabond. But if we love God we are still wanderers indeed, but we are ‘pilgrims and sojourners with Thee.’

9. Cain’s remonstrance completes the tragic picture. We see in it despair without penitence. He has no word of confession. If he had accepted his chastisement, and learned by it his sin, all the bitterness would have passed away. But he only writhes in agony, and adds, to the sentence pronounced, terrors of his own devising. God had not forbidden him to come into His presence. But he feels that he dare not venture thither. And he was right; for, whether we suppose that some sensible manifestation of the divine presence is meant by ‘Thy face’ or no, a man who had unrepented sin on his conscience, and murmurings in his heart, could not hold intercourse with God; nor would he wish to do so. Thus we learn again the lesson that sin separates from our Father, and that chastisements, not accepted as signs of His love, build up a black wall between God and us.

Nor had Cain been told that his life was in danger. But his conscience made a coward of him, as of us all, and told him what he deserved. There were, no doubt, many other children of Adam, who would be ready to avenge Abel’s death. The wild justice of revenge is deep in the heart of men; and the natural impulse would be to hunt down the murderer like a wolf. It is a dreadful picture of the defiant and despairing sinner, tortured by well-founded fears, shut out from the presence of God, but not able to shut out thoughts of Him, and seeing an avenger in every man.

We need not ask how God set a mark on Cain. Enough that His doing so was a merciful alleviation of his lot, and teaches us how God’s long-suffering spares life, and tempers judgment, that there may still be space for repentance. If even Cain has gracious protection and mercy blended with his chastisement, who can be beyond the pale of God’s compassion, and with whom will not His loving providence and patient pity labour? No man is so scorched by the fire of retribution, but many a dewy drop from God’s tenderness falls on him. No doubt, the story of the preservation of Cain was meant to restrain the blood-feuds so common and ruinous in early times; and we need the lesson yet, to keep us from vengeance under the mask of justice. But the deepest lesson and truest pathos of it lies in the picture of the watchful kindness of God lingering round the wretched man, like gracious sunshine playing on some scarred and black rock, to win him back by goodness to penitence, and through penitence to peace.

What Crouches At The Door

'If thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door: and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.'—GENESIS iv. 7 (R. V.).

These early narratives clothe great moral and spiritual truths in picturesque forms, through which it is difficult for us to pierce. In the world's childhood God spoke to men as to children, because there were no words then framed which would express what we call abstract conceptions. They had to be shown by pictures. But these early men, simple and childlike as they were, had consciences; and one abstraction they did understand, and that was sin. They knew the difference between good and evil.

So we have here God speaking to Cain, who was wroth because of the rejection of his sacrifice; and in dim, enigmatical words setting forth the reason of that rejection. 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?' Then clearly his sacrifice was rejected because it was the sacrifice of an evil-doer. His description as such is given in the words of my text, which are hard for us to translate into our modern, less vivid and picturesque language. 'If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door; and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' Strange as the words sound, if I mistake not, they convey some very solemn lessons, and if well considered, become pregnant with meaning.

The key to the whole interpretation of them is to remember that they describe what happens after, and because of, wrong-doing. They are all suspended on 'If thou doest not well.' Then, in that case, for the first thing—'sin lieth at the door.' Now the word translated here 'lieth' is employed only to express the *crouching* of an animal, and frequently of a wild animal. The picture, then, is of the wrong-doer's sin lying at his door there like a crouching tiger ready to spring, and if it springs, fatal. 'If thou doest not well, a wild beast crouches at thy door.'

Then there follow, with a singular swift transition of the metaphor, other words still harder to interpret, and which have been, as a matter of fact, interpreted in very diverse fashions. 'And unto thee shall be *its'* (I make that slight alteration upon our version) 'desire, and thou shalt rule over it.' Where did we hear these words before? They were spoken to Eve, in the declaration of her punishment. They contain the blessing that was embedded in the curse. 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' The longing of the pure womanly heart to the husband of her love, and the authority of the husband over the loving wife—the source of the deepest joy and purity of earth, is transferred, by a singularly bold metaphor, to this other relationship, and, in horrible parody of the wedded union and love, we have the picture of the sin, that was thought of as crouching at the sinner's door like a wild beast, now, as it were, wedded to him. He is mated to it now, and it has a kind of tigerish, murderous desire after him, while he on his part is to subdue and control it.

The reference of these clauses to the sin which has just been spoken of involves, no doubt, a very bold figure, which has seemed to many readers too bold to be admissible, and the words have therefore been supposed to refer to Abel, who, as the younger brother, would be subordinate to Cain. But such a reference breaks the connection of the sentence, introduces a thought which is not a consequence of Cain's not doing well, has no moral bearing to warrant its appearance here, and compels us to travel an inconveniently long distance back in the context to find an antecedent to the 'his' and 'him' of our text. It seems to be more in consonance, therefore, with the archaic style of the whole narrative, and to yield a profounder and worthier meaning, if we recognise the boldness of the metaphor, and take 'sin' as the

subject of the whole. Now all this puts in concrete, metaphorical shape, suited to the stature of the bearers, great and solemn truths. Let us try to translate them into more modern speech.

1. First think, then, of that wild beast which we tether to our doors by our wrong-doing.

We talk about ‘responsibility’ and ‘guilt,’ and ‘consequences that never can be effaced,’ and the like. And all these abstract and quasi-philosophical terms are implied in the grim, tremendous metaphor of my text ‘If thou doest not well, a tiger, a wild beast, is crouching at thy door.’ We are all apt to be deceived by the imagination that when an evil deed is done, it passes away and leaves no permanent results. The lesson taught the childlike primitive man here, at the beginning, before experience had accumulated instances which might demonstrate the solemn truth, was that every human deed is immortal, and that the transitory evil thought, or word, or act, which seems to fleet by like a cloud, has a permanent being, and hereafter haunts the life of the doer, as a real presence. If thou doest not well, thou dost create a horrible something which nestles beside thee henceforward. The momentary act is incarnated, as it were, and sits there at the doer’s doorpost waiting for him; which being turned into less forcible but more modern language, is just this: every sin that a man does has perennial consequences, which abide with the doer for evermore.

I need not dwell upon illustrations of that to any length. Let me just run over two or three ways in which it is true. First of all, there is that solemn fact which we put into a long word that comes glibly off people’s lips, and impresses them very little—the solemn fact of responsibility. We speak in common talk of such and such a thing lying at some one’s door. Whether the phrase has come from this text I do not know. But it helps to illustrate the force of these words, and to suggest that they mean this, among other things, that we have to answer for every deed, however evanescent, however long forgotten. Its guilt is on our heads. Its consequences have to be experienced by us. We drink as we have brewed. As we make our beds, so we lie on them. There is no escape from the law of consequences. ‘If ‘twere done, when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well it were done quickly.’ But seeing that it is not done when ‘tis done, then perhaps it would be better that it were not done at all. Your deed of a moment, forgotten almost as soon as done, lies there at your door; or to take a more modern and commercial figure, it is debited to your account, and stands inscribed against you for ever.

Think how you would like it, if all your deeds from your childhood, all your follies, your vices, your evil thoughts, your evil impulses, and your evil actions, were all made visible and embodied there before you. They are there, though you do not see them yet. All round your door they sit, ready to meet you and to bay out condemnation as you go forth. They are there, and one day you will find out that they are. For this is the law, certain as the revolution of the stars and fixed as the pillars of the firmament: ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’ There is no seed which does not sprout in the harvest of the moral life. Every deed germinates according to its kind. For all that a man does he has to carry the consequences, and every one shall bear his own burden. ‘If thou doest not well,’ it is not, as we fondly conceive it sometimes to be, a mere passing deflection from the rule of right, which is done and done with, but we have created, as out of our very own substance, a witness against ourselves whose voice can never be stifled. ‘If thou doest not well’ thy sin takes permanent form and is fastened to thy door.

And then let me remind you, too, how the metaphor of our text is confirmed by other obvious facts, on which I need but briefly dwell. Putting aside all the remoter bearings of that thought of responsibility, I suppose we all admit that we have consciences; I suppose that we all know that we have memories; I suppose we all of us have seen, in the cases of others, and have

experienced for ourselves, how deeds long done and long forgotten have an awful power of rising again after many long years.

Be sure that your memory has in it everything that you ever did. A landscape may be hidden by mists, but a puff of wind will clear them away, and it will all lie there, visible to the furthest horizon. There is no fact more certain than the extraordinary swiftness and completeness with which, in certain circumstances of life, and often very near the close of it, the whole panorama of the past may rise again before a man, as if one lightning flash showed all the dreary desolation that lay behind him. There have been men recovered from drowning and the like, who have told us that, as in an instant, there seemed unrolled before their startled eyes the whole scroll of their earthly career.

The records of memory are like those pages on which you write with sympathetic ink, which disappears when dry, and seems to leave the page blank. You have only to hold it before the fire, or subject it to the proper chemical process, and at once it stands out legible. You are writing your biography upon the fleshly tables of your heart, my brother; and one day it will all be spread out before you, and you will be bid to read it, and to say what you think of it. The stings of a nettle will burn for days, if they are touched with water. The sting and inflammation of your evil deeds, though it has died down, is capable of being resuscitated, and it will be.

What an awful menagerie of unclean beasts some of us have at our doors! What sort of creatures have you tethered at yours? Crawling serpents, ugly and venomous; wild creatures, fierce and bloody, obscene and foul; tigers and bears; lustful and mischievous apes and monkeys? or such as are lovely and of good report,—doves and lambs, creatures pure and peaceable, patient to serve and gentle of spirit? Remember, remember, that what a man soweth—be it hemlock or be it wheat—that, and nothing else, ‘shall he reap.’

2. Now, let us look for a moment at the next thought that is here; which is put into a strong, and, to our modern notions, somewhat violent metaphor;—the horrible longing, as it were, of sin toward the sinner: ‘Unto thee shall be its desire.’

As I explained, these words are drawn from the previous chapter, where they refer to the holy union of heart and affection in husband and wife. Here they are transferred with tremendous force, to set forth that which is a kind of horrible parody of that conjugal relation. A man is married to his wickedness, is mated to his evil, and it has, as it were, a tigerish longing for him, unhallowed and murderous. That is to say—our sins act towards us as if they desired to draw our love to themselves. This is just another form of the statement, that when once a man has done a wrong thing, it has an awful power of attracting him and making him hunger to do it again. Every evil that I do may, indeed, for a moment create in me a revulsion of conscience; but it also exercises a fascination over me which it is hard to resist. It is a great deal easier to find a man who has never done a wrong thing than to find a man who has only done it once. If the wall of the dyke is sound it will keep the water out, but if there is the tiniest hole in it, the flood will come in. So the evil that you do asserts its power over you, or, in the vigorous metaphor of my text, it has a fierce, longing desire after you, and it gets you into its clutches.

‘The foolish woman sitteth in the high places of the city, and saith, Whoso is simple let him turn in hither.’ And foolish men go after her, and—’know not that her guests are in the depth of hell.’ Ah! my brother! beware of that siren voice that draws you away from all the sweet and simple and pure food which Wisdom spreads upon her table, to tempt the beast that is in you with the words, ‘Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ Beware of the first step, for as sure as you are living, the first step taken will make the second seem to

become necessary. The first drop will be followed by a bigger second, and the second, at a shorter interval, by a more copious third, until the drops become a shower, and the shower becomes a deluge. The river of evil is ever wider and deeper, and more tumultuous. The little sins get in at the window, and open the front door for the full-grown house-breakers. One smooths the path for the other. All sin has an awful power of perpetuating and increasing itself. As the prophet says in his vision of the doleful creatures that make their sport in the desolate city, 'None of them shall want her mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of the island.' Every sin tells upon character, and makes the repetition of itself more and more easy. 'None is barren among them.' And all sin is linked together in a slimy tangle, like a field of seaweed, so that the man once caught in its oozy fingers is almost sure to be drowned.

3. And now, lastly, one word about the command, which is also a promise: 'To thee shall be its desire, and thou shalt rule over it.'

Man's primitive charter, according to the earlier chapters of Genesis, was to have dominion over the beasts of the field. Cain knew what it was to war against the wild creatures which contested the possession of the earth with man, and to tame some of them for his uses. And, says the divine voice, just as you war against the beasts of prey, just as you subdue to your purposes and yoke to your implements the tamable animals over which you have dominion, so rule over *this* wild beast that is threatening you. It is needful for all men, if they do not mean to be torn to pieces, to master the animal that is in them, and the wild thing that has been created out of them. It is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. It is your own evil that is thus incarnated there, as it were, before you; and you have to subdue it, if it is not to tyrannise over you. We all admit that in theory, but how terribly hard the practice! The words of our text seem to carry but little hope or comfort in them, to the man who has tried—as, no doubt, many of us have tried—to flee the lusts that war against the soul, and to bridle the animal that is in him. Those who have done so most honestly know best how hard it is, and may fairly ask, Is this useless repetition of the threadbare injunction all that you have to say to us? If so, you may as well hold your tongue. A wild beast sits at my door, you say, and then you bid me, 'Rule thou over it!' Tell me to tame the tiger! 'Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook? Wilt thou take him a servant for ever?'

I do not undervalue the earnest and sometimes partially successful efforts at moral reformation which some men of more than usual force of character are able to make, emancipating themselves from the outward practice of gross sin, and achieving for themselves much that is admirable. But if we rightly understand what sin is—namely, the taking self for our law and centre instead of God—and how deep its working and all-pervading its poison, we shall learn the tragic significance of the prophets question, 'Can the leopard change his spots?' Then may a man cast out sin from his nature by his own resolve, when the body can eliminate poison from the veins by its own energy. If there is nothing more to be said to the world than this message, 'Sin lieth at thy door—rule thou over it,' we have no gospel to preach, and sin's dominion is secure. For there is nothing in all this world of empty, windy words, more empty and windy than to come to a poor soul that is all bespattered and stained with sin, and say to him: 'Get up, and make thyself clean, and keep thyself so!' It cannot be done.

So my text, though it keeps itself within the limits of the law and only proclaims duty, must have hidden, in its very hardness, a sweet kernel of promise. For what God commands God enables us to do.

Therefore these words, 'Rule thou over it,' do really point onwards through all the ages to that one fact in which every man's sin is conquered and neutralised, and every man's

struggles may be made hopeful and successful, the great fact that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, came down from heaven, like an athlete descending into the arena, to fight with and to overcome the grim wild beasts, our passions and our sins, and to lead them, transformed, in the silken leash of His love.

My brother! your sin is mightier than you. The old word of the Psalm is true about every one of us, 'Our iniquities are stronger than we.' And, blessed be His name! the hope of the Psalmist is the experience of the Christian: 'As for my transgressions, Thou wilt purge them away.' Christ will strengthen you, to conquer; Christ will take away your guilt; Christ will bear, has borne your burden; Christ will cleanse your memory; Christ will purge your conscience. Trusting to Him, and by His power and life within us, we may conquer our evil. Trusting to Him, and for the sake of His blood shed for us all upon the cross, we are delivered from the burden, guilt, and power of our sins and of our sin. With thy hand in His, and thy will submitted to Him, 'thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon thou shalt trample under foot.'

With, Before, After

'Enoch walked with God,'—GENESIS v. 22.

'Walk before Me.'—GENESIS xvii. 1.

'Ye shall walk after the Lord your God.'—DEUTERONOMY xiii. 4.

You will have anticipated, I suppose, my purpose in doing what I very seldom do—cutting little snippets out of different verses and putting them together. You see that these three fragments, in their resemblances and in their differences, are equally significant and instructive. They concur in regarding life as a walk—a metaphor which expresses continuity, so that every man's life is a whole, which expresses progress, which expresses change, and which implies a goal. They agree in saying that God must be brought into a life somehow, and in some aspect, if that life is to be anything else but an aimless wandering, if it is to tend to the point to which every human life should attain. But then they diverge, and, if we put them together, they say to us that there are three different ways in which we ought to bring God into our life. We should 'walk *with* Him,' like Enoch; we should 'walk *before*' Him, as Abraham was bade to do; and we should 'walk *after*' Him, as the command to do was given to all Israel. And these three prepositions, *with*, *before*, *after*, attached to the general idea of life as a walk, give us a triple aspect—which yet is, of course, fundamentally, one—of the way in which life may be ennobled, dignified, calmed, hallowed, focussed, and concentrated by the various relations into which we enter with Him. So I take the three of them.

1. 'Enoch walked *with* God.'

That is a sweet, simple, easily intelligible, and yet lofty way of putting the notion which we bring into a more abstract and less impressive shape when we talk about communion with God. Two men travelling along a road keep each other company. 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' The companion is at our side all the same, though the mists may have come down and we cannot see Him. We can hear His voice, we can grasp His hand, we can catch the echoes of His steps. We know He is there, and that is enough. Enoch and God walked together, by the simple exercise of the faith that fills the Invisible with one great, loving Face. By a continuous, definite effort, as we are going through the bustle of daily life, and amid all the pettiness and perplexities and monotonies that make up our often weary and always heavy days, we can realise to ourselves that He is of a truth at our sides, and by purity of life and heart we can bring Him nearer, and can make ourselves more conscious of His nearness. For, brethren, the one thing that parts a man from God, and makes it impossible for a heart to expatiate in the thought of His presence, is the contrariety to His will in our conduct. The slightest invisible film of mist that comes across the blue abyss of the mighty sky will blot out the brightest of the stars, and we may sometimes not be able to see the mist, and only know that it is there because we do not see the planet. So unconscious sin may steal in between us and God, and we shall no longer be able to say, 'I walk with Him.'

The Roman Catholics talk, in their mechanical way, of bringing down all the spiritual into the material and formal, about the 'practice of the presence of God.' It is an ugly phrase, but it means a great thing, that Christian people ought, very much more than they do, to aim, day by day, and amidst their daily duties, at realising that most elementary thought which, like a great many other elementary thoughts, is impotent because we believe it so utterly, that

wherever we are, we may have Him with us. It is the secret of blessedness, of tranquillity, of power, of everything good and noble.

'I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were,' said the Psalmist of old. If he had left out these two little words, 'with Thee,' he would have been uttering a tragic complaint; but when they come in, all that is painful, all that is solitary, all that is transient, bitterly transient, in the long succession of the generations that have passed across earth's scene, and have not been kindred to it, is cleared away and changed into gladness. Never mind, though you are a stranger, if you have that companion. Never mind, though you are only a sojourner; if you have Him with you, whatever passes He will not pass; and though we dwell here in a system to which we do not belong, and its transiency and our transiency bring with them many sorrows, when we can say, 'Lord! Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations,' we are at home, and that eternal home will never pass.

Enoch 'walked with God,' and, of course, 'God took him,' There was nothing else for it, and there could be no other end, for a life of communion with God here has in it the prophecy and the pledge of a life of eternal union hereafter. So, then, 'practise the presence of God.' An old mystic says: 'If I can tell how many times to-day I have thought about God, I have not thought about Him often enough.' Walk with Him by faith, by effort, by purity.

2. And now take the other aspect suggested by the other word God spoke to Abraham: 'I am the Almighty God, walk *before* Me and be thou perfect.'

That suggests, as I suppose I do not need to point out, the idea not only of communion, which the former phrase brought to our minds, but that of the inspection of our conduct. 'As ever in the great Taskmaster's eye,' says the stern Puritan poet, and although one may object to that word 'Taskmaster,' yet the idea conveyed is the correct expansion of the commandment given to Abraham. Observe how 'walk before Me' is dovetailed, as it were, between the revelation 'I am the Almighty God' and the injunction 'Be thou perfect.' The realisation of that presence of the Almighty which is implied in the expression 'Walk before Me,' the assurance that we are in His sight, will lead straight to the fulfilment of the injunction that bears upon the moral conduct. The same connection of thought underlies Peter's injunction, 'Like as He … is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,' followed immediately as it is by, 'If ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth'—as a present estimate—'according to every mail's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear'—that reverential awe which will lead you to be 'holy even as I am holy.'

This thought that we are in that divine presence, and that there is silently, but most really, a divine opinion being formed of us, consolidated, as it were, moment by moment through our lives, is only tolerable if we have been walking with God. If we are sure, by the power of our communion with Him, of His loving heart as well as of His righteous judgment, then we can spread ourselves out before Him, as a woman will lay out her webs of cloth on the green grass for the sun to blaze down upon them, and bleach the ingrained filth out of them. We must first walk 'with God' before the consciousness that we are walking 'before' Him becomes one that we can entertain and not go mad. When we are sure of the 'with' we can bear the 'before.'

Did you ever see how on a review day, as each successive battalion and company nears the saluting-point where the General inspecting sits, they straighten themselves up and dress their ranks, and pull themselves together as they pass beneath his critical eye. A master's eye makes diligent servants. If we, in the strength of God, would only realise, day by day and act by act of our lives, that we are before Him, what a revolution could be effected on our characters and what a transformation on all our conduct!

‘Walk before Me’ and you will be perfect. For the Hebrew words on which I am now commenting may be read, in accordance with the usage of the language, as being not only a commandment but a promise, or, rather, not as two commandments, but a commandment with an appended promise, and so as equivalent to ‘If you will walk before Me you will be perfect.’ And if we realise that we are under ‘the pure eyes and perfect judgment of’ God, we shall thereby be strongly urged and mightily helped to be perfect as He is perfect.

3. Lastly, take the other relation, which is suggested by the third of my texts, where Israel as a whole is commanded to ‘walk *after* the Lord’ their God.

In harmony with the very frequent expression of the Old Testament about ‘going after idols’ so Israel here is to ‘go after God.’ What does that mean? Communion, the consciousness of being judged by God, will lead on to aspiration and loving, longing effort to get nearer and nearer to Him. ‘My soul followeth hard after Thee,’ said the Psalmist, ‘Thy right hand upholdeth me.’ That element of yearning aspiration, of eager desire to be closer and closer, and liker and liker, to God must be in all true religion. And unless we have it in some measure, it is useless to talk about being Christian people. To press onwards, not as though we had already attained, but following after, if that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended, is the attitude of every true follower of Christ. The very crown of the excellence of the Christian life is that it never can reach its goal, and therefore an immortal youth of aspiration and growth is guaranteed to it. Christian people, are you following after God? Are you any nearer to Him than you were ten years ago? ‘Walk with Me, walk before Me, walk after Me.’

I need not do more than remind you of another meaning involved in this same expression. If I walk after God, then I let Him go before me and show me my road. Do you remember how, when the ark was to cross Jordan, the commandment was given to the Israelites to let it go well on in front, so that there should be no mistake about the course, ‘for ye have not passed this way heretofore.’ Do not be in too great a hurry to press upon the heels of God, if I may so say. Do not let your decisions outrun His providence. Keep back the impatience that would hurry on, and wait for His ripening purposes to ripen and His counsels to develop themselves. Walk after God, and be sure you do not go in front of your Guide, or you will lose both your way and your Guide.

I need not say more than a word about the highest aspect which this third of our commandments takes, ‘His sheep follow Him’—’leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps,’ that is the culmination of the walking ‘with,’ and ‘before,’ and ‘after’ God which these Old Testament saints were partially practising. All is gathered into the one great word, ‘He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.’

The Course And Crown Of A Devout Life

'And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.' GENESIS v. 24.

This notice of Enoch occurs in the course of a catalogue of the descendants of Adam, from the Creation to the Deluge. It is evidently a very ancient document, and is constructed on a remarkable plan. The formula for each man is the same. So-and-so lived, begat his heir, the next in the series, lived on after that so many years, having anonymous children, lived altogether so long, and then died. The chief thing about each life is the birth of the successor, and each man's career is in broad outline the same. A dreary monotony runs through the ages. How brief and uniform may be the records of lives of striving and tears and smiles and love that stretched through centuries! Nine hundred years shrink into less than as many lines.

The solemn monotony is broken in the case of Enoch. This paragraph begins as usual—he 'lived'; but afterwards, instead of that word, we read that he 'walked with God'—happy they for whom such a phrase is equivalent to 'live'—and, instead of 'died,' it is said of him that 'he *was not*.' That seems to imply that he, as it were, slipped out of sight or suddenly disappeared; as one of the psalms says, 'I looked, and lo! he was not.' He was there a moment ago—now he is gone; and my text tells how that sudden withdrawal came about. God, with whom he walked, put out His hand and took him to Himself. Of course. What other end could there be to a life that was all passed in communion with God except that apotheosis and crown of it all, the lifting of the man into closer communion with his Father and his Friend?

So, then, there are just these two things here—the noblest life and its crown.

1. The noblest life.

'He walked with God.' That is all. There is no need to tell what he did or tried to do, how he sorrowed or joyed, what were his circumstances. These may all fade from men's knowledge as they have somewhat faded from his memory up yonder. It is enough that he walked with God.

Of course, we have here, underlying the phrase, the familiar comparison of life to a journey, with all its suggestions of constant change and constant effort, and with the suggestion, too, that each life should be a progress directly tending to one clearly recognised goal. But passing from that, let us just think for a moment of the characteristics which must go to make up a life of which we can say that it is walking with God. The first of these clearly is the one that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts his finger upon, when he makes faith the spring of Enoch's career. The first requisite to true communion with God is vigorous exercise of that faculty by which we realise the fact of His presence with us; and that not as a jealous-eyed inspector, from whose scrutiny we would fain escape, but as a companion and friend to whom we can cleave. 'He that cometh to God,' and walks with God, must first of all 'believe that He *is*'; and passing by all the fascinations of things seen, and rising above all the temptations of things temporal, his realising eye must fix upon the divine Father and see Him nearer and more clearly than these. You cannot walk with God unless you are emancipated from the dominion of sense and time, and are living by the power of that great faculty, which lays hold of the things that are unseen as the realities, and smiles at the false and forged pretensions of material things to be the real. We have to invert the teaching of the world and of our senses. My fingers and my eyes and my ears tell me that this gross, material universe about me is the real, and that all beyond it is shadowy and (sometimes we think) doubtful, or,

at any rate, dim and far off. But that is false, and the truth is precisely the other way. The Unseen is the Real, and the Material is the merely Apparent. Behind all visible objects, and giving them all their reality, lies the unchangeable God.

Cultivate the faculty and habit of vigorous faith, if you would walk with God. For the world will put its bandages over your eyes, and try to tempt you to believe that these poor, shabby illusions are the precious things; and we have to shake ourselves free from its harlot kisses and its glozing lies, by very vigorous and continual efforts of the will and of the understanding, if we are to make real to ourselves that which is real, the presence of our God.

Besides this vigorous exercise of the faculty of faith, there is another requisite for a walk with God, closely connected with it, and yet capable of being looked at separately, and that is, that we shall keep up the habit of continual occupation of thought with Him. That is very much an affair of habit with Christian people, and I am afraid that the neglect of it is the habitual practice of the bulk of professing Christians nowadays. It is hard, amidst all our work and thought and joys and sorrows, to keep fresh our consciousness of His presence, and to talk with Him in the midst of the rush of business. But what do we do about our dear ones when we are away from them? The measure of our love of them is accurately represented by the frequency of our remembrances of them. The mother parted from her child, the husband and the wife separated from one another, the lover and the friend, think of each other a thousand times a day. Whenever the spring is taken off, then the natural bent of the inclination and heart assert themselves, and the mind goes back again, as into a sanctuary, into the sweet thought. Is that how we do with God? Do we so walk with Him, as that thought, when released, instinctively sets in that direction? When I take off the break, does my spirit turn to God? If there is no hand at the helm, does the bow always point that way? When the magnet is withdrawn for a moment, does the needle tremble back and settle itself northwards? If we are walking with God, we shall, more times a day than we can count when the evening comes on, have had the thought of Him coming into our hearts ‘like some sweet beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it.’ Thus we shall ‘walk with God.’

Then there is another requisite. ‘How can two walk together except they be agreed?’ ‘He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.’ There is no union with God in such communion possible, unless there be a union with Him by conformity of will and submission of effort and aim to His commandments. Well, then, is that life possible for us? Look at this instance before us. We know very little about how much knowledge of God these people in old days had, but, at all events, it was a great deal less than you and I have. Their theology was very different from ours; their religion was absolutely identical with ours. Their faith, which grasped the God revealed in their creed, was the same as our faith, though the creed which their faith grasped was only an outline sketch of yours and mine. But at all times and in all generations, the element and essence of the religious life has been the same-that is, the realising sense of the living divine presence, the effort and aspiration after communion with Him, and the quiet obedience and conformity of the practical life to His will. And so we can reach out our hands across all the centuries to this pre-Noachian, antediluvian patriarch, dim amongst the mists, and feel that he too is our brother.

And he has set us the example that in all conditions of life, and under the most unfavourable circumstances, it is possible to live in this close touch with God. For in his time, not only was there, as I have said, an incomplete and rudimentary knowledge of God, but in his time the earth was filled with violence, and gigantic forms of evil are represented as having dominated mankind. Amidst it all, the Titanic pride, the godlessness, the scorn, the rudeness, and the violence, amidst it all, this one ‘white flower of a blameless life’ managed to find nutriment upon the dunghill, and to blossom fresh and fair there. You and I cannot, whatever may be

our hindrances in living a consistent Christian life, have anything like the difficulties that this man had and surmounted. For us all, whatever our conditions, such a life is possible.

And then there is another lesson that he teaches us, viz. that such a life is consistent with the completest discharge of all common duties. The outline, as far as appearance was concerned, of this man's life was the same as the outline of those of his ancestors and successors. They are all described in the same terms. The formula is the same. Enoch lived, Mahalaleel, and all the rest of the half-unpronounceable names, they lived, they begat their heirs, and sons and daughters, and then they died. And the same formula is used about this man. He walked with God, but it was while treading the common path of secular life that he did so.

He found it possible to live in communion with God, and yet to do all the common things that men did then. Anybody's house may be a Bethel—a house of God—and anybody's work may be worship; and wherever we are and whatever we do, it is possible therein to serve God, and there to walk with Him.

2. And now a word about the crown of this life of communion. 'He was not, for God took him'

What wonderful reticence in describing, or rather hinting at, the stupendous miracle that is here in question! Is that like a book that came from the legend-loving and legend-making brains of men; or does it sound like the speech of God, to whom nothing is extraordinary and nothing needs to have a mark of admiration after it? It was the same to Him whether Enoch died or whether He simply took him to Himself. If one wants to know what men would have made of such a thing, if *they* had had to tell it, let them read those wretched Rabbinical fables that have been stitched on to this verse. There they will see how men describe miracles; and here they will see how God does so.

'*He was not*.' As I have said, he disappeared; that was what the world knew. 'God took him'; that was what God tells the world.

Thus this strange exception to the law of death stood, as I suppose, to the ancient world as doing somewhat the same office for them that the translation of Elijah afterwards partially did for Israel, and that the resurrection of Jesus Christ does completely for us, viz. it brought the future life into the realm of fact, and took it out of the dim region of speculation altogether. He establishes a truth who proves it, and he proves a fact that shows it. A doctrine of a future state is not worth much, but the fact of a future state, which was established by this incident then, and is certified for us all now, by the Christ risen from the dead, is all-important. Our gospel is all built upon facts, and this is the earliest fact in man's history which made man's subsistence in other conditions than that of earthly life a certainty.

And then, again, this wonderful exception shows to us, as it did to that ancient world, that the natural end of a religious life is union with God hereafter. It seems to me that the real proofs of a future life are two: one, the fact of Christ's resurrection, and the other, the fact of our religious experience. For anything looks to me more likely, and less incredible, than that a man who could walk with God should only have a poor earthly life to do it in, and that all these aspirations, these emotions, should be bounded and ended by a trivial thing, that touches only the physical frame. Surely, surely, there is nothing so absurd as to believe that he who can say 'Thou art my God,' and who has said it, should ever by anything be brought to cease to say it. Death cannot kill love to God; and the only end of the religious life of earth is its perfecting in heaven. The experiences that we have here, in their loftiness and in their incompleteness, equally witness for us, of the rest and the perfectness that remain for the children of God.

Then, again, this man in his unique experience was, and is, a witness of the fact that death is an excrescence, and results from sin. I suppose that he trod the road which the divine intention had destined to be trodden by all the children of men, if they had not sinned; and that his experience, unique as it is, is a survival, so to speak, of what was meant to be the law for humanity, unless there had intervened the terrible fact of sin and its wages, death. The road had been made, and this one man was allowed to travel along it that we might all learn, by the example of the exception, that the rule under which we live was not the rule that God originally meant for us, and that death has resulted from the fact of transgression. No doubt Enoch had in him the seeds of it, no doubt there were the possibilities of disease and the necessity of death in his physical frame, but God has shown us in that one instance, and in the other of the great prophet's, how *He* is not subject to the law that men shall die, although men are subject to it, and that if He will, He can take them all to Himself, as He did take these two, and will take them who, at last, shall not die but be changed.

Let me remind you that this unique and exceptional end of a life of communion may, in its deepest, essential character, be experienced by each of us. There are two passages in the book of Psalms, both of which I regard as allusions to this incident. The one of them is in the forty-ninth Psalm and reads thus: 'He will deliver my soul from the power of the grave, for He will take me.' Our version conceals the allusion, by its unfortunate and non-literal rendering 'receive.' The same word is employed there as here. Can we fail to see the reference? The Psalmist expects his soul to be 'delivered from the power of the grave,' because God *takes* it.

And again, in the great seventy-third Psalm, which marks perhaps the highwater mark of pre-Christian anticipations of a future state, we read: 'Thou wilt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards *take* me' (again the same word) 'to glory.' Here, again, the Psalmist looks back to the unique and exceptional instance, and in the rapture and ecstasy of the faith that has grasped the living God as his portion, says to himself: 'Though the externals of Enoch's end and of mine may differ, their substance will be the same, and I, too, shall cease to be seen of men, because God takes me into the secret of His pavilion, by the loving clasp of His lifting hand.'

Enoch was led, if I may say so, round the top of the valley, beyond the head waters of the dark river, and was kept on the high level until he got to the other side. You and I have to go down the hill, out of the sunshine, in among the dank weeds, to stumble over the black rocks, and wade through the deep water; but we shall get over to the same place where he stands, and He that took him round by the top will 'take' us through the river; and so shall we 'ever be with the Lord'

'Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him.' This verse is like some little spring with trees and flowers on a cliff. The dry genealogical table—and here this bit of human life in it! How unlike the others—they *lived* and they *died*; this man's life was walking with God and his departure was a fading away, a ceasing to be found here. It is remarkable in how calm a tone the Bible speaks of its supernatural events. We should not have known this to be a miracle but for the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The dim past of these early chapters carries us over many centuries. We know next to nothing about the men, where they lived, how they lived, what thoughts they had, what tongue they spoke. Some people would say that they never lived at all. I believe, and most of you, I suppose, believe that they did. But how little personality we give them! Little as we know of environment and circumstances, we know the main thing, the fact of their having been. Then we are sure that they had sorrow and joy, strife and love, toil and rest, like the rest of us, that whether their days were longer or shorter they were filled much as ours are, that whatever was the pattern into which the quiet threads of their life was woven it was, warp and weft, the

same yarn as ours. In broad features every human life is much the same. Widely different as the clothing of these grey fathers in their tents, with their simple contrivances and brief records, is from that of cultivated busy Englishmen to-day, the same human form is beneath both. And further, we know but little as to their religious ideas, how far they were surrounded with miracles, what they knew of God and of His purposes, how they received their knowledge, what served them for a Bible. Of what positive institutions of religion they had we know nothing; whether for them there was sacrifice and a sabbath day, how far the original gospel to Adam was known or remembered or understood by them. All that is perfectly dark to us. But this we know, that those of them who were godly men lived by the same power by which godly men live nowadays. Whatever their creed, their religion was ours. Religion, the bond that unites again the soul to God, has always been the same.

The Saint Among Sinners

'These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.'—GENESIS vi. 9-22.

1. Notice here, first, the solitary saint. Noah stands alone 'in his generations' like some single tree, green and erect, in a forest of blasted and fallen pines. 'Among the faithless, faithful only he.' His character is described, so to speak, from the outside inwards. He is 'righteous,' or discharging all the obligations of law and of his various relationships. He is 'perfect.' His whole nature is developed, and all in due symmetry and proportion; no beauty wanting, no grace cultivated at the expense of others. He is a full man; not a one-sided and therefore a distorted one. Of course we do not take these words to imply sinlessness. They express a relative, not an absolute, completeness. Hence we may learn both a lesson of stimulus and of hope. We are not to rest satisfied with partial goodness, but to seek to attain an all-round perfectness, even in regard to the graces least natural to our dispositions. And we can rejoice to believe that God is generous in His acceptance and praise. He does not grudge commendation, but takes account of the deepest desires and main tendencies of a life, and sees the germ as a full-blown flower, and the bud as a fruit.

Learn, too, that solitary goodness is possible. Noah stood uninfected by the universal contagion; and, as is always the case, the evil around, which he did not share, drove him to a more rigid abstinence from it. A Christian who is alone 'in his generations,' like a lily among nettles, has to be, and usually is, a more earnest Christian than if he were among like-minded men. The saints in 'Caesar's household' needed to be very unmistakable saints, if they were not to be swept away by the torrent of godlessness. It is hard, but it is possible, for a boy at school, or a young man in an office, or a soldier in a barrack, to stand alone, and be Christlike; but only on condition that he yields to no temptation to drop his conduct to the level around him, and is never guilty of compromise. Once yield, and all is over. Flowers grow on a dunghill, and the very reeking rottenness may make the bloom finer.

Learn, too, that the true place for the saint is ‘in his generations.’ If the mass is corrupt, so much the more need to rub the salt well in. Disgust and cowardice, and the love of congenial society, keep Christian people from mixing with the world, which they must do if they are to do Christ’s work in it. There is a great deal too much union with the world, and a great deal too much separation from it, nowadays, and both are of the wrong sort. We cannot keep too far away from it, by abstinence from living by its maxims, and tampering with its pleasures. We cannot mix too much with it if we take our Christianity with us, and remember our vocation to be its light.

Notice, again, the companion of the solitary saint. What beauty there is in that description of the isolated man, passing lonely amid his contemporaries, like a stream of pure water flowing through some foul liquid, and untouched by it, and yet not alone in his loneliness, because ‘he walked with God!’ The less he found congenial companionship on earth, the more he realised God as by his side. The remarkable phrase, used only of Enoch and of Noah, implies a closer relation than the other expression, ‘To walk before God.’ Communion, the habitual occupation of mind and heart with God, the happy sense of His presence making every wilderness and solitary place glad because of Him. the child’s clasping the father’s hand with his tiny fingers, and so being held up and lifted over many a rough place, are all implied. Are we lonely in outward reality? Here is our unfailing companion. Have we to stand single among companions, who laugh at us and our religion? One man, with God to back him, is always in the majority. Though surrounded by friends, have we found that, after all, we live and suffer, and must die alone? Here is the all-sufficient Friend, if we have fellowship with whom our hearts will be lonely no more.

Observe that this communion is the foundation of all righteousness in conduct. Because Noah walked with God, he was ‘just’ and ‘perfect.’ If we live habitually in the holy of holies, our faces will shine when we come forth. If we desire to be good and pure, we must dwell with God, and His Spirit will pass into our hearts, and we shall bear the fragrance of his presence wherever we go. Learn, also, that communion with God is not possible unless we are fighting against our sin, and have some measure of holiness. We begin communion with Him, indeed, not by holiness, but by faith. But it is not kept up without the cultivation of purity. Sin makes fellowship with God impossible. ‘Can two walk together, except they be agreed?’ ‘What communion hath light with darkness?’ The delicate bond which unites us in happy communion with God shrivels up, as if scorched, at the touch of sin. ‘If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie.’

2. Notice the universal apostasy. Two points are brought out in the sombre description. The first is moral corruption; the second, violence. Bad men are cruel men. When the bonds which knit society to God are relaxed, selfishness soon becomes furious, and forcibly seizes what it lusts after, regardless of others’ rights. Sin saps the very foundations of social life, and makes men into tigers, more destructive to each other than wild beasts. All our grand modern schemes for the reformation of society will fail unless they begin with the reformation of the individual. To walk with God is the true way to make men gentle and pitying.

Learn from this dark outline that God gazes in silence on the evil. That is a grand, solemn expression, ‘Corrupt before God.’ All this mad riot of pollution and violence is holding its carnival of lust and blood under the very eye of God, and He says never a word. So is it ever. Like some band of conspirators in a dark corner, bad men do deeds of darkness, and fancy they are unseen, and that God forgets *them*, because they forget God; and all the while His eye is fixed on them, and the darkness is light about them. Then comes a further expression of the same thought: ‘God looked upon the earth.’ As a sudden beam of sunshine out of a

thunder-cloud, His eye flashes down, not as if He then began to know, but that His knowledge then began, as it were, to act.

3. What does the stern sentence on the rotten world teach us? A very profound truth, not only of the certain divine retribution, but of the indissoluble connection of sin with destruction. The same word is thrice employed in verses 11 and 12 to express 'corruption' and in verse 13 to express 'destruction.' A similar usage is found in 1 Corinthians iii. 17, where the same Greek word is translated 'defile' and 'destroy.' This teaches us that, in deepest reality, corruption is destruction, that sin is death, that every sinner is a suicide. God's act in punishment corresponds to, and is the inevitable outcome of, our act in transgression. So fatal is all evil, that one word serves to describe both the poison-secreting root and the poisoned fruit. Sin is death in the making; death is sin finished.

The promise of deliverance, which comes side by side with the stern sentence, illustrates the blessed truth that God's darkest threatenings are accompanied with a revelation of the way of escape. The ark is always shown along with the flood. Zoar is pointed out when God foretells Sodom's ruin. We are no sooner warned of the penalties of sin, than we are bid to hear the message of mercy in Christ. The brazen serpent is ever reared where the venomous snakes bite and burn.

4. We pass by the details of the construction of the ark to draw the final lesson from the exact obedience of Noah. We have the statement twice over, He did 'according to all that God commanded him.' It was no easy thing for him to build the ark, amidst the scoffing of his generations. Smart witticisms fell around him like hail. All the 'practical men' thought him a dreamy fool, wasting his time, while they prospered and made something of life. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us the secret of his obedience: 'By faith, Noah,' etc. He realised the distant unseen, because he believed Him who warned him of it. The immediate object of his faith was 'the things not seen as yet'; but the real, deepest object was God, whose word showed him these. So faith is always trust in a divine Person, whether it lays hold of the past sacrifice, the present indwelling Spirit, or the future heaven.

Noah's example teaches us the practical effects of faith. 'Moved with godly fear,' says Hebrews; by which is meant, not a mere dread of personal evil, for Noah was assured of safety—but that godly reverence and happy fear which dwells with faith, and secures precise obedience. Learn that a faith which does not work on the feelings is a very poor thing. Some Christian people have a great horror of emotional religion. Unemotional religion is a great deal worse. The road by which faith gets at the hands is through the heart. And he who believes but feels nothing, will do exactly as much as he feels, and probably does not really believe much more.

So after Noah's emotion followed his action. He was bid to prepare his ark, we have only to take refuge in the ark which God has prepared in Christ; but the principle of Noah's obedience applies to us all. He realised so perfectly that future, with its double prospect of destruction and deliverance, that his whole life was moulded by the conduct which should lead to his escape. The far-off flood was more real to him than the shows of life around him. Therefore he could stand all the gibes, and gave himself to a course of life which was sheer folly unless that future was real. Perhaps a hundred and twenty years passed between the warning and the flood; and for all that time he held on his way, nor faltered in his faith. Does our faith realise that which lies before us with anything like similar clearness? Do we see that future shining through all the trivial, fleeting present? Does it possess weight and solidity enough to shape our lives? Noah's creed was much shorter than ours; but I fear his faith was as much stronger.

5. We may think, finally, of the vindication of his faith. For a hundred and twenty years the wits laughed, and the ‘common-sense’ people wondered, and the patient saint went on hammering and pitching at his ark. But one morning it began to rain; and by degrees, somehow, Noah did not seem quite such a fool. The jests would look rather different when the water was up to the knees of the jesters; and their sarcasms would stick in their throats as they drowned. So is it always. So it will be at the last great day. The men who lived for the future, by faith in Christ, will be found out to have been the wise men when the future has become the present, and the present has become the past, and is gone for ever; while they who had no aims beyond the things of time, which are now sunk beneath the dreary horizon, will awake too late to the conviction that they are outside the ark of safety, and that their truest epitaph is ‘Thou fool!’

‘Clear Shining After Rain’

‘And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged; The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen. And it came to pass at the end of forty days that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more. And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried. And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease,’—GENESIS viii. 1-22.

The universal tradition of a deluge is most naturally accounted for by admitting that there was a ‘universal deluge.’ But ‘universal’ does not apply to the extent as embracing the whole earth, but as affecting the small area then inhabited—an area which was probably not greater than the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris. The story in Genesis is the Hebrew version of the universal tradition, and its plain affinity to the cuneiform narratives is to be frankly accepted. But the relationship of these two is not certain. Are they mother and daughter, or are they sisters? The theory that the narrative in Genesis is derived from the Babylonian, and is a purified, elevated rendering of it, is not so likely as that both are renderings of a more primitive account, to which the Hebrew narrative has kept true, while the other has tainted it with polytheistic ideas. In this passage the cessation of the flood is the theme, and it brings out both the love of the God who sent the awful punishment, and the patient godliness of the man who was spared from it. So it completes the teaching of the flood, and proclaims that God ‘in wrath remembers mercy.’

1. ‘God remembered Noah.’ That is a strong ‘anthropomorphism,’ like many other things in Genesis—very natural when these records were written, and bearing a true meaning for all times. It might seem as if, in the wild rush of the waters from beneath and from above, the little handful in the ark were forgotten. Had the Judge of all the earth, while executing ‘terrible things in righteousness,’ leisure to think of them who were ‘afar off upon the sea’? Was it a blind wrath that had been let loose? No; in all the severity there was tender regard for those worthy of it. Judgment was discriminating. The sunshine of love broke through even the rain-clouds of the flood.

So the blessed lesson is taught that, in the widest sweep of the most stormy judgments, there are those who abide safely, fearing no evil. Though the waters are out, there is a rock on which we may stand safe, above their highest wave. And why did God ‘remember Noah’? It was not favouritism, arbitrary and immoral. Noah was bid to build the ark, because he was ‘righteous’ in a world of evil-doers; he was ‘remembered’ in the ark, because he had believed God’s warning, obeyed God’s command as seeing the judgment ‘not seen as yet,’ and so ‘became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.’ They who trust God, and, trusting Him, realise as if present the future judgment, and, ‘moved with fear,’ take refuge in the ark, are never forgot by Him, even while the world is drowned. They live in His heart, and in due time He will show that He remembers them.

2. The gradual subsidence of the flood is told with singular exactitude of dates, which are certainly peculiar if they are not historical. The slow decrease negatives the explanation of the story as being the exaggerated remembrance of some tidal-wave caused by earthquake and the like. Precisely five months after the flood began, the ark grounded, and the two sources, the rain from above and the ‘fountains of the deep’ (that is, probably, the sea), were ‘restrained,’ and a high wind set in. That date marked the end of the increase of the waters, and consequently the beginning of their decrease. Seven months and ten days elapsed between it and the complete restoration of the earth to its previous condition. That time was divided into stages. Two months and a half passed before the highest land emerged; two months more and the surface was all visible; a month and twenty-seven days more before ‘the earth was dry.’ The frequent recurrence of the sacred numbers, seven and ten, is noticeable. The length of time required for the restorative process witnesses to the magnitude of the catastrophe, impresses the imagination, and suggests the majestic slowness of the divine working, and how He uses natural processes for His purposes of moral government, and rules the wildest outbursts of physical agents. The Lord as king ‘sitteth upon the flood,’ and opens or seals the fountains of the great deep as He will. Scripture does not tell of the links between the First Cause and the physical effect. It brings the latter close up to the former. The last link touches the fixed staple, and all between may be ignored.

But the patient expectance of Noah comes out strongly in the story, as well as the gradualness of God’s working. Not till ‘forty days’—a round number—after the land appeared, did He do anything. He waited quietly till the path was plain. Eager impatience does not become those who trust in God. It is not said that the raven was sent out to see if the waters were abated. No purpose is named, nor is it said that it returned at all. ‘To and fro’ may mean over the waste of waters, not back and forward to and from the ark. The raven, from its blackness, its habit of feeding on carrion, its fierceness, was a bird of ill-omen, and sending it forth has a grim suggestion that it would find food enough, and ‘rest for the sole of its foot,’ among the swollen corpses floating on the dark waters. The dove, on the other hand, is the emblem of gentleness, purity, and tenderness. She went forth, the very embodiment of meek hope that wings its way over dark and desolate scenes of calamity and judgment, and, though disappointed at first, patiently waits till the waters sink further, discerns the earliest signs of their drying up, and comes back to the sender with a report which is a prophecy: ‘Your peace

shall return to you again.' Happy they who send forth, not the raven, but the dove, from their patient hearts. Their gentle wishes come back with confirmation of their hopes, 'as doves to their windows.'

3. But Noah did not leave the ark, though 'the earth was dry.' God had 'shut him in,' and it must be God who brings him out. We have to take heed of precipitate departure from the place where He has fixed us. Like Israel in the desert, it must be 'at the commandment of the Lord' that we pitch the camp, and at the commandment of the Lord that we journey. Till He speaks we must remain, and as soon as He speaks we must remove. 'God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth … and Noah went forth.' Thus prompt must be our obedience. A sacrifice of gratitude is the fit close of each epoch in our lives, and the fit beginning of each new one. Before he thought of anything else, Noah built his altar. All our deeds should be set in a golden ring of thankfulness. So the past is hallowed, and the future secure of God's protection. It is no unworthy conception of God which underlies the strongly human expression that he 'smelled the sweet savour.' He delights in our offerings, and our trustful, grateful love is 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable' to Him. The pledge that He will not any more curse the ground for man's sake is occasioned by the sacrifice, but is grounded on what seems, at first sight, a reason for the very opposite conclusion. Man's evil heart the reason for God's forbearance? Yes, because it is *'evil from his youth*.' He deals with men as knowing our frame, the corruption of our nature, and the need that the tree should be made good before it can bring forth good fruit. Therefore He will not smite, but rather seek to draw to repentance by His goodness, and by the faithful continuance of His beneficence in the steadfast covenant of revolving seasons, 'filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

The Sign For Man And The Remembrancer For God

'And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth. GENESIS ix. 8-17.

The previous verses of this chapter lay down the outlines of the new order which followed the flood. The blessing and the command to be fruitful are repeated. The dominion over animals is confirmed, but enlarged by the permission to use them as food, and by the laying on them of 'the terror of you and the dread of you.' The sanctity of human life is laid down with great emphasis. Violence and bloodshed had brought about the flood. The appalling destruction effected by it might lead to the mistaken notion that God held man's life cheap. Therefore the cornerstone of future society is laid in that declaration that life is inviolable. These blessings and commands are followed by this remarkable section, which deals with God's covenant with Noah, and its token in the rainbow.

1. The covenant is stated, and the parties concerned in it enumerated in verses 3-11. When Noah came forth from the ark, after the stupendous act of divine justice, he must have felt that the first thing he needed was some assurance as to the footing on which he and the new world round him stood with God. The flood had swept away the old order. It had revealed terrible possibilities of destruction in nature, and terrible possibilities of wrath in God. Was any knowledge of His intentions and ways possible? Could continuance of the new order be counted on? The answer to such questions was—God's covenant. Now, as then, when any great convulsions shake what seems permanent, and bring home to men the thinness of the crust of use and wont roofing an infinite depth of unknown possibilities of change, on which we walk, the heart cries out for some assurance of perpetuity, and some revelation of God's mind. We can have such, as truly as Noah had, if we use the Revelation given us in Jesus.

In God's covenant with Noah, the fact of the covenant may first be noted. What is a covenant? The term usually implies a reciprocal bond, both parties to which come under obligations by it, each to the other. But, in this case, there are no obligations on the part of man or of the creatures. This covenant is God's only. It is contingent on nothing done by the recipients. He binds Himself, whatever be the conduct of men. This covenant is the self-motived promise of an unconditional mercy. May we not say that the 'New Covenant' in Jesus Christ is after the pattern of this, rather than after the manner of compacts which require both parties to do their several parts?

But note the great thought, that God limits His freedom of action by this definite promise. Noah was not left to grope in dread among the terrible possibilities opened by the flood. God marked out the line on which He would move, and marked off a course which He would not pursue. It is like a king giving his subjects a constitution. Men can reckon on God. He has let them know much of the principles and methods of His government. He has buoyed out His course, as it were, on the ocean, or pricked it down upon a chart. We have not to do with arbitrary power, with inscrutable will. Our God is not one who 'giveth no account of any of His matters.' To use a common saying, 'We know where to have Him.'

The substance of this covenant is noteworthy. It is concerned solely with physical nature. There is nothing spiritual or 'religious' about it. There are to be no more universal deluges. That is all which it guarantees. But consider how important such an assurance was in two aspects. Note the solemn light which it threw on the past. It taught that the flood was an exception in the divine government, which should stand unrepeated for ever, in its dread pre-eminence testifying how awful it was as a judicial act, and how outrageous had been the guilt which it drowned out of existence and sight. A wholesome terror at the unexampled act of judgment would fill the hearts of the little group which now represented mankind.

Consider the effect of the covenant in encouraging hope. We have said that the one thing needful for Noah was some assurance that the new order would last. He was like a man who has just been rescued from an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. The ground seems to reel beneath him. Old habitudes have been curled up like leaves in the fire. Is there to be any fixity, any ground for continuous action, or for labour for a moment beyond the present? Is it worth while to plant or sow? Men who have lived through national tempests or domestic crashes know how much they need to be steadied afterwards by some reasonable assurance of comparative continuity. And these men, in the childhood of the race, would need it much. So they were sent out to till the earth, and to begin again strenuous lives, with this covenant to keep them from falling into a hand-to-mouth style of life, which would have brought them down to barbarism. We all need the same kind of assurance; and then, when we get it, such is the weakness of humanity, we are tempted to think that continuity means eternity, and that, because probably to-morrow shall be as this day, there will never come a to-morrow which shall be quite unlike to-day. The crust of cooled earth, on which we walk, is thick enough to bear man and all his works, but there comes a time when it will crack. The world will not be flooded again, but we forget, what Noah did not know, that it will be burned.

The parties to the covenant must be noticed. Note how frequently the share in it, which all living creatures have, is referred to in the context. In verse 10 the language becomes strained (in the original), in order to express the universal participation of all living creatures; and in verse 13 'the earth' itself is spoken of as one party. God recognises obligations to all living things, and even to the dumb, non-sentient earth. He will not causelessly quench one bright, innocent life, nor harm one clod. Surely this is, at least, an incipient revelation of a God whose 'tender mercies are over all his works.' He 'doth take care for oxen'; and man, with all the creatures that are with him, and all the wild ones that 'come not near' him, and all the solid structure of the world, are held in one covenant of protecting and sustaining providence and power.

2. The sign of the covenant is described at great length in verses 12-17. Note that verses 12, 13 state the general idea of a token or sign, that verses 14-16 deepen this by stating that the token to man is a reminder to God, and that verse 17 sums up the whole with emphatic repetition of the main points. The narrative does not imply, as has often been supposed, that the rainbow was visible for the first time after the deluge. To suppose that, is to read more into the story than is there, or than common sense tolerates. If there were showers and

sunshine, there must have been rainbows. But the fair vision strode across the sky with no articulate promise in its loveliness, though it must always have kindled wonder, and sometimes stirred deeper thoughts. Now, for the first time, it was made ‘a sign,’ the visible pledge of God’s promise.

Mark the emphasis with which God’s agency is declared and His ownership asserted. ‘*I* do set *My* bow.’ Neither Noah nor the writer knew anything about refraction or the prismatic spectrum. But perhaps they knew more about the rainbow than people do who know all about how it comes, except that God sets it in the cloud, and that it is His. Let us have the facts which science labels as such, by all means, and the more the better; but do not let us forget that there are other facts in nature which science has no means of attaining, but which are as solid and a great deal deeper than those which it supplies.

The natural adaptation of the rainbow for this office of a token is too plain to need dwelling on. It ‘fills the sky when storms prepare to part,’ and hence is a natural token that the downpour is being stayed. Somewhere there must be a bit of blue through which the sun can pierce; and the small gap, which is large enough to let it out, will grow till all the sky is one azure dome. It springs into sight in front of the cloud, without which it could not be, so it typifies the light which may glorify judgments, and is born of sorrows borne in the presence of God. It comes from the sunshine smiting the cloud; so it preaches the blending of love with divine judgment. It unites earth and heaven; so it proclaims that heavenly love is ready to transform earthly sorrows. It stretches across the land; so it speaks of an all-embracing care, which enfolds the earth and all its creatures.

It is not only a ‘sign to men.’ It is also, in the strong anthropomorphism of the narrative, a remembrancer to God. Of course this is accommodation of the representation of His nature to the limitations of ours. And the danger of attaching unworthy ideas to it is lessened by noticing that He is said to set His bow in the cloud, before it acts as His remembrancer. Therefore, He had remembered before it appeared. The truth, conveyed in the childlike language, is that God has His covenant ever before Him, and that He responds to and honours the appeal made to Him, by that which He has Himself appointed for a sign to men. The expectant eyes of the trustful man and the eye of God meet, as it were, in looking on the sign. On earth it nourishes faith; in heaven it moves to love and blessing. God can be reminded of what He always remembers. The rainbow reminds Him of His covenant by its calm light. Jesus Christ reminds Him of His grace by His intercession before the throne. We remind Him of His plighted faithfulness by our prayers. ‘Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep not silence.’

An Example Of Faith

'Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.' GENESIS xii. 1-9.

I

We stand here at the well-head of a great river—a narrow channel, across which a child can step, but which is to open out a broad bosom that will reflect the sky and refresh continents. The call of Abram is the most important event in the Old Testament, but it is also an eminent example of individual faith. For both reasons he is called 'the Father of the Faithful.' We look at the incident here mainly from the latter point of view. It falls into three parts.

1. The divine voice of command and promise.—God's servants have to be separated from home and kindred, and all surroundings. The command to Abram was no mere arbitrary test of obedience. God could not have done what He meant with him, unless He had got him by himself. So Isaiah (li. 2) put his finger on the essential when he says, 'I called him alone.' God's communications are made to solitary souls, and His voice to us always summons us to forsake friends and companions, and to go apart with God. No man gets speech of God in a crowd. If you desired to fill a person with electricity, you used to put him on a stool with glass legs, to keep him from earthly contact. If the quickening impulse from the great magnet is to charge the soul, that soul must be isolated. 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

The vagueness of the command is significant. Abram did not know 'whither he went.' He is not told that Canaan is the land, till he has reached Canaan. A true obedience is content to have orders enough for present duty. Ships are sometimes sent out with sealed instructions, to be opened when they reach latitude and longitude so-and-so. That is how we are all sent out. Our knowledge goes no farther ahead than is needful to guide our next step. If we 'go out' as He bids us, He will show us what to do next.

'I do not ask to see The distant scene; one step enough for me.'

Observe the promise. We may notice that it needed a soul raised above the merely temporal to care much for such promises. They would have been but thin diet for earthly appetites. 'A great nation'; a divine blessing; to be a source of blessing to the whole world, and a touchstone by their conduct to which men would be blessed or cursed;—what was there in these to fascinate a man, unless he had faith to teach him the relative importance of the

earthly and the heavenly, the present and the future? Notice that the whole promise appeals to unselfish desires. It is always, in some measure, elevating to live for a future, rather than a present, good; but if it be only the same kind of good as the present would yield, it is a poor affair. The only really ennobling faith is one which sets before itself a future full of divine blessing, and of diffusion of that blessing through us, and which therefore scorns delights, and for such gifts is content to be solitary and a wanderer.

2. The obedience of faith.—We have here a wonderful example of prompt, unquestioning obedience to a bare word. We do not know how the divine command was conveyed to Abram. We simply read, 'The Lord said'; and if we contrast this with verse 7, 'The Lord appeared … and said,' it will seem probable that there was no outward sign of the divine will. The patriarch knew that he was following a divine command, and not his own purpose; but there seems to have been no appeal to sense to authenticate the inward voice. He stands, then, on a high level, setting the example of faith as unconditional acceptance of, and obedience to, God's bare word.

Observe that faith, which is the reliance on a person, and therefore trust in his word, passes into both forms of confidence in that word as promise, and obedience to that word as command. We cannot cut faith in halves, and exercise the one aspect without the other. Some people's faith says that it delights in God's promises, but it does not delight in His commandments. That is no faith at all. Whoever takes God at His word, will take all His words. There is no faith without obedience; there is no obedience without faith.

We have already said enough about the separation which was effected by Abram's journey; but we may just notice that the departure from his father's house was but the necessary result of the gulf between them and him, which had been opened by his faith. They were idolaters; he worshipped one God. That drove them farther apart than the distance between Sichem and Haran. When sympathy in religion was at an end, the breach of all other ties was best. So to-day, whether there be outward separation or no, depends on circumstances; but every true Christian is parted from the dearest who is not a Christian, by an abyss wider than any outward distance can make. The law for us is Abram's law, 'Get thee out.' Either our faith will separate us from the world, or the world will separate us from our faith and our God.

The companionship of Lot, who attaches himself to Abram, teaches that religion, in its true possessors, exercises an attractive influence over even common natures, and may win them to a loftier life. Some weak eyes may discern more glory in the sunshine tinting a poor bit of mist into ruddy light than in the beam which is too bright to look at. A faithful Abram will draw Lot after him.

'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.' Compare this singular expression with chapter xi. 31, where we have Terah's emigration from Ur described in the same terms, with the all-important difference in the end, 'They came' not into Canaan, but 'unto Haran, and dwelt there.' Many begin the course; one finishes it. Terah's journeying was only in search of pasture and an abode. So he dropped his wider scheme when the narrower served his purpose. It was an easy matter to go from Ur to Haran. Both were on the same bank of the Euphrates. But to cross the broad, deep, rapid river was a different thing, and meant an irrevocable cutting loose from the past life. Only the man of faith did that. There are plenty of half-and-half Christians, who go along merrily from Ur to Haran; but when they see the wide stream in front, and realise how completely the other side is separated from all that is familiar, they take another thought, and conclude they have come far enough, and Haran will serve their turn.

Again, the phrase teaches us the certain issue of patient pilgrimage and persistent purpose. There is no mystery in getting to the journey's end. 'One foot up, and the other foot down,' continued long enough, will bring to the goal of the longest march. It looks a weary journey, and we wonder if we shall ever get thither. But the magic of 'one step at a time' does it. The guide is also the upholder of our way. 'Every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.'

3. The life in the land.—The first characteristic of it is its continual wandering. This is the feature which the Epistle to the Hebrews marks as significant. There was no reason but his own choice why Abram should continue to journey, and prefer to pitch his tent now under the terebinth tree of Moreh, now by Hebron, rather than to enter some of the cities of the land. He dwelt in tents because he looked for the city. The clear vision of the future detached him, as it will always detach men, from close participation in the present. It is not because we are mortal, and death is near at the furthest, that the Christian is to sit loose to this world, but because he lives by the hope of the inheritance. He must choose to be a pilgrim, and keep himself apart in feeling and aims from this present. The great lesson from the wandering life of Abram is, 'Set your affection on things above.' Cultivate the sense of belonging to another polity than that in the midst of which you dwell. The Canaanites christened Abram 'The Hebrew' (Genesis xiv. 13), which may be translated 'The man from the other side.' That is the name which all true Christians should deserve. They should bear their foreign extraction in their faces, and never be naturalised subjects here. Life is wholesomer in the tent under the spreading tree, with the fresh air blowing about us and clear sky above, than in the Canaanite city.

Observe, too, that Abram's life was permeated with worship. Wherever he pitches his tent, he builds an altar. So he fed his faith, and kept up his communion with God. The only condition on which the pilgrim life is possible, and the temptations of the world cease to draw our hearts, is that all life shall be filled with the consciousness of the divine presence, our homes altars, and ourselves joyful thankofferings. Then every abode is blessed. The undefended tent is a safe fortress, in which dwelling we need not envy those who dwell in palaces. Common tasks will then be fresh, full of interest, because we see God in them, and offer them up to Him. The wandering life will be a life of walking with God, and progressive knowledge of Him; and over all the roughnesses and the sorrows and the trivialities of it will be spread 'the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration' of God's presence, and the peacefulness of communion with Him.

Again, we may notice that the life of obedience was followed by fuller manifestations of God, and of His will. God 'appeared' when Abram was in the land. Is it not always true that obedience is blessed by closer vision and more knowledge? To him that hath shall be given; and he who has followed the unseen Guide through dimly discerned paths to an invisible goal, will be gladdened when he reaches the true Canaan, by the sight of Him whom, having not seen, he loved. Even here on earth obedience is the path to fuller knowledge; and when the pilgrims who have left all and followed the Captain of salvation through a deeper, darker stream than Abram crossed, have touched the other side, God will appear to them, and say, as the enraptured eye gazes amazed on the goodly land, 'Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'

Abram And The Life Of Faith

II

A great act of renunciation at the divine call lies at the foundation of Israel's history, as it does at the foundation of every life that blesses the world or is worth living. The divine Word to Abram first gives the command in all its authoritativeness and plain setting forth of how much had to be surrendered, and then in its exuberant setting forth of how much was to be won by obedience. God does not hide the sacrifices that have to be made if we will be true to His command. He will enlist no recruits on false pretences. All ties of country, kindred, and father's house have to be loosened, and, if need be, to be cut, for His command is to be supreme, and clinging hands that would hold back the pilgrim have to be disengaged. If a man realises God's hold on him, he feels all others relaxed. The magnetism of the divine command overcomes gravitation, and lifts him high above earth. The life of faith ever begins as that of 'the Father of the Faithful' began, with the solemn recognition of a divine will which separates. Further, Abram saw plainly what he had to leave, but not what he was to win. He had to make a venture of faith, for 'the land that I will shew thee' was undefined. Certainly it was somewhere, but where was it? He had to fling away substance for what seemed shadow to all but the eye of faith, as we all have to do. The familiar, undeniable good of the present has to be waived in favour of what 'common sense' calls a misty possibility in the future. To part with solid acres and get nothing but hopes of an inheritance in the skies looks like insanity, and is the only true wisdom. 'Get thee out' is plain; 'the land that I will shew thee' looks like the doubtful outlines seen from afar at sea, which may be but clouds.

But Abram had a great hope blazing in front, none the less bright or guiding because it all rested on the bare promise of God. It is the prerogative of faith to give solidity and reality to what the world thinks has neither. The wanderer who had left his country was to receive a land for his own; the solitary who had left his kindred was to become the founder of a nation; the unknown stranger was to win a great name,—and how wonderfully that has come true! Not only was he to be blessed, but also to be a blessing, for from him was to flow that which should bless all the earth,—and how transcendently that has come true! The attitude of men to him (and to the universal blessing that should descend from him) was to determine their position in reference to God and 'blessings' or 'cursings' from him. So the migration of Abram was a turning-point in universal history.

Obedience followed the command, immediate as the thunder on the flash, and complete. 'So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him,'—blessed they of whose lives that may be the summing-up! Happy the life which has God's command at the back of every deed, and no command of His unobeyed! If our acts are closely parallel with God's speech to us, they will prosper, and we shall be peaceful wherever we may have to wander. Success followed obedience in Abram's case, as in deepest truth it always does. That is a pregnant expression: 'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.' A strange itinerary of a journey, which omits all but the start and the finish! And yet are these not the most important points in any journey or life,—whither it was directed and where it arrived? How little will the weary tramps in the desert be remembered when the goal has been reached! Dangers and privations soon pass from memory, and we shall think little of sorrows, cares, and pains, when we arrive at home. The life of faith is the only one which is always sure of getting to the place to which it seeks to journey. Others miss their aim, or drop dead on the road, like the early emigrants out West; Christian lives get to the city.

Once in the land, Abram was still a stranger and pilgrim. He first planted himself in its heart by Sichem, but outside the city, under the terebinth tree of Moreh. The reason for his position is given in the significant statement that ‘the Canaanite was then in the land.’ So he had to live in the midst of an alien civilisation, and yet keep apart from it. As Hebrews says, he was ‘dwelling in tabernacles,’ because he ‘looked for a city.’ The hope of the permanent future made him keep clear of the passing present; and we are to feel ourselves pilgrims and sojourners, not so much because earth is fleeting and we are mortal, as because our true affinities are with the unseen and eternal. But the presence of ‘the Canaanite’ is connected also with the following words, which tell that ‘the Lord appeared unto Abram,’ and now after his obedience told him that this was the land that was to be his. He unfolds His purposes to those who keep His commandments; obedience is the mother of insight. The revelation put a further strain on faith, for the present occupiers of the land were many and strong; but it matters not how formidably and firmly rooted the Canaanite is, God’s children can be sure that the promise will be fulfilled. We can calmly look on his power and reckon on its decay, if the Lord appears to us, as to Abram—and He surely will if we have followed His separating voice, and dwell as strangers here, because our hearts are with Him.

After the appearance of God and the promise, we have an outline of the pilgrim’s life, as seen in Abram. He signalised God’s further opening of His purposes, by building an altar on the place where He had been seen by him. Thankful recognition and commemoration of the times in our lives when He has most plainly drawn near and shown us glimpses of His will, are no less blessed than due, and they who thus rear altars to Him will wonder, when they come to count up how many they have had to build. But the life of faith is ever a pilgrim life, and Bethel has soon to be the home instead of Shechem. There, too, Abram keeps outside the city, and pitches his tent. There, too, the altar rises by the side of the tent. The transitory provision for housing the pilgrim contrasts with the solid structure for offering sacrifices. The tent is ‘pitched,’ and may be struck and carried away to-morrow, but the altar is ‘builded.’ That part of our lives which is concerned with the material and corporeal is, after all, short in duration and small in importance; that which has to do with God, His revelations, and His worship and service, lasts. What is left in ancient historic lands, like Egypt or Greece, is the temples of the gods, while the huts of the people have perished long centuries ago. What we build for God lasts; what we pitch for ourselves is transient as we are.

Going Forth

'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.'—GENESIS xii. 5.

I

The reference of these words is to Abram's act of faith in leaving Haran and setting out on his pilgrimage. It is a strange narrative of a journey, which omits the journey altogether, with its weary marches, privations, and perils, and notes but its beginning and its end. Are not these the main points in every life, its direction and its attainment? There are—

'Two points in the adventure of the diver, One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.'

Abram and his company had a clear aim. But does not the Epistle to the Hebrews magnify him precisely because he 'went out, not knowing whither he went'? Both statements are true, for Abram had the same combination of knowledge and ignorance as we all have. He knew that he was to go to a land that he should afterwards inherit, and he knew that, in the first place, Canaan was to be his 'objective point,' but he did not know, till long after he had crossed the Euphrates and pitched his tent by Bethel, that it was the land. The ultimate goal was clear, and the first step towards it was plain, but how that first step was related to the goal was not plain, and all the steps between were unknown. He went forth with sealed orders, to go to a certain place, where he would have further instructions. He knew that he was to go to Canaan, and beyond that point all was dark, except for the sparkle of the great hope that gleamed on the horizon in front, as a sunlit summit rises above a sea of mist between it and the traveller. Like such a traveller, Abram could not accurately tell how far off the shining peak was, nor where, in the intervening gorges full of mist, the path lay; but he plunged into the darkness with a good heart, because he had caught a glimpse of his journey's end. So with us. We may have clear before us the ultimate aim and goal of our lives, and also the step which we have to take now, in pressing towards it, while between these two there stretches a valley full of mist, the breadth of which may be measured by years or by hours, for all that we know, and the rough places and green pastures of which are equally hidden from us. We have to be sure that the mountain peak far ahead, with the sunshine bathing it, is not delusive cloud but solid reality, and we have to make sure that God has bid us step out on the yard of path which we *can* see, and, having secured these two certainties, we are to cast ourselves into the obscurity before us, and to bear in our hearts the vision of the end, to cheer us amid the difficulties of the road.

Life is strenuous, fruitful, and noble, in the measure in which its ultimate aim is kept clearly visible throughout it all. Nearer aims, prescribed by physical necessities, tastes, circumstances, and the like, are clear enough, but a melancholy multitude of us have never reflected on the further question: 'What then?' Suppose I have made my fortune, or won my wife, or established my position, or achieved a reputation, behind all these successes lies the larger question. These are not ends but means, and it is fatal to treat them as being the goal of our efforts or the chief end of our being. There would be fewer wrecked lives, and fewer bitter and disappointed old men, if there were more young ones who, at starting, put clearly before themselves the question: 'What am I living for? and what am I going to do when I have secured the nearer aims necessarily prescribed to me?'

What that aim should be is not doubtful. The only worthy end befitting creatures with hearts, minds, consciences, and wills like ours is God Himself. Abram's 'Canaan' is usually regarded as an emblem of heaven, and that is correct, but the land of our inheritance is not wholly beyond the river, for God is the portion of our hearts. He *is* heaven. To dwell with Him, to have all the current of our being running towards Him, to set Him before us in the strenuous hours of effort and in the quiet moments of repose, in the bright and in the dark days, are the conditions of blessedness, strength, and peace.

That aim clearly apprehended and persistently pursued gives continuity to life, such as nothing else can do. How many of the things that drew us to themselves, and were for a while the objects of desire and effort, have sunk below the horizon! The lives that are not directed to God as their chief end are like the voyages of old-time sailors, who had to creep from one headland to another, and steer for points which, one after another, were reached, left behind, and forgotten. There is only one aim so great, so far in advance that we can never reach, and therefore can never pass and drop it. Life then becomes a chain, not a heap of unrelated fragments. That aim made ours, stimulates effort to its highest point, and therefore secures blessedness. It emancipates from many bonds, and takes the poison out of the mosquito bites of small annoyances, and the stings of great sorrows. It gleams ever before a man, sufficiently attained to make him at rest, sufficiently unattained to give the joy of progress. The pilgrims who had but one single aim, 'to go to the land of Canaan,' were delivered from the miseries of conflicting desires, and with simplicity of aim came concentration of force and calm of spirit.

Coming In

II

If life has a clear, definite aim, and especially if its aim is the highest, there will be detachment from, and abandonment of, many lower ones. Nothing worth doing is done, and nothing worth being is realised in ourselves, except on condition of resolutely ignoring much that attracts. ‘They went forth’; Haran must be given up if Canaan is to be reached. Artists are content to pay the price for mastery in their art, students think it no hardship to remain ignorant of much in order to know their own subject thoroughly; men of business feel it no sacrifice to give up culture, leisure, and sometimes still higher things, such as love and purity, to win wealth. And we shall not be Christians after Christ’s heart unless we practise similar restrictions. The stream that is to flow with impetus sufficient to scour its bed clear of obstructions must not be allowed to meander in side branches, but be banked up in one channel. Sometimes there must be actual surrender and outward withdrawal from lower aims which, by our weakness, have become rival aims; always there must be subordination and detachment in heart and mind. The compass in an iron ship is disturbed by the iron, unless it has been adjusted; the golden apples arrest the runner, and there are clogs and weights in every life, which have to be laid aside if the race is to be won. The old pilgrim fashion is still the only way. We must do as Abram did: leave Haran and its idols behind us, and go forth, ready to dwell, if need be, in deserts, and as sojourners even when among cities, or we shall not reach the ‘land that is very far off.’ It is near us if we forsake self and the ‘things seen and temporal,’ but it recedes when we turn our hearts to these.

‘Into the land of Canaan they came.’ No man honestly and rightly seeks God and fails to find Him. No man has less goodness and Christ-likeness than he truly desires and earnestly pursues. Nearer aims are often missed, and it is well that they should be. We should thank God for disappointments, for hopes unfulfilled, or proving still greater disappointments when fulfilled. It is mercy that often makes the harvest from our sowing a scanty one, for so we are being taught to turn from the quest in which searching has no assurance of finding, to that in which to seek is to find. ‘I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.’ We may not reach other lands which seem to us to be lands of promise, or when we do, may find that the land is ‘evil and naughty,’ but this land we shall reach, if we desire it, and if, desiring it, we go forth from this vain world. The Christian life is the only one which has no failures, no balked efforts, no frustrated aims, no brave settings out and defeated returnings. The literal meaning of one of the Old Testament words for *sin* is missing the mark, and that embodies the truth that no man wins what he seeks who seeks satisfaction elsewhere than in God. Like the rivers in Asiatic deserts, which are lost in the sand and never reach the sea, all lives which flow towards anything but God are dissipated and vain.

But the supreme realisation of an experience like Abram’s is reserved for another life. No pilgrim Zion-ward perishes in the wilderness, or loses his way or fails to come to ‘the city of habitation.’ ‘They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.’ And when they appear there, they will think no more, just as this narrative says nothing, of the sandy, salt, waterless wildernesses, or the wearinesses, dangers, and toils of the road. The experience of the happy travellers, who have found all which they sought and are at home for ever in the fatherland towards which they journeyed, will all be summed up in this, that ‘they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.’

The Man Of Faith

'And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.'—GENESIS xii. 6, 7.

Great epoch and man. Steps of Abram's training. First he was simply called to go—no promise of inheritance—obeyed—came to Canaan-found a thickly peopled land with advanced social order, and received no divine vision till he was face to face with the Canaanite.

1. *God's bit-by-bit leading of us.*

How slowly the divine purpose was revealed—the trial before the promise—did not know where, nor that Canaan was land, but only told enough for his first march.

So with us—our ignorance of future is meant to have the effect of keeping us near God and training us to live a day at a time.

God's finger on the page points to a word at a time. Each day's route is given morning by morning in the order for the day.

2. *Obedience often brings us into very difficult places.*

Abram was ready to say, no doubt, 'This cannot be the land for me, peopled as it is with all these Canaanites.' We are ever ready to think that, if we find obstacles, we must have misunderstood God's directions, but 'many adversaries' often indicate an 'open door.'

3. *The presence of enemies brings the presence of God.*

This is the first time we read that God *appeared* to men.

As the darkness thickens, the pillar of fire brightens. But not only does God appear more clearly, but our spirits are more eager and therefore able to see Him. We are mercifully left to feel the enemies before we see Him present in His strength.

4. *The victory for us lies in the vision of God and of His loving purpose.*

How superb the confidence of 'Unto thy seed will I give *this* land.'

That vision is our true strength. And it will make us feel as pilgrims, which is in itself more than half the battle.

Life In Canaan

‘And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.’ GENESIS xii. 3.

These are the two first acts of Abram in the land of Canaan.

1. *All life should blend earthly and heavenly.*

They are not to be separated. Religion should run through everything and take the whole of life for its field. Where we cannot carry it is no place for us. It is a shame that heathenism should be more penetrated by its religion than Christendom is.

2. *The family should be a church.*

Domestic religion. New Testament households. Abram a priest. The decay of family religion, worship, and instruction.

3. *The service to God should be more costly than to ourselves.*

Pitching a tent cheaper than building an altar. Give God the best. We build ourselves ceiled houses and the ark dwells in curtains. Pagans build elaborate temples, but their houses are hovels. Too many Christians do the opposite.

4. *Building for God lasts, for selves perishes.*

A tent is stricken, and no trace remains but embers. The stones of Jacob’s altar may be standing yet. The Parthenon of Athens remains: where are the hovels of the people? ‘He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’ Permanent results of transitory deeds.

The Importance Of A Choice

'And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hal; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt lake the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.'—GENESIS xiii. 1-13.

The main lesson of this section is the wisdom of seeking spiritual rather than temporal good. That is illustrated on both sides. Prosperity attends Abram and Lot while they think more of obeying God than of flocks and herds. Lot makes a mistake, as far as this world is concerned, when he chooses his place of abode for the sake of its material advantages. But the introductory verses (vv. 1-4) suggest a question, and seem to teach an important lesson. Was Abram right in so soon leaving the land to which God had led him, and going down to Egypt? Was that not taking the bit between his teeth? He had been commanded to go to Canaan; should he not have stopped there—famine or no famine—till the same authority commanded him to leave the land? If God had put him there, should he not have trusted God to keep him alive in famine? The narrative seems to imply that his going to Egypt was a failure of faith. It gives no hint of a divine voice leading him thither. We do not hear that he builded any altar beside his tent there, as he had done in the happier days of life by trust. His stay resulted in peril and in something very like lying, for which he had to bear the disgrace of being rebuked by an idolater, and having no word of excuse to offer. The great lesson of the whole section, and indeed of Abram's whole life, receives fresh illustration from the story thus understood, which preaches loudly that trust is safety and wellbeing, and that it is always sin and always folly to leave Canaan, where God has put us, even if there be a famine, and to go down into Egypt, even if its harvests be abundant.

But another lesson is also taught. After the interruption of the Egyptian journey, Abram had to begin all his Canaan life over again. Very emphatically the narrative puts it, that he went to 'the place where his tent had been at the beginning,' to the altar which he had made at the first. Yes! that is the only place for a man who has faltered and gone aside from the course of obedience. He must begin over again. The backsliding Christian has to resort anew to the place of the penitent, and to come to Christ, as he did at first for pardon. It is a solemn thought that years of obedience and heroisms of self-surrender, may be so annihilated by some act of self-seeking distrust that the whole career has, as it were, to be begun anew from

the very starting-point. It is a blessed thought that, however far and long we may have wandered, we can always return to the place where we were at the beginning, and there call on the name of the Lord.

Note how we are taught here the great truth for the Old Testament, that outward prosperity follows most surely those who do not seek for it. Abram's wealth has increased, and his companion, Lot, has shared in the prosperity. It is because he 'went with Abram' that he 'had flocks, and herds, and tents.' Of course, the connection between despising the world and possessing it is not thus close in New Testament times. But even now, one often sees that the men who *will* be rich fall into a pit of poverty, and that a heart set on higher things, which counts earthly advantages second and not first, wins a sufficiency of these most surely. Foxlike cunning, and wolf-like rapacity, and Devil-like selfishness, which make up a large portion of what the world calls 'great business capacity,' do not always secure the prize. But the real possession of earth and all its wealth depends to-day, as much as ever it did in Abram's times, on seeking 'first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.' Only when we are Christ's are all things ours. They are ours, not by the vulgar way of what the world calls ownership, but in proportion as we use them to the highest ends of helping us to grow in wisdom and Christ-likeness, in the measure in which we subordinate them to heavenly good, in the degree in which we employ them as means of serving Christ. We can see the Pleiades best by not looking directly at, but somewhat away from, them; and just as pleasure, if made the direct object of life, ceases to be pleasure, so the world's goods, if taken for our chief aim, cease to yield even the imperfect good which they can bestow.

But now we have to look at the two dim figures which the remainder of this story presents to us, and which shine there, in that far-off past, types and instances of the two great classes into which men are divided,—Abram, the man of faith; Lot, the man of sense.

Mark the conduct of the man of faith. Why should he, who has God's promise that all the land is his, squabble with his kinsman about pasture and wells? The herdsmen naturally would come to high words and blows, especially as the available land was diminished by the claims of the 'Canaanite and Perizzite.' But the direct effect of Abram's faith was to make him feel that the matter in dispute was too small to warrant a quarrel. A soul truly living in the contemplation of the future, and filled with God's promises, will never be eager to insist on its rights, or to stand on its dignity, and will take too accurate a measure of the worth of things temporal to get into a heat about them. The clash of conflicting interests, and the bad blood bred by them, seem infinitely small, when we are up on the height of communion with God. An acre or two more or less of grass land does not look all-important, when our vision of the city which hath foundations is clear. So an elevated calm and 'sweet reasonableness' will mark the man who truly lives by faith, and he will seek after the things that make for peace. Abram could fight, as Old Testament morality permitted, when occasion arose, as Lot found out to his advantage before long. But he would not strive about such trifles.

May we not venture to apply his words to churches and sects? They too, if they have faith strong and dominant, will not easily fall out with one another about intrusions on each other's territory, especially in the presence, as at this day, of the common foe. When the Canaanite and the Perizzite are in the land, and Unbelief in militant forms is arrayed against us, it is more than folly, it is sin, for brethren to be turning their weapons against each other. The common foe should make them stand shoulder to shoulder. Abram's faith led, too, to the noble generosity of his proposal. The elder and superior gives the younger and inferior the right of option, and is quite willing to take Lot's leavings. Right or left—it mattered not to him; God would be with him, whichever way he went; and the glorious Beyond, for which he lived, blazed too bright before his inward sight to let him be very solicitous where he was. 'I

have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' It does not matter much what accommodation we have on ship-board, when the voyage is so short. If our thoughts are stretching across the sea to the landing at home, and the welcome there, we shall not fight with our fellow-passengers about our cabins or places at the table. And notice what rest comes when faith thus dwindles the worth of the momentary arrangements here. The less of our energies are consumed in asserting ourselves, and scrambling for our rights, and cutting in before other people, so as to get the best places for ourselves, the more we shall have to spare for better things; and the more we live in the future, and leave God to order our ways, the more shall our souls be wrapped in perfect peace. Mark the conduct of the man of sense. We can fancy the two standing on the barren hills by Bethel, from one of which, as travellers tell us, there is precisely the view which Lot saw. He lifted up his greedy eyes, and there, at his feet, lay that strange Jordan valley with its almost tropical richness, its dark lines of foliage telling of abundant water, the palm-trees of Jericho perhaps, and the glittering cities. Up there among the hills there was little to tempt,—rocks and scanty herbage; down below, it was like the lost Eden, or the Egypt from which they had but lately come.

What need for hesitation? True, the men of the plain were 'wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly,' as the chapter says with grim emphasis. But Lot evidently never thought about that. He knew it, though, and ought to have thought about it. It was his sin that he was guided in his choice only by considerations of temporal advantage. Put his action into words, and it says, 'Grass for my sheep is more to me than fellowship with God, and a good conscience.' No doubt he would have had salves enough. 'I do not need to become like them, though I live among them.' 'A man must look after his own interests.' 'I can serve God down there as well as up here.' Perhaps he even thought that he might be a missionary among these sinners. But at bottom he did not seek first the kingdom of God, but the other things.

We have seldom the choice put before us so dramatically and sharply; but it is as really presented to each. There is the shameless cynicism of the men who avowedly only ask the question, 'Will it pay?' But there are subtler forms which affect us all. It is the standing temptation of Englishmen to apply a money standard to everything, to adopt courses of action of which the only recommendation is that they promote getting on in the world. Men who call themselves Christians select schools for their children, or professions for their boys, or marriages for their daughters, down in Sodom, because it will give them a lift in life which they would not get up in the starved pastures at Bethel, with nobody but Abram and his like to associate with. If the earnestness with which men pursue an end is to be taken as any measure of its importance in their eyes, it certainly does not look much as if modern average Christians did believe that it was of more moment to be united to God, and to be growing like Him, than to secure a good large share of earthly possessions. Tried by the test of conduct, their faith in getting on is a great deal deeper than their faith in getting up. But if our religion does not make us put the world beneath our feet, and count all things but loss that we may win Christ, we had better ask ourselves whether our religion is any better than Lot's, which was second-hand, and was much more imitation of Abram than obedience to God.

Lot teaches us that material good may tempt and conquer, even after it has once been overcome. His early life had been heroic; in his young enthusiasm, he had thrown in his portion with Abram in his great venture. He had not been thinking of his flocks when he left Haran. Probably, as I have just said, he was a good deal galvanised into imitation; but still, he had chosen the better part. But now he has tired of a pilgrim's life. There are men who cut down the thorns, and in whom the seed is sown; but thorns are tenacious of life, and quick growing, and so they spread over the field and choke the seed. It is easier to take some one bold step than to keep true through life to its spirit. Youth contemns, but too often middle-age worships, worldly success. The world tightens its grasp as we grow older, and Lot and Demas

teach us that it is hard to keep for a lifetime on the heights. Faith, strong and ever renewed by communion, can do it; nothing else can.

Lot's history teaches what comes of setting the world first, and God's kingdom second. For one thing, the association with it is sure to get closer. Lot began with choosing the plain; then he crept a little nearer, and pitched his tent 'towards' Sodom; next time we hear of him, he is living in the city, and mixed up inextricably with its people. The first false step leads on to connections unforeseen, from which the man would have shrunk in horror, if he had been told that he would make them. Once on the incline, time and gravity will settle how far down we go. We shall see, in subsequent sections, how far Lot's own moral character suffered from his choice. But we may so far anticipate the future narrative as to point out that it affords a plain instance of the great truth that the sure way to lose the world as well as our own souls, is to make it our first object. He would have been safe if he had stopped up among the hills. The shadowy Eastern kings who swooped down on the plain would never have ventured up there. But when we choose the world for our portion, we lay ourselves open to the full weight of all the blows which change and fortune can inflict, and come voluntarily down from an impregnable fastness to the undefended open.

Nor is this all; but at the last, when the fiery rain bursts on the doomed city, Lot has to leave all the wealth for which he has sacrificed conscience and peace, and escapes with bare life; he suffers loss even if he himself is 'saved as dragged through the fire.' The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. The riches which wax not old, and need not to be left when we leave all things besides, are surely the treasures which the calmest reason dictates should be our chief aim. God is the true portion of the soul; if we have Him, we have all. So, let us seek Him first, and, with Him, all else is ours.

Abram The Hebrew

'And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew.' GENESIS xiv. 13.

This is a singular designation of Abram as 'The Hebrew.' Probably we have in its use here a trace of the customary epithet which he bore among the inhabitants of Canaan, and perhaps the presence of the name in this narrative may indicate the influence of some older account, traditional or written, which owed its authorship to some of them. At all events, this is the first appearance of the name in Scripture. As we all know, it has become that of the nation, but a Jew did not call himself a 'Hebrew' except in intercourse with foreigners. As in many other cases, the national name used by other nations was not that by which the people called themselves. Here, obviously, it is not a national name, for the very good reason that there was no nation then. It is a personal epithet, or, in plain English, a nickname, and it means, probably, as the ancient Greek translation of Genesis gives it, neither more nor less than 'The man from the other side,' the man that had come across the water. Just as a mediaeval prince bore the *sobriquet* Outremere-the 'man from beyond the sea'—so Abram, to the aboriginal, or, at least, long-settled, inhabitants of the country, was known simply as the foreigner, the 'man from the other side' (of the Jordan, or more probably of the great river Euphrates), the man from across the water.

Now that name may suggest, with a permissible, and, I hope, not misleading play of fancy, just two things, which I seek now to press upon our hearts and consciences. The one is as to how men become Christians, and the other is as to how they look to other people when they are.

1. Men become Christians by a great emigration.

'Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy country, and from thy kindred,' was the command to Abram. And he became the heir to God's promises and the father of the faithful, because he did not hesitate a moment to make the plunge and to leave behind him all his past, his associations, his loves, much of his possessions, and, in a very profound sense, his old self, and put a great impassable gulf between him and them all.

Now I am not going to say anything so narrow or foolish as that the Christian life must always begin with a conscious and sudden change; but this I am quite sure of, that in the vast majority of cases of thoroughly and out-and-out religious men, there must be a conscious change, whether it has been diffused through months or years, or concentrated in one burning moment. There has been a beginning; whether it has been like the dawn, or whether it has been like the kindling of a candle, the beginning of the flashing of the divine light into the heart; and the men that are most really under the influence of religious truth can, as a rule, looking back upon their past experience, see that it divides itself into two halves, separated from each other by a profound gulf—the time on the other side, and that on this side, of the great river. We must take heed lest by insisting on any one way of entrance into the kingdom we seem to narrow God's mercy, or sadden true hearts, or make the method of approach a test of the fact of entrance. God's city has more than twelve gates; they open to all the thirty-two points of the compass, yet there is, in the religious experience of the truest saints, always something analogous to this change. And what I desire to press upon you is, that unless you are only religious people after the popular superficial fashion of the day, there will be something like it in your lives.

There will be a change in a man's deepest self, so that he will be a 'new creature,' with new tastes, new motives stirring to action, new desires pressing for satisfaction, new loves sweetly filling his heart, new insight into the meanings and true good of life and time guiding his conduct, new aversions withdrawing him from old delights which have become hateful now, new hopes pluming their growing wings, and new powers bearing him along a new road. There will be a change in his relations to God and to God's will. God in Christ will have become his centre, instead of self, which was so before. He lives in a new world, being himself a new man.

Our Lord uses this very illustration when He says, 'He that heareth My Word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.' That is a great migration, is it not, from the condition of a corpse to that of a living man? Paul, too, gives the same idea with a somewhat different turn of the illustration, when he gives 'thanks to the Father who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of,'—not, as we might expect to complete the antithesis, 'the light,' but—the 'kingdom of the Son of His love,' which is the same thing as the light. The illustration is probably drawn from the practice of the ancient conquering monarchs, who, when they subjugated a country, were wont to lead away captive long files of its inhabitants as compulsory colonists, and set them down in another land. Thus the conquering Christ comes, and those whom He conquers by His love, He shifts by a great emigration out of the dominion of that darkness which is at once tyranny and anarchy, and leads them into the happy kingdom of the light.

Thus, then, all Christian men become such, because they turn their backs upon their old selves, and crucify their affections and lusts; and paste down the leaf, as it were, on which their blotted past is writ, and turn over a new and a fairer one. And my question to you, dear brethren, is, Are you men from the other side, who were not born where you live now, and who have passed out of the native Chaldea into the foreign—and yet to the new self home—land of union with God?

2. This designation may be taken as teaching that a Christian should be known as a foreigner, a man from across the water.

Everybody in Canaan that knew Abram at all knew him as not one of themselves. The Hebrew was the name he went by, because his unlikeness to the others was the most conspicuous thing about him, even to the shallowest eye. Abram found himself, when he had migrated into Canaan, in no barbarous country, but plunged at once into the midst of an organised and compact civilisation, that walled its cities, and had the comforts and conveniences and regularities of a settled order; and in the midst of it all, what did he do? He elected to live in a tent. 'He dwelt in tabernacles, as the Epistle to the Hebrews comments upon his history, 'because he looked for a city.' The more his expectations were fixed upon a permanent abode, the more transitory did he make his abode here. If there had been no other city to fill his eyes, he would have gone and lived in some of those that were in the land. If there had been no other order to which he felt himself to belong, he would have had no objection to cast in his lot with the order and the people with whom he lived on friendly terms. But although he bought and sold with them, and fought for them and by their sides, and acquired from them land in which to bury his dead, he was not one of them, but said, 'No! I am not going into your city. I stay in my tent under this terebinth tree; for I am here as a stranger and a sojourner.' No doubt there were differences of language, dress, and a hundred other little things which helped the impression made on the men of the land by this strange visitor who lived in amity but in separation, and they are all crystallised in the name which the popular voice gave him, 'The man from the other side.'

That is the impression which Christian people ought to make in the world. They should be recognised, by even unobservant eyes who know nothing of the inner secret of their lives, as plainly belonging to another order. If we seek to keep fresh in our own minds the consciousness that we do so, it will make itself manifest in all our bearing and actions. So that exhortation to cultivate the continual sense that our true city—the mother city of our hearts and hopes—is in heaven is ever to be reiterated, and as constantly obeyed, as the necessary condition of a life worthy of our true affinities and of our glorious hopes.

Nor less needful is the other exhortation—live by the laws of your own land, not by those of the foreign country where you are for a time. If you do that thoroughly, you will not need to say, 'I am from another country.' Your conduct will say it for you. An English ship is a bit of England, in whatever latitude it may be, and however far beyond the three-mile limit of the King's authority upon the seas it may float. And so, wherever there is a Christian man, there is a bit of God's kingdom, and over that little speck in the midst of the ocean of the world the flag with the Cross on it should fly, and the laws of the Christ should be the only laws that have currency. If it could be said of us as Haman said to his king about the Jews, that we were a people with laws 'diverse from those of all people,' we should be doing more than, alas! most of us do, to honour Him whom we profess to serve. Follow Christ, and people will be quick enough to say of you 'The man from the other side,' 'He does not belong to our city.' There is no need for ostentation, nor for saying, 'Come and see my zeal for the Lord,' nor for blowing trumpets before us at street corners or elsewhere. The less of all that the better. The more we try to do the common things done by the folk round us, but from another motive, the more powerful will be our witness for our Master.

For instance, when John Knox was in the French galleys, he was fastened to the same oar with some criminal, perhaps a murderer. The two men sat on the same bench, did the same work, tugged at the same heavy sweep, were fed with the same food, suffered the same sorrows. Do you think there was any doubt as to the infinite gulf between them? We may be working side by side, at the very same tasks, and under similar circumstances, with men that have no share in our faith, and no sympathy with our hopes and aspirations, and yet, though doing the same thing, it will *not* be the same thing. And if we keep Christ before us, and follow His steps who has left us an example, depend upon it people will very soon find out that we are men 'from across the water.'

Notice, further, how this dissimilarity and obvious aloofness from the order of things in which we dwell is still perfectly compatible with all sorts of helpful associations. The context shows us that. There had come a flood of invasion, under kings with strange and barbarous names, from the far East. They had swept down upon the fertile valley of Siddim, and there had inflicted devastation. Amongst the captives had been Lot, Abram's relative, and all his goods had been taken. One fugitive, as it appears, had escaped, and the first thing he did was to go straight to 'the man from the other side,' and tell him about it, as if sure of sympathy and help. No doubt the relationship between Abram and Lot was the main reason why the panting survivor made his way to the hills where Abram's tent was pitched, but there was also confidence in his willingness to help the Sodomites who had lost their goods. So it was not to the sons of Heth in Mamre that the fugitive turned in his extremity, but he 'told Abram the Hebrew.'

I need not narrate over again the familiar story of how, for once in his peaceful life, the 'friend of God' girds on his sword and develops military instincts in his prompt and well-planned pursuit, which show that if he did not try to conquer some part of the land which he knew to be his by the will of God, it was not for want of ability, but because he 'believed God,' and could wait. We all know how he armed his slaves, and made a swift march to the

northern extremity of the land, and then, by a nocturnal surprise, came down upon the marauders and scattered them like chaff, before his onset, and recovered Lot and all the spoil.

Let us learn that, if Christian men will live well apart from the world, they will be able to sympathise with and help the world; and that our religion should fit us for the prompt and heroic undertaking, as it certainly does for the successful accomplishment, of all deeds of brotherly kindness and sympathy, bringing help and solace to the weak and the wearied, liberty to the captives, and hope to the despairing.

I do not believe that Christian men have any business to draw swords now. Abram is in that respect the Old Testament type of a God-fearing hero, with the actual sword in his hands. The New Testament type of a Christian warrior without a sword is not one jot less, but more, heroic. The form of sympathy, help, and 'public spirit' which the 'man from the other side' displayed is worse than an anachronism now in the light of Christ's law. It is a contradiction. But the spirit which breathed through Abram's conduct should be ours. We are bound to 'seek the peace of the city' where we dwell as strangers and pilgrims, avoiding no duty of sympathy and help, but by prompt, heroic, self-forgetting service to all the needy, sorrowful, and oppressed, building up such characters for ourselves that fugitives and desperate men shall instinctively turn to men from the other side for that help which, they know full well, the men of the country are too selfish or cowardly to give.

May I venture to suggest yet another and very different application of this name? To the aboriginal inhabitants of heaven, the angels that kept their first estate, redeemed men are possessors of a unique experience; and are the 'men from the other side.' They who entered on their pilgrimage through the Red Sea of conversion, pass out of it through the Jordan of death. They who become Christ's, by the great change of yielding their hearts to Him, and who live here as pilgrims and sojourners, pass dryshod through the stream into His presence. And there they who have always dwelt in the sunny highlands of the true Canaan, gather round them, and call them, not unenvying, perhaps, their experience, 'The men that have crossed.' The 'Hebrews of the Hebrews' in the heavens are those who have known what it is to be pilgrims and sojourners, and to whom the promise has been fulfilled in the last hour of their journey, 'When thou passest through the river, I will be with thee.' *They* teach the angels a new song who sing, 'Thou hast led us through fire and through water, and brought us into a wealthy place.'

God's Covenant With Abram

'And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness. And He said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And He said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'—GENESIS xv. 5-18.

1. Abram had exposed himself to dangerous reprisals by his victory over the confederate Eastern raiders. In the reaction following the excitement of battle, dread and despondency seem to have shadowed his soul. Therefore the assurance with which this chapter opens came to him. It was new, and came in a new form. He is cast into a state of spiritual ecstasy, and a mighty 'word' sounds, audible to his inward ear. The form which it takes—'I am thy shield'—suggests the thought that God shapes His revelation according to the moment's need. The unwarlike Abram might well dread the return of the marauders in force, to avenge their defeat. Therefore God speaks to his fears and present want. Just as to Jacob the angels appeared as a heavenly camp guarding his undefended tents and helpless women; so, here and always, God is to us what we most need at the moment, whether it be comfort, or wisdom, or guidance, or strength. The manna tasted to each man, as the rabbis say, what he most desired. God's gifts take the shape of man's necessity.

Abram had just exercised singular generosity in absolutely refusing to enrich himself from the spoil. God reveals Himself as 'his exceeding great reward.' He gives Himself as recompense for all sacrifices. Whatever is given up at His bidding, 'the Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' Not outward things, nor even an outward heaven, is the guerdon of the soul; but a larger possession of Him who alone fills the heart, and fills the heart alone. Other riches may be counted, but this is 'exceeding great,' passing comprehension, and ever unexhausted, and having something over after all experience. Both these aspects of God's preciousness are true for earth; but we need a shield only while exposed to attack. In the land of peace, He is only our reward.

2. Mark the triumphant faith which wings to meet the divine promise. The first effect of that great assurance is to deepen Abram's consciousness of the strange contradiction to it apparently given by his childlessness. It is not distrust that answers the promise with a question, but it is eagerness to accept the assurance and ingenuous utterance of difficulties in the hope of their removal. God is too wise a father not to know the difference between the

tones of confidence and unbelief, however alike they may sound; and He is too patient to be angry if we cannot take in all His promise at once. He breaks it into bits not too large for our lips, as He does here. The frequent reiterations of the same promises in Abram's life are not vain. They are a specimen of the unwearied repetition of our lessons, 'Here a little, there a little,' which our teacher gives His slow scholars. So, once more, Abram gets the promise of posterity in still more glorious form. Before, it was likened to the dust of the earth; now it is as the innumerable stars shining in the clear Eastern heaven. As he gazes up into the solemn depths, the immensity and peace of the steadfast sky seems to help him to rise above the narrow limits and changefulness of earth, and a great trust floods his soul. Abram had lived by faith ever since he left Haran; but the historian, usually so silent about the thoughts of his characters, breaks through his usual manner of narrative to insert the all-important words which mark an epoch in revelation, and are, in some aspects, the most significant in the Old Testament. Abram 'believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.'

Observe the teaching as to the nature and object of faith in that first clause. The word rendered 'believed' literally means to steady oneself by leaning on something. So it gives in a vivid picture more instructive than many a long treatise what faith is, and what it does for us. As a man leans his trembling hand on a staff, so we lay our weak and changeful selves on God's strength; and as the most mutable thing is steadied by being fastened to a fixed point, so we, though in ourselves light as thistledown, may be steadfast as rock, if we are bound to the rock of ages by the living band of faith. The metaphor makes it plain that faith cannot be merely an intellectual act of assent, but must include a moral act, that of confidence. Belief as credence is mainly an affair of the head, but belief as trust is an act of the will and the affections.

The object of faith is set in sunlight clearness by these words,—the first in which Scripture speaks of faith. Abram leaned on 'the Lord.' It was not the promise, but the promiser, that was truly the object of Abram's trust. He believed the former, because he trusted Him who made it. Many confusions in Christian teaching would have been avoided if it had been always seen that faith grasps a person, not a doctrine, and that even when the person is revealed by doctrine, it is him, and not only it, which faith lays hold of. Whether God speaks promises, teachings of truth, or commandments, faith accepts them, because it trusts Him. Christ is revealed to us for our faith by the doctrinal statements of the New Testament. But we must grasp Himself, as so revealed, if we are to have faith which saves the soul. This same thought of the true object of faith as personal helps us to understand the substantial identity of faith in all ages and stages of revelation, however different the substance of the creeds. Abram knew very little of God, as compared with our knowledge. But it was the same God whom Abram trusted, and whom we trust as made known in His Son. Hence we can stretch out our hands across the ages, and clasp his as partaker of 'like precious faith.' We walk in the light of the same sun,—he in its morning beams, we in its noonday glory. There has never been but one road to God, and that is the road which Abram trod, when 'he believed in the Lord.'

3. Mark the full-orbed gospel truth as to the righteousness of faith which is embedded in this record of early revelation, 'He counted it to him for righteousness.' A geologist would be astonished if he came on remains in some of the primary strata which indicated the existence, in these remote epochs, of species supposed to be of much more recent date. So here we are startled at finding the peculiarly New Testament teaching away back in this dim distance. No wonder that Paul fastened on this verse, which so remarkably breaks the flow of the narrative, as proof that his great principle of justification by faith was really the one only law by which, in all ages, men had found acceptance with God. Long before law or circumcision, faith had been counted for righteousness. The whole Mosaic system was a parenthesis; and even in it,

whoever had been accepted had been so because of his trust, not because of his works. The whole of the subsequent divine dealings with Israel rested on this act of faith, and on the relation to God into which, through it, Abram entered. He was not a perfectly righteous man, as some passages of his life show; but he rose here to the height of loving and yearning trust in God, and God took that trust in lieu of perfect conformity to His will. He treated and regarded him as righteous, as is proved by the covenant which follows. The gospel takes up this principle, gives us a fuller revelation, presents the perfect righteousness of Christ as capable of becoming ours by faith, and so unveils the ground on which Abram and the latest generations are equally 'accepted in the beloved.' This reckoning of righteousness to the unrighteous, on condition of their faith, is not because of any merit in faith. It does not come about in reward of, but by means of, their faith, which is nothing in itself, but is the channel only of the blessing. Nor is it a mere arbitrary act of God's, or an unreal imputing of what is not. But faith unites with Christ; and 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' so as that 'in Him we have redemption.' His righteousness becomes ours. Faith grafts us into the living Vine, and we are no longer regarded in our poor sinful individual personality, but as members of Christ. Faith builds us into the rock; but He is a living Stone, and we are living stones, and the life of the foundation rises up through all the courses of the great temple. Faith unites sinful men to God in Christ; therefore it makes them partakers of the 'blessedness of the man, … to whom the Lord will not impute sin,' and of the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord reckons his faith for righteousness. That same faith which thus clothes us with the white robe of Christ's righteousness, in lieu of our own tattered raiment, also is the condition of our becoming righteous by the actual working out in our character of all things lovely and of good report. It opens the heart to the entrance of that divine Christ, who is first made *for* us, and then, by daily appropriation of the law of the spirit of life, is made *in* us, 'righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.' May all who read these lines 'be found in Him,' having 'that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith!'

4. Consider the covenant which is the consequence of Abram's faith, and the proof of his acceptance.

It is important to observe that the whole remainder of this chapter is regarded by the writer as the result of Abram's believing God. The way in which verse 7 and the rest are bolted on, as it were, to verse 6, clearly shows this. The nearer lesson from this fact is, that all the Old Testament revelation from this point onward rests on the foundation of faith. The further lesson, for all times, is that faith is ever rewarded by more intimate and loving manifestations of God's friendship, and by fuller disclosure of His purposes. The covenant is not only God's binding Himself anew by solemn acts to fulfil His promises already made, but it is His entering into far sweeter and nearer alliance with Abram than even He had hitherto had. That name, 'the friend of God,' by which he is still known over all the Mohammedan world, contains the very essence of the covenant. In old days men were wont to conclude a bond of closest amity by cutting their flesh and interchanging the flowing blood. Henceforth they had, as it were, one life. We have not here the shedding of Abram's blood, as in the covenant of circumcision. Still, the slain animals represent the parties to the covenant, and the notion of a resulting unity of the closest order as between God and Abram is the very heart of the whole incident.

The particulars as to the rite by which the covenant was established are profoundly illuminative. The significant division of the animals into two shows that they were regarded as representing the contracting parties, and the passing between them symbolised the taking up of the obligations of the covenant. This strange rite, which was widely spread, derives importance from the use of it probably made in Hebrews ix 16, 17. The new covenant, bringing still closer friendship and higher blessings, is sealed by the blood of Christ. He

represents both God and man. In His death, may we not say that the manhood and the Godhead are parted, and we, standing as it were between them, encompassed by that awful sacrifice, and enclosed in its mysterious depths, enter into covenant with God, and become His friends?

We need not to dwell upon the detailed promises, of which the covenant was the seal. They are simply the fuller expansion of those already made, but now confirmed by more solemn guarantees. The new relation of familiar friendship, established by the covenant itself, is the main thing. It was fitting that God's friend should be in the secret of His purposes. 'The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth,' but the friend does. And so we have here the assurance that faith will pierce to the discernment of much of the mind of God, which is hid from sense and the wisdom of this world. If we would know, we must believe. We may be 'men of God's counsel,' and see deeply into the realities of the present, and far ahead into what will then become the certainties of the future, if only we live by faith in the secret place of the Most High, and, like John, lean so close on the Master's bosom that we can hear His lowest whisper.

Notice, too, the lessons of the smoking furnace and the blazing torch. They are like the pillar of fire and cloud. Darkness and light; a heart of fire and a wrapping of darkness,—these are not symbols of Israel and its checkered fate, as Dean Stanley thinks, but of the divine presence: they proclaim the double aspect of all divine manifestations, the double element in the divine nature. He can never be completely known; He is never completely hid. Ever does the lamp flame; ever around it the smoke wreathes. In all His self-revelation is 'the hiding of His power'; after all revelation He dwelleth 'in the thick darkness.' Only the smoke is itself fire, but not illumined to our vision. The darkness is light inaccessible. Much that was 'smoke' to Abram has caught fire, and is 'light' to us. But these two elements will ever remain; and throughout eternity God will be unknown, and yet well known, pouring Himself in ever-growing radiance on our eyes, and yet 'the King invisible.'

Nor is this all the teaching of the symbol. It speaks of that twofold aspect of the divine nature, by which to hearts that love He is gladsome light, and to unloving ones He is threatening darkness. As to the Israelites the pillar was light, and to the Egyptians darkness and terror; so the same God is joy to some, and dread to others. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell.' Light itself can become the source of pain the most exquisite, if the eye is diseased. God Himself cannot but be a torment to men who love darkness rather than light. Love and wrath, life and death, a God who pities and who cannot but judge, are solemnly proclaimed by that ancient symbol, and are plainly declared to us in the perfect revelation in Christ Jesus.

Observe, too, the manner of the ratification of the covenant. The symbol of the Divine presence passed between the pieces. No mention is made of Abram's doing so. Why this one-sided covenant? Because God's gracious dealings with men are one-sided. He seeks no oaths from us; He does not exchange blessings for our gifts. His covenant is the free result of His unmotived love, and is ratified by a solemn sacrifice, which we do not offer. We have nothing to do but to take what He gives. All ideas of barter and bargain are far from Him. Our part is but to embrace His covenant, which is complete and ratified whether we embrace it or not. What a wonderful thought that is of a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God! We do not hear so much of it as our fathers did. The more is the pity. It means that God has, as it were, buoyed out across the boundless ocean of His possible modes of action a plain course, which He binds Himself to keep; that He has frankly let us into the very secret of His doings; that He has stooped to use human forms of assurance to make it easier to trust Him; that He has confirmed His promise by a mighty sacrifice. Therefore we may enter into closest friendship with Him, and take for our own the exultant swan-song of Abram's royal son:

‘Although my house be not so with God [although my life be stained, and my righteousness unfit to be offered to His pure eyes]; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.’

The Word That Scatters Fear

'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' GENESIS XV. 1.

I

Abram was now apparently about eighty-five years old. He had been fourteen years in Palestine, and had, for the only time in his life, quite recently been driven to have recourse to arms against a formidable league of northern kings, whom, after a swift forced march from the extreme south to the extreme north of the land, he had defeated. He might well fear attack from their overwhelmingly superior forces. So this vision, like all God's words, fits closely to moments needs, but is also for all time and all men.

1. The call to conquer fear.

Fear not.—(*a*) There is abundant reason for fear in facts of life. There are so many certain evils, and so many possible evils, that any man who is not a feather-brained fool must sometimes quail.

(*b*) Reasons for fear in our relations to divine law.

(*c*) The only rational way of conquering fears is by showing them to be unfounded. It is waste of breath to say, Don't be afraid, and to do nothing to remove the occasions of fear. It is childish to try to get rid of fears by shutting the eyes tight and refusing to look formidable facts in the face.

(*d*) The revelation of God is the true antidote to fear.

(*e*) 'Fear not' is the characteristic word of divine revelation. It is of frequent occurrence from Abraham till John in Patmos.

2. The ground of the call in the Revelation of God as Shield.

(*a*) As to outward evils, His protection assures us, not of absolute exemption, but of His entire control of them, so that men and circumstances are His instruments, and His will only is powerful. Chedorlaomer and all the allied kings are nothing; 'a noise,' as the prophet said of a later conqueror. All the bitterness and terror is taken out of evil. If any fiery dart pass through the shield, all its poison is wiped off in passage. So there remains no reason for fear, since all things work together for good. Behind that shield we are safe as diver in his bell, though seas rave and sea-monsters swim around.

(*b*) As to inward evils, our Shield assures us of absolute exemption. 'Shield of faith.' Faith is shield because it takes hold of God's strength.

3. The ground of the call in the Revelation of God as Reward. Abraham had refused all share in booty, a large sacrifice, and here he is promised, A Reward in God, *i.e.* He gives Himself in recompense for all sacrifices in path of duty. 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.' This promise opens out to general truth that God Himself is the true reward of a devout life. There are many recompenses for all sacrifices for God, some of them outward and material, some of them inward and spiritual, but the reward which surpasses all others is that by such sacrifices we attain to greater capacity for God, and therefore possess more of Him. This is the only Reward worth thinking of—God only satisfies the soul. With Him we are rich; without Him poor; 'exceeding great'—'riches in glory,' transcending all measure. The revelations of God as Shield and Reward are both given in reference to the present life, but the former applies only to earth, where 'without are fighters, within are fears'; while 'the

latter is mainly true for heaven, where those who have fought, having God for their Shield, will possess Him for their Reward, in a measure and manner which will make all earthly experiences seem poor. Here the ‘heirs of God’ get subsistence money, which is a small instalment of their inheritance; there they enter into possession of it all.

II

Many years have passed since Abram was called to go forth from his father’s house, assured that God would make of him a great nation. They had been years of growing power. He has been dwelling at Mamre, as a prince among the people of the land, a power. There sweeps down on Southern Palestine the earliest of those invasions from the vast plains of the North which afterwards for generations were the standing dread of Abram’s descendants. Like the storm pillars in their own deserts, are these wild marauders with the wild names that never appear again in the history. Down on the rich valleys and peaceful pasture lands they swoop for booty, not for conquest. Like some sea-bird, they snatch their prey and away. They carry with them among the long train of captives Abram’s ungenerous brother-in-law, Lot. Then the friend of God, the father of the faithful, musters his men, like an Arab sheikh as he was, and swiftly follows the track of the marauders over the hills of Samaria, and across the plain of Jezreel. The night falls, and down he swoops upon them and scatters them. Coming back he had interviews with the King of Sodom, when he refuses to take any of the spoil, and with Melchizedek. Abram is back at Mamre. How natural that fear and depression should seize him: the reaction from high excitement; the dread that from the swarming East vengeance would come for his success in that night surprise; the thought that if it did, he was a wandering stranger in a strange land and could not count on allies. Then there would come, perhaps, the remembrance of how long God had delayed the very beginnings of the fulfilment, ‘Seeing I go childless.’

To this mood of mind the divine vision is addressed. ‘Fear not—I am thy shield’ whatever force comes against thee, ‘and thine exceeding great reward,’—perhaps in reference to his refusal to take anything from the spoil. But God says this to us all. In these antique words the very loftiest and purest principles of spiritual religion are set forth.

He that loves and trusts God possesses God.

He that possesses God has enough for earth.

He that possesses God has enough for heaven.

1. It is possible for a man to have God for his. ‘I am thy Reward,’—not merely Rewarder, but Reward.

How can one spiritual Being belong to another?—plainly, By mutual love.

The Gospel assures us of God’s love, and makes it possible for ours to be fixed on Him.

Faith gives us God for ours.

The highest view of the blessings of the Gospel is that God Himself becomes our reward.

How sad the insanity of men appears, in the ordinary aims of their life, its rewards and its objects of desire! How they chase after variety!

How much loftier and truer a conception of the blessing of religion this is than notions of mere escape and the like!

2. The possession of God is enough for earth.

God the all-sufficient object for our spirits, His love, the communication of Himself, the sense of His presence, the depths of His infinite character, of His wondrous ways, of His

revealed Truth as an object for thought: of His authoritative will as imperative for will and conscience: aspiration towards Him.

God the Eternal Object.

To find Him in everything, and everything in Him, is to be at rest.

This is what He promises—

Not a life of outward success and ease—much nobler than if He did.

Take Abram's as a type.

In war He will be our Defence.

In absence of other joys He will be Enough.

Sphered and included in Him is all sweetness. He sustains all relations, and does for us what these other joys and goods partially do.

The possession of His love should put away all fear, since having Him we are not at the mercy of externals.

What, then, is Life as men ordinarily make it?—what a blunder!

3. To possess God is enough for heaven.

Such a relationship is the great proof of immortality.

Christ and Sadducees.

The true glory of heaven is in fuller possession of God: no doubt other things, but these subsidiary.

The Reward is God.

The idea of recompense ample and full for all sorrow.

More than adequate wages for all work.

That final reward will show how wise the wanderer was, who left his father's house and 'looked for a city.' God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Christ comes to us—offers Himself.

Think of how rich with Him, and oh, think of how poor without Him!

Which will you have on earth?

Which will you have in another world?

Faith And Righteousness

‘And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.’ GENESIS XV. 6.

It is remarkable to find this anticipation of New Testament teaching so far back. It is like finding one full-blown flower in a garden where all else is but swelling into bud. No wonder that Paul fastened on it to prove that justification by faith was older than Moses, than law or circumcision, that his teaching was the real original, and that faith lay at the foundation of the Old Testament religion.

1. The Nature of Faith.—The metaphor in the Hebrew word is that of a man leaning all his weight on some strong stay. Surely that metaphor says more than many definitions. It teaches that the essence of faith is absolute reliance, and that unites us with Him on whom we rely. Its result will be steadfastness. We are weak, mobile, apt to be driven hither and thither, but light things lashed to fixed things become fixed. So ‘reeds shaken with wind’ are changed into iron pillars.

2. The Object of Faith.—’Lord.’ It is a Person, not the promise but the Promiser. Of course, reliance on the Person results in acceptance of His word, and here it is God’s word as to the future. Our faith has to do with the future, but also with the past. Its object is Christ, the historic Christ, the living Christ, the Christ who will come again. How clear the nature of faith becomes when its object is clear! It cannot be mere assent, but trust. How clear becomes its identity in all ages! The creeds may be different in completeness, but the object of faith is the same, and the emotion is the same.

3. The effect of Faith.—Righteous is conformity to the will of God. Abram was not righteous, but he yielded himself to God and trusted Him, and God accepted that as the equivalent of righteousness. The acceptance was shown by the Covenant, and by the fulfilment of the promises.

So here is the great truth that faith is accepted for righteous. It is rightly regarded and treated as righteous, by the estimate of God, who estimates things as they really are.
It *is* righteousness, for—

(*a*) Faith is itself a supreme act of righteousness, as being accordant with God’s supreme desire for man.

(*b*) Faith unites with Christ the righteous.

(*c*) Faith will blossom out into all righteousness.

Waiting Faith Rewarded And Strengthened By New Revelations

'And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee In their generations.' GENESIS xvii. 1-9.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He was ninety-nine when God appeared to him, as recorded in this chapter. There had been three divine communications in these twenty-five years—one at Bethel on entering the land, one after the hiving off of Lot, and one after the battle with the Eastern kings. The last-named vision had taken place before Ishmael's birth, and therefore more than thirteen years prior to the date of the lesson.

We are apt to think of Abraham's life as being crowded with supernatural revelations. We forget the foreshortening necessary in so brief a sketch of so long a career, which brings distant points close together. Revelations were really but thinly sown in Abram's life. For something over thirteen years he had been left to walk by faith, and, no doubt, had felt the pressure of things seen, silently pushing the unseen out of his life.

Especially would this be the case as Ishmael grew up, and his father's heart began to cling to him. The promise was beginning to grow dimmer, as years passed without the birth of the promised heir. As verse 18 of this chapter shows, Abram's thoughts were turning to Ishmael as a possible substitute. His wavering confidence was steadied and quickened by this new revelation. We, too, are often tempted to think that, in the highest matters, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' and to wish that God would be content with our Ishmaels, which satisfy us, and would not withdraw us from possessed good, to make us live by hope of good unseen. We need to reflect on this vision when we are thus tempted.

1. Note the revelation of God's character, and of our consequent duty, which preceded the repetition of the covenant. 'I am the Almighty God.' The aspect of the divine nature, made prominent in each revelation of Himself, stands in close connection with the circumstances or mental state of the recipient. So when God appeared to Abram after the slaughter of the kings, He revealed Himself as 'thy Shield' with reference to the danger of renewed attack from the formidable powers which He had bearded and beaten. In the present case the stress is laid on God's omnipotence, which points to doubts whispering in Abram's heart, by reason of God's delay in fulfilling His word, and of his own advancing years and failing strength. Paul brings out the meaning of the revelation when he glorifies the faith which it kindled anew in Abram, 'being fully assured that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform' (Rom. iv. 21). Whenever our 'faith has fallen asleep' and we are ready to let go our hold of God's ideal and settle down on the low levels of the actual, or to be somewhat

ashamed of our aspirations after what seems so slow of realisation, or to elevate prudent calculations of probability above the daring enthusiasms of Christian hope, the ancient word, that breathed itself into Abram's hushed heart, should speak new vigour into ours. 'I am the Almighty God—take My power into all thy calculations, and reckon certainties with it for the chief factor. The one impossibility is that any word of Mine should fail. The one imprudence is to doubt My word.'

What follows in regard to our duty from that revelation? 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Enoch walked *with* God; that is, his whole active life was passed in communion with Him. The idea conveyed by 'walking *before* God' is not precisely the same. It is rather that of an active life, spent in continual consciousness of being 'naked and opened before the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account.' That thrilling consciousness will not paralyse nor terrify, if we feel that we are not only 'ever in the great Task-Master's eye,' but that God's omniscience is all-knowing love, and is brought closer to our hearts and clothed in gracious tenderness in Christ whose 'eyes were as a flame of fire,' but whose love is more ardent still, who knows us altogether, and pities and loves as perfectly as He knows.

What sort of life will spring from the double realisation of God's almightiness, and of our being ever before Him? 'Be thou perfect.' Nothing short of immaculate conformity with His will can satisfy His gaze. His desire for us should be our aim and desire for ourselves. The standard of aspiration and effort cannot be lowered to meet weakness. This is nobility of life—to aim at the unattainable, and to be ever approximating towards our aim. It is more blessed to be smitten with the longing to win the unwon than to stagnate in ignoble contentment with partial attainments. Better to climb, with faces turned upwards to the inaccessible peak, than to lie at ease in the fat valleys! It is the salt of life to have our aims set fixedly towards ideal perfection, and to say, 'I count not myself to have apprehended: but … I press toward the mark.' *Toward* that mark is better than *to* any lower. Our moral perfection is, as it were, the reflection in humanity of the divine almightiness.

The wide landscape may be mirrored in an inch of glass. Infinity may be, in some manner, presented in miniature in finite natures. Our power cannot represent God's omnipotence, but our moral perfection may, especially since that omnipotence is pledged to make us perfect if we will walk before Him.

2. Note the sign of the renewed covenant. Compliance with these injunctions is clearly laid down as the human condition of the divine fulfilment of it. 'Be thou perfect' comes first; 'My covenant is with thee' follows. There was contingency recognised from the beginning. If Israel broke the covenant, God was not unfaithful if He should not adhere to it. But the present point is that a new confirmation is given before the terms are repeated. The main purpose, then, of this revelation, did not lie in that repetition, but in the seal given to Abram by the change of name.

Another sign was also given, which had a wider reference. The change of name was God's seal to His part. Circumcision was the seal of the other party, by which Abram, his family, and afterwards the nation, took on themselves the obligations of the compact.

The name bestowed is taken to mean 'Father of a Multitude.' It was the condensation into a word, of the divine promise. What a trial of Abram's faith it was to bid him take a name which would sound in men's ears liker irony than promise! He, close on a hundred years old, with but one child, who was known not to be the heir, to be called the father of many! How often Canaanites and his own household would smile as they used it! What a piece of senile presumption it would seem to them! How often Abram himself would be tempted to think his new name a farce rather than a sign! But he took it humbly from God, and he wore it,

whether it brought ridicule from others or assurance in his own heart. It takes some courage for any of us to call ourselves by names which rest on God's promise and seem to have little vindication in present facts. The world is fond of laughing at 'saints,' but Christians should familiarise themselves with the lofty designations which God gives His children, and see in them not only a summons to life corresponding, but a pledge and prophecy of the final possession of all which these imply. God calls 'things that are not, as though they were'; and it is wisdom, faith, and humility—not presumption—which accepts the names as omens of what shall one day be.

The substance of the covenant is mainly identical with previous revelations. The land is to belong to Abram's seed. That seed is to be very numerous. But there is new emphasis placed on God's relation to Abram's descendants. God promises to be 'a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,' and, again, 'I will be their God' (verses 7, 8). That article of the old covenant is repeated in the new (Jer. xxxi. 33), with the addition, 'And they shall be My people,' which is really involved in it. We do not read later more spiritual ideas into the words, when we find in them here, at the very beginning of Hebrew monotheism, an insight into the deep truth of the reciprocal possession of God by us, and of us by God. What a glimpse into the depths of that divine heart is given, when we see that we are His possession, precious to Him above all the riches of earth and the magnificences of heaven! What a lesson as to the inmost blessedness of religion, when we learn that it takes God for its very own, and is rich in possessing Him, whatever else may be owned or lacking!

To possess God is only possible on condition of yielding ourselves to Him. When we give ourselves up, in heart, mind, and will, to be His, He is ours. When we cease to be our own, we get God for ours. The self-centred man is poor; he neither owns himself nor anything besides, in any deep sense. When we lose ourselves in God, we find ourselves, and being content to have nothing, and not even to be our own masters or owners, we possess ourselves more truly than ever, and have God for our portion, and in Him 'all things are ours.'

A Petulant Wish

'And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee! GENESIS xvii. 18.

These words sound very devout, and they have often been used by Christian parents yearning for the best interests of their children, and sometimes of their wayward and prodigal children. But consecrated as they are by that usage, I am afraid that their meaning, as they were uttered, was nothing so devout and good as that which is often attached to them.

1. Note the temper in which Abraham speaks here. The very existence of Ishmael was a memorial of Abraham's failure in faith and patience. For he thought that the promised heir was long in coming, and so he thought that he would help God. For thirteen years the child had been living beside him, winding a son's way into a father's heart, with much in his character, as was afterwards seen, that would make a frank, daring boy his old father's darling. Then all at once comes the divine message, 'This is not the son of the Covenant; this is not the heir of the Promise. Sarah shall have a child, and from him shall come the blessings that have been foretold.' And what does Abraham do? Fall down in thankfulness before God? leap up in heart at the conviction that now at last the long-looked-for fulfilment of the oath of God was impending? Not he. 'O that *Ishmael* might live before Thee. Why cannot *he* do? Why may he not be the chosen child, the heir of the Promise? Take him, O God!'

That is to say, he thinks he knows better than God. He is petulant, he resists his blessing, he fancies that his own plan is quite as good as the divine plan. He does not want to draw away his heart from the child that it has twined round. So he loses the blessing of the revelation that is being made to him; because he does not bow his will, and accept God's way instead of his own. Now, do you not think that that is what we do? When God sends us Isaac, do we not often say, 'Take Ishmael; he is my own making. I have set all my hopes on him. Why should I have to wrench them all away?' In our individual lives we want to prescribe to God, far too often, not only the *ends*, but the *way* in which we shall get to the ends; and we think to ourselves, 'That road of my own engineering that I have got all staked out, that is the true way for God's providence to take.' And when His path does not coincide with ours, then we are discontented, and instead of submitting we go with our pet schemes to Him; and if not in so many words, at least in spirit and temper, we try to force our way upon God, and when He is speaking about Isaac insist on pressing Ishmael on His notice.

It is often so in regard to our individual lives; and it is so in regard to the united action of Christian people very often. A great deal of what calls itself earnest contending for 'the faith once delivered to the saints' is nothing more nor less than insisting that methods of men's devising shall be continued, when God seems to be substituting for them methods of His own sending; and so fighting about externals and church polity, and determining that the world has got to be saved in my own special fashion, and in no other, though God Himself seems to be suggesting the new thing to me. That is a very frequent phenomenon in the experience of Christian communities and churches. Ishmael is so very dear. He is not the child of promise, but he is the child that we have thought it advisable to help God with. It is hard for us to part with him.

Dear brethren, sometimes, too, God comes to us in various providences, and not only reduces into chaos and a heap of confusion our nicely built-up little houses, but He sometimes comes to us, and lifts us out of some lower kind of good, which is perfectly satisfactory to us, or all but perfectly satisfactory, in order to give to us something nobler and higher. And we resist that too; and do not see why Ishmael should not serve God's turn as he has served ours; or

think that there is no need at all for Isaac to come into our lives. God never takes away from us a lower, unless for the purpose of bestowing upon us a higher blessing. Therefore not to submit is the foolishest thing that men can do.

But if that be anything like an account of the temper expressed by this saying, is it not strange that murmuring against God takes the shape of praying? Ah! there is a great deal of 'prayer' as it calls itself, which is just moulded upon this petulant word of Abraham's momentarily failing faith and submission. How many people think that to pray means to bring their wishes to God, and try to coax Him to make them His wishes! Why, half the shallow sceptical talk of this generation about the worthlessness of prayer goes upon that fundamental fallacy that the notion of prayer is to dictate terms to God; and that unless a man gets his wishes answered he has no right to suppose that his prayers are answered. But it is not so. Prayer is not after the type of 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee!' That is a poor kind of prayer of which the inmost spirit is resistance to a clear dictate of the divine will; but the true prayer is, 'O that I may be willing to take what Thou art willing, in Thy mercy and love, to send!'

I believe in importunate prayer, but I believe also that a great deal of what calls itself importunate prayer is nothing more than an obstinate determination not to be satisfied with what satisfies God. If a man has been bringing his wishes—and he cannot but have such—continuously to God, with regard to any outward things, and these have not been answered, he needs to look very carefully into his own temper and heart in order to make sure that what seems to be waiting upon God in importunate petition is not pestering Him with refused desires. To make a prayer out of my rebellion against His will is surely the greatest abuse of prayer that can be conceived. And when Abraham said, 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee!' if he said it in the spirit in which I think he did, he was not praying, but he was grumbling.

2. And then notice, still further, how such a temper and such a prayer have the effect of hiding joy and blessing from us.

This was the crisis of Abraham's whole life. It was the moment at which his hundred years nearly of patient waiting were about to be rewarded. The message which he had just received was the most lovely and gracious word that ever had come to him from the heavens, although many such words had come. And what does he do with it? Instead of falling down before God, and letting his whole heart go out in jubilant gratitude, he has nothing to say but 'I would rather that Thou didst it in another way. It is all very well to speak about sending this heir of promise. I have no pleasure in that, because it means that my Ishmael is to be passed by and shelved.' So the proffered joy is turned to ashes, and Abraham gets no good, for the moment, out of God's greatest blessing to him; but all the sky is darkened by mists that come up from his own heart.

Brethren, if you want to be miserable, perk up your own will against God's. If you want to be blessed, acquiesce in all that He does send, in all that He has sent, and, by anticipation, in all that He will send. For, depend upon it, the secret of finding sunbeams in everything is simply letting God have His own way, and making your will the sounding-board and echo of His. If Abraham had done as he ought to have done, that would have been the gladdest moment of his life. You and I can make out of our deepest sorrows the occasions of pure, though it is quiet, gladness, if only we have learned to say, 'Not my will, but Thy will be done.' That is the talisman that turns everything into gold, and makes sorrow forget its nature, and almost approximate to solemn joy.

3. My last word is this: God loves us all too well to listen to such a prayer.

Abraham's passionate cry was so much empty wind, and was like a straw laid across the course of an express train, in so far as its power to modify the gracious purpose of God already declared was concerned. And would it not be a miserable thing if we could deflect the solemn, loving march of the divine Providence by these hot, foolish, purblind wishes of ours, that see only the nearer end of things, and have no notion of where their further end may go, or what it may be?

Is it not better that we should fall back upon this thought, though, at first sight, it seems so to limit the power of petition, 'We know that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us'? There is nothing that would more wreck our lives than if what some people want were to be the case—that God should let us have our own way, and give us serpents because we asked for them and fancied they were eggs; or let us break our teeth upon bestowed stones because, like whimpering children crying for the moon, we had asked for them under the delusion that they were bread.

Leave all that in His hands; and be sure of this, that the true way to peace, to rest, to gladness, and to wringing the last drop of possible sweetness out of gifts and losses, disappointments and fruitions, is to have no will but God's will enthroned above and in our own wills. If Abraham had acquiesced and submitted, Ishmael and Isaac would have been a pair to bless his life, as they stood together over his grave. And if you and I will leave God to order all our ways, and not try to interfere with His purposes by our short-sighted dictation, 'all things will work together for good to us, because we love God,' and lovingly accept His will and His law.

‘Because Of His Importunity’

‘And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him! For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty’s sake. And he said unto Him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake. And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.’—GENESIS xviii. 16-33.

I

The first verse of this chapter says that ‘the Lord appeared’ unto Abraham, and then proceeds to tell that ‘three men stood over against him,’ thus indicating that these were, collectively, the manifestation of Jehovah. Two of the three subsequently ‘went toward Sodom,’ and are called ‘angels’ in chapter xix. 1. One remained with Abraham, and is addressed by him as ‘Lord,’ but the three are similarly addressed in verse 3. The inference is that Jehovah appeared, not only in the one ‘man’ who spake with Abraham, but also in the two who went to Sodom.

In this incident we have, first, God’s communication of His purpose to Abraham. He was called the friend of God, and friends confide in each other. ‘The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,’ and it is ever true that they who live in amity and communion with God thereby acquire insight into His purposes. Even in regard to public or so-called ‘political’ events, a man who believes in God and His moral government will often be endowed with a ‘terrible sagacity,’ which forecasts consequences more surely than do godless politicians. In regard to one’s own history, it is still more evidently true that the one way to apprehend God’s purposes in it is to keep in close friendship with Him. Then we shall see the meaning of the else bewildering whirl of events, and be able to say, ‘He that hath wrought us for the

selfsame thing is God.' But the reason assigned for intrusting Abraham with the knowledge of God's purpose is to be noted. It was because of his place as the medium of blessing to the nations, and as the lawgiver to his descendants. God had 'known him,'—that is, had lovingly brought him into close relations with Himself, not for his own sake only, but, much more, that he might be a channel of grace to Israel and the world. His 'commandment' to his descendants was to lead to their worship of Jehovah and their upright living, and these again to their possession of the blessings promised to Abraham. That purpose would be aided by the knowledge of the judgment on Sodom, its source, and its cause, and therefore Abraham was admitted into the council-chamber of Jehovah. The insight given to God's friends is given that they may more fully benefit men by leading them into paths of righteousness, on which alone they can be met by God's blessings.

The strongly figurative representation in verses 20, 21, according to which Jehovah goes down to ascertain whether the facts of Sodom's sin correspond to the report of it, belongs to the early stage of revelation, and need not surprise us, but should impress on us the gradual character of the divine Revelation, which would have been useless unless it had been accommodated to the mental and spiritual stature of its recipients. Nor should it hide from us the lofty conception of God's long-suffering justice, which is presented in so childlike a form. He does 'not judge after … the hearing of His ears,' nor smite without full knowledge of the sin. A later stage of revelation puts the same thought in language less strange to us, when it teaches that 'the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed,' and in His balances many a false estimate, both of virtuous and vicious acts, is corrected, and retribution is always exactly adjusted to the deed.

But the main importance of the incident is in the wonderful picture of Abraham's intercession, which, in like manner, veils, under a strangely sensuous representation, lofty truths for all ages. It is to be noted that the divine purpose expressed in 'I will go down now, and see,' is fulfilled in the going of the two (men or angels) towards Sodom; therefore Jehovah was in them. But He was also in the One before whom Abraham stood. The first great truth enshrined in this part of the story is that the friend of God is compassionate even of the sinful and degraded. Abraham did not intercede for Lot, but for the sinners in Sodom. He had perilled his life in warfare for them; he now pleads with God for them. Where had he learned this brave pity? Where but from the God with whom he lived by faith? How much more surely will real communion with Jesus lead *us* to look on all men, and especially on the vicious and outcast, with His eyes who saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, torn, panting, scattered, and lying exhausted and defenceless! Indifference to the miseries and impending dangers of Christless men is impossible for any whom He calls 'not servants, but friends.'

Again, we are taught the boldness of pleading which is permitted to the friend of God, and is compatible with deepest reverence. Abraham is keenly conscious of his audacity, and yet, though he knows himself to be but dust and ashes, that does not stifle his petitions. His was the holy 'importunity' which Jesus sent forth for our imitation. The word so rendered in Luke xi. 8, which is found in the New Testament there only, literally means 'shamelessness,' and is exactly the disposition which Abraham showed here. Not only was he persistent, but he increased his expectations with each partial granting of his prayer. The more God gives, the more does the true suppliant expect and crave; and rightly so, for the gift to be given is infinite, and each degree of possession enlarges capacity so as to fit to receive more, and widens desire. What contented us to-day should not content us to-morrow.

Again, Abraham is bold in appealing to a law to which God is bound to conform. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' is often quoted with an application foreign to its true

meaning. Abraham was not preaching to men trust that the most perplexing acts of God would be capable of full vindication if we knew all, but he was pleading with God that His acts should be plainly accordant with the idea of justice planted by Him in us. The phrase is often used to strengthen the struggling faith that

'All is right which seems most wrong, If it be His sweet will.'

But it means not 'Such and such a thing must be right because God has done it,' but 'Such and such a thing is right, therefore God must do it.' Of course, our conceptions of right are not the absolute measure of the divine acts, and the very fact which Abraham thought contrary to justice is continually exemplified in Providence, that 'the righteous should be as the wicked' in regard to earthly calamities affecting communities. So far Abraham was wrong, but the spirit of his remonstrance was wholly right.

Again, we learn the precious lesson that prayer for others is a real power, and does bring down blessings and avert evils. Abraham did not here pray for Lot, but yet 'God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow'(chap. xix. 29), so that there had been unrecorded intercession for him too. The unselfish desires for others, that exhale from human hearts under the influence of the love which Christ plants in us, do come down in blessings on others, as the moisture drawn up by the sun may descend in fructifying rain on far-off pastures of the wilderness. We help one another when we pray for one another.

The last lesson taught is that 'righteous' men are indeed the 'salt of the earth' not only preserving cities and nations from further corruption, but procuring for them further existence and probation. God holds back His judgments so long as hope of amendment survives, and 'will not destroy for the ten's sake.'

The Intercourse Of God And His Friend

II

We have seen that the fruit of Abraham's faith was God's entrance into close covenant relations with him; or, as James puts it, 'It was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.' This incident shows us the intercourse of the divine and human friends in its familiarity, mutual confidence, and power. It is a forecast of Christ's own profound teachings in His parting words in the upper chamber, concerning the sweet and wondrous intercourse between the believing soul and the indwelling God.

1. The friend of God catches a gleam of divine pity and tenderness. Abraham has no relations with the men of Sodom. Their evil ways would repel him; and he would be a stranger among them still more than among the Canaanites, whose iniquity was 'not yet full.' But though he has no special bonds with them, he cannot but melt with tender compassion when he hears their doom. Communion with the very Source of all gentle love has softened his heart, and he yearns over the wicked and fated city. Where else than from his heavenly Friend could he have learned this sympathy? It wells up in this chapter like some sudden spring among solemn solitudes—the first instance of that divine charity which is the best sign that we have been with God, and have learned of Him. All that the New Testament teaches of love to God, as necessarily issuing in love to man, and of the true love to man as overleaping all narrow bounds of kindred, country, race, and ignoring all questions of character, and gushing forth in fullest energy towards the sinners in danger of just punishment, is here in germ. The friend of God must be the friend of men; and if they be wicked, and he sees the frightful doom which they do not see, these make his pity the deeper. Abraham does not contest the justice of the doom. He lives too near his friend not to know that sin must mean death. The effect of friendship with God is not to make men wish that there were no judgments for evil-doers, but to touch their hearts with pity, and to stir them to intercession and to effort for their deliverance.

2. The friend of God has absolute trust in the rectitude of His acts. Abraham's remonstrance, if we may call it so, embodies some thoughts about the government of God in the world which should be pondered.

His first abrupt question, flung out without any reverential preface, assumes that the character of God requires that the fate of the righteous should be distinguished from that of the wicked. The very brusqueness of the question shows that he supposed himself to be appealing to an elementary and indubitable law of God's dealings. The teachings of the Fall and of the Flood had graven deep on his conscience the truth that the same loving Friend must needs deal out rewards to the good and chastisement to the bad. That was the simple faith of an early time, when problems like those which tortured the writers of the seventy-third Psalm, or of Job and Ecclesiastes, had not yet disturbed the childlike trust of the friend of God, because no facts in his experience had forced them on him. But the belief which was axiomatic to him, and true for his supernaturally shaped life with its special miracles and visible divine guard, is not the ultimate and irrefragable principle which he thought it. In widespread calamities the righteous are blended with the wicked in one bloody ruin; and it is the very misery of such judgments that often the sufferers are not the wrongdoers, but that the fathers eat the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. The whirlwind of temporal judgments makes no distinctions between the dwellings of the righteous and the wicked, but levels them both. No doubt, the fact that the impending destruction was to be a direct Divine interposition of a punitive kind

made it more necessary that it should be confined to the actual culprits. No doubt, too, Abraham's zeal for the honour of God's government was right. But his first plea belongs to the stage of revelation at which he stood, not to that of the New Testament, which teaches that the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell were not sinners above all men in Jerusalem. Abraham's confidence in God's justice, not Abraham's conceptions of what that justice required, is to be imitated. A friend of God will hold fast by the faith that 'His way is perfect,' and will cherish it even in the presence of facts more perplexing than any which met Abraham's eyes.

Another assumption in his prayer is that the righteous are sources of blessing and shields for the wicked. Has he there laid hold of a true principle? Certainly, it is indeed the law that 'every man shall bear his own burden,' but that law is modified by the operation of this other, of which God's providence is full. Many a drop of blessing trickles from the wet fleece to the dry ground. Many a stroke of judgment is carried off harmlessly by the lightning conductor. Where God's friends are inextricably mixed up with evil-doers, it is not rare to see diffused blessings which are destined indeed primarily for the former, but find their way to the latter. Christians are the 'salt of the earth' in this sense too, that they save corrupt communities from swift destruction, and for their sakes the angels delay their blow. In the final resort, each soul must reap its own harvest from its own deeds; but the individualism of Christianity is not isolation. We are bound together in mysterious community, and a good man is a fountain of far-flowing good. The truest 'saviours of society' are the servants of God.

A third principle is embodied in the solemn question, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' This is not meant in its bearing here, as we so often hear it quoted, to silence man's questionings as to mysterious divine acts, or to warn us from applying our measures of right and wrong to these. The very opposite thought is conveyed; namely, the confidence that what God does must approve itself as just to men. He is Judge of all the earth, and therefore bound by His very nature, as by His relations to men, to do nothing that cannot be pointed to as inflexibly right. If Abraham had meant, 'What God does, must needs be right, therefore crush down all questions of how it accords with thy sense of justice,' he would have been condemning his own prayer as presumptuous, and the thought would have been entirely out of place. But the appeal to God to vindicate His own character by doing what shall be in manifest accord with His name, is bold language indeed, but not too bold, because it is prompted by absolute confidence in Him. God's punishments must be obviously righteous to have moral effect, or to be worthy of Him.

But true as the principle is, it needs to be guarded. Abraham himself is an instance that men's conceptions of right do not completely correspond to the reality. His notion of 'right' was, in some particulars, as his life shows, imperfect, rudimentary, and far beneath New Testament ideas. Conscience needs education. The best men's conceptions of what befits divine justice are relative, progressive; and a shifting standard is no standard. It becomes us to be very cautious before we say to God, 'This is the way. Walk Thou in it,' or dismiss any doctrine as untrue on the ground of its contradicting our instincts of justice.

3. The friend of God has power with God. 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?' The divine Friend recognises the obligation of confidence. True friendship is frank, and cannot bear to hide its purposes. That one sentence in its bold attribution of a like feeling to God leads us deep into the Divine heart, and the sweet reality of his amity. Insight into His will ever belongs to those who live near Him. It is the beginning of the long series of disclosures of 'the secret of the Lord' to 'them that fear Him,' which is crowned by 'henceforth I call you not servants; but … friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.' So much for the divine side of the communion.

On the human side, we are here taught the great truth, that God's friends are intercessors, whose voice has a mysterious but most real power with God. If it be true, that, in general terms, the righteous are shields and sources of blessing to the unholy, it is still more distinctly true that they have access to God's secret place with petitions for others as well as for themselves. The desires which go up to God, like the vapours exhaled to heaven, fall in refreshing rain on spots far away from that whence they rose. In these days we need to keep fast hold of our belief in the efficacy of prayer for others and for ourselves. God knows Himself and the laws of His government a great deal better than any one besides does; and He has abundantly shown us in His Word, and by many experiences, that breath spent in intercession is not wasted. In these old times, when worship was mainly sacrificial, this wonderful instance of pure intercession meets us, an anticipation of later times. And from thence onwards there has never failed proof to those who will look for it, that God's friends are true priests, and help their brethren by their prayers. Our voices should 'rise like a fountain night and day' for men. But there is a secret distrust of the power, and a flagrantly plain neglect of the duty, of intercession nowadays, which need sorely the lesson that God 'remembered Abraham' and delivered Lot. Luther, in his rough, strong way, says: 'If I have a Christian who prays to God for me, I will be of good courage, and be afraid of nothing. If I have one who prays against me, I had rather have the Grand Turk for my enemy.'

The tone of Abraham's intercession may teach us how familiar the intercourse with the Heavenly Friend may be. The boldest words from a loving heart, jealous of God's honour, are not irreverent in His eyes. This prayer is abrupt, almost rough. It sounds like remonstrance quite as much as prayer. Abraham appeals to God to take care of His name and honour, as if he had said, If Thou doest this, what will the world say of Thee, but that Thou art unmerciful? But the grand confidence in God's character, the eager desire that it should be vindicated before the world, the dread that the least film should veil the silvery whiteness or the golden lustre of His name, the sensitiveness for His honour—these are the effects of communion with Him; and for these God accepts the bold prayer as truer reverence than is found in many more guarded and lowly sounding words. Many conventional proprieties of worship may be broken just because the worship is real. 'The frequent sputter shows that the soul's depths boil in earnest.' We may learn, too, that the most loving familiarity never forgets the fathomless gulf between God and it. Abraham remembers that he is 'dust and ashes'; he knows that he is venturing much in speaking to God. His pertinacious prayers have a recurring burden of lowly recognition of his place. Twice he heralds them with 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord'; twice with 'Oh let not the Lord be angry.' Perfect love casts out fear and deepens reverence. We may come with free hearts, from which every weight of trembling and every cloud of doubt has been lifted. But the less the dread, the lower we shall bow before the Loftiness which we love. We do not pray aright until we tell God everything. The 'boldness' which we as Christians ought to have, means literally a frank speaking out of all that is in our hearts. Such 'boldness and access with confidence' will often make short work of so-called seemly reverence, but it will never transgress by so much as a hair's-breadth the limits of lowly, trustful love.

Abraham's persistency may teach us a lesson. If one might so say, he hangs on God's skirt like a burr. Each petition granted only encourages him to another. Six times he pleads, and God waits till he has done before He goes away; He cannot leave His friend till that friend has said all his say. What a contrast the fiery fervour and unwearying pertinacity of Abraham's prayers make to the stiff formalism of the intercessions one is familiar with! The former are like the successive pulses of a volcano driving a hot lava stream before it; the latter, like the slow flow of a glacier, cold and sluggish. Is any part of our public or private worship more hopelessly formal than our prayers for others? This picture from the old world

may well shame our languid petitions, and stir us up to a holy boldness and persistence in prayer. Our Saviour Himself teaches that ‘men ought always to pray, and not to faint,’ and Himself recommends to us a holy importunity, which He teaches us to believe is, in mysterious fashion, a power with God. He gives room for such patient continuance in prayer by sometimes delaying the apparent answer, not because He needs to be won over to bless, but because it is good for us to draw near, and to keep near, the Lord. He is ever at the door, ready to open, and if sometimes, like Rhoda to Peter, He does not open immediately, and we have to keep knocking, it is that our desires may increase by delay, and so He may be able to give a blessing, which will be the greater and sweeter for the tarrying.

So the friendship is manifested on both sides: on God’s, by disclosure of His purpose and compliance with His friend’s request; on Abraham’s, by speech which is saved from irreverence by love, and by prayer which is acceptable to God by its very importunity. Jesus Christ has promised us the highest form of such friendship, when He has said, ‘I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you’; and again, ‘If ye abide in Me, … ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’

The Swift Destroyer

'And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest them be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that He said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And He said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.'—GENESIS xix. 15-26.

The religious significance of this solemn page of revelation is but little affected by any of the interesting questions which criticism raises concerning it, so that I am free to look at the whole narrative for the purpose of deducing its perennial lessons. There are four clearly marked stages in the story: the lingering of Lot in the doomed city, and the friendly force which dragged him from it; the prayer of abject fear, and the wonderful answer; the awful catastrophe; and the fate of the wretched woman who looked back.

1. Lot's lingering and rescue by force. Second thoughts are not always best. When great resolves have to be made, and when a clear divine command has to be obeyed, the first thought is usually the nobler; and the second, which pulls it back, and damps its ardour, is usually of the earth, earthy. So was it with Lot. Overnight, in the excitement of the terrible scene enacted before his door, Lot had been not only resolved himself to flee, but his voice had urged his sons-in-law to escape from the doom which he then felt to be imminent. But with the cold grey light of morning his mood has changed. The ties which held him in Sodom reassert their power. Perhaps daylight made his fears seem less real. There was no sign in the chill Eastern twilight that this day was to be unlike the other days. Perhaps the angels' summons roused him from sleep, and their 'arise' is literally meant. It might have given wings to his flight. Urgent, and resonant, like the morning bugle, it bids him be stirring lest he be swept away 'in the punishment of the city.' Observe that the same word means 'sin' and 'punishment,'—a testimony to the profound truth that at bottom they are one, sin being pain in the root, pain being sin in the flower. So our own word 'evil' covers all the ground, and means both sin and sorrow. But even that pealing note does not shatter his hesitation. He still lingers. What kept him? That which had first taken him there—material advantages. He had struck root in Sodom. The tent life which he had kept to at first has been long given up; we find him sitting in the gate of the city, the place for gossip and friendly intercourse. He has either formed, or is going to form, marriage alliances for his daughters with men of the city who are as black as the rest. Perhaps his wife, whom the story will not name, for pity or for horror, was a Sodomite. To escape meant to leave all this and his wealth behind. If he

goes out, he goes out a pauper. So his heart, which is where his treasure is, makes his movements slow. What insanity his lingering must have seemed to the angels! I wonder if we, who cling so desperately to the world, and who are so slow to go where God would have us to be for our own safety, if thereby we shall lose anything of this world's wealth, seem very much wiser to eyes made clear-sighted with the wisdom of heaven. This poor hesitating lingerer, too much at home in the city of destruction to get out of it even to save his life, has plenty of brothers to-day. Every man who lets the world hold him by the skirts when Christ is calling him to salvation, and every man who is reluctant to obey any clear call to sacrifice and separation from godless men, may see his own face in this glass, and perhaps get a glimpse of its ugliness.

What a homely picture, full of weighty truth, the story gives us, of the angels each taking two of the reluctant four by the hand, and dragging them with some degree of kindly force from destruction into safety! So, in a great fire, domestic animals and horses seem to find a strange fascination in the flames, and have to be carried out of certain death by main force. They 'set him'—or we might read, 'made him rest'—outside the city. It was but a little distance, for these 'cities' were tiny places, and the walls were soon reached. But it was far enough to change Lot's whole feelings. He passes to feeble despair and abject fear, as we shall see. That forlorn group, homeless, friendless, stripped of everything, shivering outside the gate in the cold morning air, may teach us how wise and prudent the man is who seeks the kingdom of God second, and the other things first.

2. There was a pause outside the city. A new voice speaks now to Lot. 'They' brought him forth; but 'He' said 'escape.' The same 'Lord' to whom Abraham had prayed, has now rejoined the mysterious pair whom He had sent to Sodom. And Lot's entreaty is addressed to Him whom he calls 'my Lord.' He uses singular pronouns throughout, although the narrator says that he 'said unto *them*.' There seems to be here the same idea as is embodied in the word 'Elohim'; namely, that the divine powers are regarded as in some sense separable, and yet all inhering in a personal unity. At all events, we have here a distinct representation of an intercourse between God and man, in which thoughts are conveyed to the human spirit direct from the divine, and desires pass from the human to the divine. The manner of the intercourse we do not know, but the possibility of the fact can scarcely be denied by any believer in a God; and, however we may call this miraculous or abnormal, the essence of the event can be repeated in the experience of each of us. God still speaks to men, and men may still plead with God. Unless our religion is communion, it is nothing.

The divine voice reiterates the angels' urgent command in still more stringent words: 'Escape for thy life.' There is to be no more angel-leading, but Lot's feet are to be made as hinds' feet by the thought of the flaming death that is pursuing. His lingering looks are sternly forbidden, since they would delay his flight and divide his heart. The direction of his flight is for the first time pointed out. The fertile plain, which had lured him down from the safe hills, is prohibited. Only on the mountain-side, probably the eastern mountains, where the morning red was beginning to blush, is there safety.

Lot's answer shows a complete change of feeling. He is too fully alarmed now. His fright is so desperate that it has killed faith and common sense. The natural conclusion from God's mercy, which he acknowledges, would have been trust and obedience. 'Therefore I can escape,' not 'but I cannot escape,' would have been the logic of faith. The latter is the irrationality of fear. When a man who has been cleaving to this fleeting life of earthly good wakes up to believe his danger, he is ever apt to plunge into an abyss of terror, in which God's commands seem impossible, and His will to save becomes dim. The world first lies to us by 'You are quite safe where you are. Don't be in a hurry to go.' Then it lies, 'You never

can get away now.' Reverse Lot's whimpering fears, and we get the truth. Are not God's directions how to escape, promises that we shall escape? Will He begin to build, and not be able to finish? Will the judgments of His hand overrun their commission, like a bloodhound which, in its master's absence, may rend his friend? 'We have all of us one human heart,' and this swift leap from unreasoning carelessness to as unreasoning dread, this failure to draw the true conclusion from God's past mercy, and this despairing recoil from the path pointed for us, and craving for easier ways, belongs to us. 'A strange servant of God was this,' say we. Yes, and we are often quite as strange. How many people awakened to see their danger are so absorbed by the sight that they cannot see the cross, or think they can never reach it!

God answered the cry, whatever its fault, and that may well make us pause in our condemnation. He hears even a very imperfect petition, and can see the tiniest germ of faith buried under thick clods of doubt and fear. This stooping readiness to meet Lot's weakness comes in wonderful contrast with the terrible revelation of judgment which follows. What a conception of God, which had room for this more than human patience with weakness, and also for the flashing, lurid glories of destructive retribution! Zoar is spared, not for the unworthy reason which Lot suggested—because its minuteness might buy impunity, as some noxious insect too small to be worth crushing—but in accordance with the principle which was illustrated in Abraham's intercession, and even in Lot's safety; namely, that the righteous are shields for others, as Paul had the lives of all that sailed with him given to him.

God's 'cannot' answers Lot's 'cannot.' His power is limited by His own solemn purpose to save His faltering servant. The latter had feared that, before he could reach the mountain, 'the evil' would overtake him. God shows him that his safety was a condition precedent to its outburst. Lot barred the way. God could not 'let slip the dogs of' judgment, but held them in the leash until Lot was in Zoar. Very awful is the command to make haste, based on this impossibility, as if God were weary of delay, and more than ready to smite. However we may find anthropomorphism in these early narratives, let us not forget that, when the world has long been groaning under some giant evil, and the bitter seed is grown up into a waving forest of poison, there is something in the passionless righteousness of God which brooks no longer delay, but seeks to make 'a short work' on the earth.

3. So we are brought face to face with the grim story of the destruction. There is a world of tragic meaning in the simple note of time given. 'The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.' The low-lying cities of the plain would lie in shadow for some time before the sun topped the eastern hills. What a dawn! At that joyous hour, just when the sunshine struck down on the smiling plain, and lake and river gleamed like silver, and all things woke to new hopes and fresh life, then the sky darkened, and the earth sank, and horrible rain of fiery bitumen fell from the black pall, salt mud poured in streams, and over all hung a column of fat, oily smoke. It is not my province to discuss the physical cause of the destruction; but I may refer to the suggestions of Sir J. W. Dawson, in his *Egypt and Syria*, and in *The Expositor* for May 1886, in which he shows that great beds of bituminous limestone extend below the Jordan valley and much of the Dead Sea, and that the escape of inflammable gag from these through the opening of a fissure along a great 'line of fault,' is capable of producing all the effects described. The 'brimstone' of the Authorised Version is probably rather some form of bituminous matter which would be carried into the air by such an escape of gas, and a thick saline mud would accompany the eruption, encrusting anything it reached. Subsidence would follow the ejection of quantities of such matter; and hence the word 'overthrew,' which seems inappropriate to a mere conflagration, would be explained.

But, however this may be, we have to recognise a supernatural element in the starting of the train of natural causes, as well as in the timing of the catastrophe, and a divine purpose of retribution, which turns the catastrophe, however effected, into a judgment.

So regarded, the event has a double meaning. In the first place, it is a revelation of an element in the divine character and of a feature in the divine government. To the men of that time, it might be a warning. To Abraham, and through him to his descendants, and through them to us, it preaches a truth very unwelcome to many in this day: that there is in God that which constrains Him to hate, fight against, and punish, evil. The temper of this generation turns away from such thoughts, and, in the name of the truth that 'God is love,' would fain obliterate the truth that He does and will punish. But if the punitive element be suppressed, and that in God which makes it necessary ignored or weakened, the result will be a God who has not force enough to love, but only weakly to indulge. If He does not hate and punish, He does not pardon. For the sake of the love of God, we must hold firm by the belief in the judgments of God. The God who destroyed Sodom is not merely the God of an earlier antiquated creed. 'Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yea, of the Gentiles also.'

Again, this event is a prophecy. So our Lord has employed it; and much of the imagery in which the last judgment is represented is directly drawn from this narrative. So far from this story showing to us only the superstitions of a form of belief which we have long outgrown, its deepest meaning lies far ahead, and closes the history of man on the earth. We know from the lips which cannot lie, that the appalling suddenness of that destruction foreshadows the swiftness of the coming of that last 'day of the Lord.' We know that in literality some of the physical features shall be reproduced; for the fire which shall burn up the world and all its works is no figure, nor is it proclaimed only by such non-authoritative voices as those of Jesus and His apostles, but also by the modern possessors of infallible certitude, the men of science. We know that that day shall be a day of retribution. We know, too, that the crime of Sodom, foul and unnatural as it was, is not the darkest, but that its inhabitants (who have to face that judgment too) will find their doom more tolerable, and their sins lighter, than some who have had high places in the Church, than the Pharisees and wise men who have not taken Christ for their Saviour.

4. The fate of the loiterer. Her backward look must have been more than momentary, for the destruction of the cities did not begin till Lot was safe in Zoar. She must have lingered far behind, and been overtaken by the eruption of liquid saline mud, which, as Sir J. W. Dawson has shown, would attend or follow the outburst of bituminous matter, so that her fate was the natural consequence of her heart being still in Sodom. As to the 'pillar of salt' which has excited cavils on the one hand and foolish legends on the other, probably we are to think rather of a heap than of a pillar. The word does not occur in either meaning elsewhere, but its derivation implies something raised above the level of the ground; and a heap, such as would be formed by a human body encrusted with salt mud, would suit the requirements of the expression. Like a man who falls in a snowstorm, or, still more accurately, just as some of the victims at Pompeii stumbled in their flight, and were buried under the ashes, which still keep the outline of their figures, so Lot's wife was covered with the half-liquid slimy mud. Granted the delay in her flight, the rest is perfectly simple and natural. She was buried in a horrible tomb; and, in pity to her memory, no name has been written upon it. She remains to all generations, in a far truer sense than superstition dreamed of when it pointed to an upright salt rock as her prison and her monument, a warning of the danger of the backward look, which betrays the true home of the heart, and may leave us unsheltered in the open plain when the fiery storm bursts. 'Remember Lot's wife.'

When the angels awoke Lot, the day was breaking. By the time that Abraham had risen ‘early in the morning,’ and reached the place by his tent from which he had yesterday looked on the smiling plain, all was over, and the heavy smoke cloud wrapped the dead with its pall-like folds. So swift and sudden is to be the coming of the Son of man,—as the lightning which rushes in one fierce blinding flash from one side of heaven to the other. Wherefore, God calls to each of us: ‘Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.’

Faith Tested And Crowned

'And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, 'Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering! And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.'—GENESIS xxii. 1-14.

I

A life of faith and self-denial has usually its sharpest trials at or near its beginning. A stormy day has generally a calm close. But Abraham's sorest discipline came all sudden, like a bolt from blue sky. Near the end, and after many years of peaceful, uneventful life, he had to take a yet higher degree in the school of faith. Sharp trial means increased possession of God. So his last terrible experience turned to his crowning mercy.

1. The very first words of this solemn narrative raise many questions. We have God appointing the awful trial. The Revised Version properly replaces 'tempt' by 'prove.' The former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worse part of a man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of a man, with the desire that he should stand. Temptation says: 'Do this pleasant thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is wrong.' Trial, or proving, says: 'Do this right and noble thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful.' The one is 'a sweet, beguiling melody,' breathing soft indulgence and relaxation over the soul; the other is a pealing trumpet-call to high achievements.

God's proving does not mean that He stands by, watching how His child will behave. He helps us to sustain the trial to which He subjects us. Life is all probation; and because it is so, it is all the field for the divine aid. The motive of His proving men is that they may be strengthened. He puts us into His gymnasium to improve our physique. If we stand the trial, our faith is increased; if we fall, we learn self-distrust and closer clinging to Him. No

objection can be raised to the representation of this passage as to God's proving Abraham, which does not equally apply to the whole structure of life as a place of probation that it may be a place of blessing. But the manner of the trial here presents a difficulty. How could God command a father to kill his son? Is that in accordance with His character? Well, two considerations deserve attention. First, the final issue; namely, Isaac's deliverance, was an integral part of the divine purpose from the beginning of the trial; so that the question really is, Was it accordant with the divine character to require readiness to sacrifice even a son at His command? Second, that in Abraham's time, a father's right over his child's life was unquestioned, and that therefore this command, though it lacerated Abraham's heart, did not wound his conscience as it would do were it heard to-day. It is impossible to conceive of a divine injunction such as this being addressed to us. We have learned the inalienable sacredness of every life, and the awful prerogative and burden of individuality. God's command cannot enforce sin. But it was not wrong in Abraham's eyes for a father to slay his son; and God might shape His message to the form of the existing morality without derogation from His character, especially when the result of the message would be, among other things, to teach His abhorrence of human sacrifices, and so to lift the existing morality to a higher level.

2. The great body of the history sets before us Abraham standing the terrible test. What unsurpassable beauty is in the simple story! It is remarkable, even among the scriptural narratives, for the entire absence of anything but the visible facts. There is not a syllable about the feelings of father or of son. The silence is more pathetic than many words. We look as into a magic crystal, and see the very event before our eyes, and our own imaginations tell us more of the world of struggle and sorrow raging under that calm outside than the highest art could do. The pathos of reticence was never more perfectly illustrated. Observe, too, the minute, prolonged details of the slow progress to the dread instant of sacrifice. Each step is told in precisely the same manner, and the series of short clauses, coupled together by an artless 'and,' are like the single strokes of a passing bell, or the slow drops of blood heard falling from a fatal wound. The homely preparations for the journey are made by Abraham himself. He makes no confidante of Sarah; only God and himself knew what that bundle of wood meant. What thoughts must have torn his soul throughout these weary days! How hard to keep his voice round and full while he spoke to Isaac! How much the long protracted tension of the march increased the sharpness of the test! It is easier to reach the height of obedient self-sacrifice in some moment of enthusiasm, than to keep up there through the commonplace details of slowly passing days. Many a faith, which could even have slain its dearest, would have broken down long before the last step of that sad journey was taken.

The elements of the trial were two: first, Abraham's soul was torn asunder by the conflict of fatherly love and obedience to God. The narrative intimates this struggle by continually insisting on the relationship between the two. The command dwells with emphasis on it: 'thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.' He takes with him 'Isaac his son'; lays the wood on 'Isaac his son.' Isaac 'spake unto Abraham his father'; Abraham answers, 'Here am I, my son'; and again, 'My son, God will provide.' He bound 'Isaac his son'; he 'took the knife to slay his son'; and lastly, in the glad surprise at the end, he offers the ram 'in the stead of his son.' Thus, at every turn, the tender bond is forced on our notice, that we may feel how terrible was the task laid on him—to cut it asunder with his own hand. The friend of God must hold all other love as less than His, and must be ready to yield up the dearest at His bidding. Cruel as the necessity seems to flesh and blood, and specially poignant as his pain was, in essence Abraham's trial only required of him what all true religion requires of us. Some of us have been called by God's providence to give up the light of our eyes, the joy of our homes, to Him. Some of us have had to make the choice between earthly and heavenly

love. All of us have to throne God in our hearts, and to let not the dearest usurp His place. In our weakness we may well shrink from such a test. But let us not forget that the trial of Abraham was not imposed by his own mistaken conceptions of duty, nor by a sterner God than the New Testament reveals, but is distinctly set before every Christian in essence, though not in form, by the gentle lips from which flowed the law of love more stringent and exclusive in its claims than any other: 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

The conflict in Abraham's soul had a still more painful aspect in that it seemed to rend his very religion into two. Faith in the promise on which he had been living all his life drew one way; faith in the later command, another. God seemed to be against God, faith against faith, promise against command. If he obeys now, what is to become of the hopes that had shone for years before him? His whole career will be rendered nugatory, and with his own hand he will crush to powder his life's work. That wonderful short dialogue which broke the stern silence of the journey seems to throw light on his mood. There is nothing in literature sacred or secular, fact or fiction, poetry or prose, more touching than the innocent curiosity of Isaac's boyish question, and the yearning self-restraint of the father's desperate and yet calm answer. But its value is not only in its pathos. It seems to show that, though he knew not how, still he held by the hope that somehow God would not forget His promise. Out of his very despair, his faith struck, out of the flint of the hard command, a little spark which served to give some flicker of light amid the darkness. His answer to his boy does not make his sacrifice less, but his faith more. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives a somewhat different turn to his hopes, when he tells us that he offered up the heir of the promises, 'accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead.' Both ways of clinging to the early promise, even while obeying the later command, seem to have passed through his mind. The wavering from the one to the other is natural. He is sure that God had not lied before, and means what He commands now. He is sure that there is some point of reconciliation—perhaps this, perhaps that, but certainly somewhat. So he goes straight on the road marked for him, quite sure that it will not end in a blind alley, from which there is no exit. That is the very climax of faith—to trust God so absolutely, even when His ways seem contradictory, as to be more willing to believe apparent impossibilities than to doubt Him, and to be therefore ready for the hardest trial of obedience. We, too, have sometimes to take courses which seem to annihilate the hope and aims of a life. The lesson for us is to go straight on the path of clear duty wherever it leads. If it seem to bring us up to inaccessible cliffs, we may be sure that when we get there we shall find some ledge, though it may be no broader than a chamois could tread, which will suffice for a path. If it seem to bring us to a deep and bridgeless stream, we shall find a ford when we get to the water's edge. If the mountains seem to draw together and bar a passage, we shall find, when we reach them, that they open out; though it may be no wider than a cañon, still the stream can get through, and our boat with it.

3. So we have the climax of the story—faith rewarded. The first great lesson which the interposition of the Divine voice teaches us, is that obedience is complete when the inward surrender is complete. The outward act was needless. Abraham would have done no more if the flashing knife had buried itself in Isaac's heart. Here is the first great proclamation of the truth which revolutionises morality and religion, the beginnings of the teaching which culminates in the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, and in the gospel of salvation, not by deeds, but through faith. The will is the man, the true action is the submission of the will. The outward deed is only the coarse medium through which it is made visible for men: God looks on purpose as performance.

Again, faith is rewarded by God's acceptance and approval. 'I know that thou fearest God,' not meaning that He learned the heart by the conduct, but that, on occasion of the conduct, He

breathes into the obedient heart that calm consciousness of its service as recognised and accepted by Him, which is the highest reward that His friend can know. ‘To be well pleasing to Him’ is our noblest aim, which, cherished, makes sacrifice sweet, and all difficult things easy. ‘Nor know we anything more fair Than is the smile upon Thy face.’

Again, faith is rewarded by a deeper insight into God’s will. Much has been said about the sacrifice of Isaac in its bearing upon the custom of human sacrifice. We do not believe that Abraham was led to his act by a mistaken idea, borrowed from surrounding idolatries. His position as the sole monotheist amid these, the absence of evidence that human sacrifice was practised then among his neighbours, and, above all, the fact of the divine approval of his intention, forbid our acceptance of that theory. Nor can we regard the condemnation of such sacrifices as the main object of the incident. But no doubt an incidental result, and, we may perhaps say, a subsidiary purpose of it, was to stamp all such hideous usages with the brand of God’s displeasure. The mode of thought which led to them was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Old World, and corresponded to a true conception of the needs of humanity. The dark sense of sin, the conviction that it required expiation, and that procurable only by death, drove men to these horrid rites. And that ram, caught in the thicket, thorn-crowned and substituted for the human victim, taught Abraham and his sons that God appointed and provided a lamb for an offering. It was a lesson won by faith. Nor need we hesitate to see some dim forecast of the great Substitute whom God provided, who bears the sins of the world.

Again, faith is rewarded by receiving back the surrendered blessing, made more precious because it has been laid on the altar. How strange and solemn must have been the joy with which these two looked in each other’s faces! What thankful wonder must have filled Abraham’s heart as he loosed the cord that had bound his son! It would be many days before the thrill of gratitude died away, and the possession of his son seemed to Abraham, or that of life seemed to Isaac, a common thing. He was doubly now a child of wonder, born by miracle, delivered by miracle. So is it ever. God gives us back our sacrifices, tinged with a new beauty, and purified from earthly alloy.

We never know how sweet our blessings are till we have yielded them to Him. ‘There is no man that hath left’ anything or any person for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s who will not ‘receive a hundred-fold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.’

Lastly, Abraham was rewarded by being made a faint adumbration, for all time, of the yet more wondrous and awful love of the divine Father, who, for our sakes, has surrendered His only-begotten Son, whom He loved. Paul quotes the very words of this chapter when he says: ‘He that *spared* not His *own Son*, but delivered Him up for us all.’ Such thoughts carry us into dim regions, in which, perhaps, silence is best. Did some shadow of loss and pain pass over the divine all-sufficiency and joy, when He sent His Son? Was the unresisting innocence of the son a far-off likeness of the willing eagerness of the sinless Sufferer who chose to die? Was the resolved surrender of the father a faint prelude of the deep divine love which gave His only Son for us? Shall we not say, ‘Now I know that Thou lovest me, because Thou hast not withheld Thy Son, Thine only Son, from me’? Shall we not recognise this as the crown of Abraham’s reward, that his act of surrender of his dearest to God, his Friend, has been glorified by being made the mirror of God’s unspeakable gift of His Son to us, His enemies?

The Crowning Test And Triumph Of Faith

II

The first words of this lesson give the keynote for its meaning. ‘God did prove Abraham’; the strange command was a test of his faith. In recent times the incident has been regarded chiefly as embodying a protest against child-sacrifices, and no doubt that is part of its intention, and their condemnation was part of its effect, but the other is the principal thing. Abraham, as the ‘Father of the Faithful,’ has his faith tested by a series of events from his setting out from Haran, and they culminate in this sharpest of all, the command to slay his son. The life of faith is ever a life of testing, and very often the fire that tries increases in heat as life advances. The worst conflicts are not always at the beginning of the war.

Our best way of knowing ourselves is to observe our own conduct, especially when it is hard to do nobly. We may easily cheat ourselves about what is the basis and ruling motive of our lives, but our actions will show it us. God does not ‘test’ us as if He did not know what was gold and what base metal, but the proving is meant to make clear to others and ourselves what is the worth and strength of our religion. The test is also a means of increasing the faith which it demonstrates, so that the exhortation to ‘count it all joy’ to have faith tried is no overstrained counsel of perfection.

The narrative plainly declares that the command to sacrifice his son was to Abraham unmistakably divine. The explanation that Abraham, living beside peoples who practised child-sacrifice, heard but the voice of his own conscience asking, ‘Canst thou do for Jehovah what these do for Moloch?’ does not correspond to the record. No doubt God does speak through conscience; but what sent Abraham on his terrible journey was a command which he knew did not spring up within, but came to him from above. We may believe or disbelieve the possibility or the actuality of such direct and distinguishable commands from God, but we do not face the facts of this narrative unless we recognise that it asserts that God made His will known to Abraham, and that Abraham knew that it was God’s will, not his own thought.

But is it conceivable that God should ever bid a man commit a crime? To the question put in that bald way, of course there can be but one answer, No. But several conditions have to be taken into account. First, it is conceivable that God should test a man’s willingness to surrender what is most precious to him, and what all his hopes are fixed on; and this command was given with the purpose that it should not be obeyed in fact, if the willingness to obey it was proved. Again, the stage of development of the moral sense at which Abraham stood has to be remembered. The child-sacrifices around him were not regarded as crimes, but as worship, and, while his affections were the same as ours, and his father’s heart was wrung, to slay Isaac did not present itself to him as a crime in the way in which it does so to us. God deals with men on the moral and spiritual level to which they have attained, and, by descending to it, raises them higher.

The purpose of the command was to test faith, even more than to test whether earthly love or heavenly obedience were the stronger. There is a beautiful and instructive climax in the designations of Isaac in verse 2, where four times he is referred to, ‘thy son, thine only son,’ in whom all the hopes of fulfilment of the divine promise were concentrated, so that, if this fruit from the aged tree were cut off, no other could ever grow; ‘whom thou lovest,’—there the sharp point pierces the father’s heart; ‘even Isaac,’ in which name all the ties that knit him to Abraham are gathered up. Each word heightens the greatness of the sacrifice demanded, and is a fresh thrust of the dagger into Abraham’s very life. Each suggests a reason for not

slaying Isaac, which sense might plead. God does not hide the painfulness of surrender from us. The more precious the treasure is, the more are we bound to lay it on the altar. But it was Abraham's faith even more than his love that was tested. The Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold on this as the main element in the trial, that he who 'had received the promises' was called to do what seemed to blast all hope of their being fulfilled. What a cruel position to have God's command and God's promise apparently in diametrical opposition! But faith loosened even that seemingly inextricable tangle of contradiction, and felt that to obey was for man, and to keep His promise was for God. If we do our duty, He will see to the consequences. 'Tis mine to obey; 'tis His to provide.'

Nothing in literature is more tenderly touched or more truly imagined than that long, torturing journey—Abraham silent, Isaac silently wondering, the servants silently following. And, like a flash, at last 'the place' was seen afar off. How calmly Abraham speaks to the two followers, mastering his heart's throbbing even then! 'We will worship, and come again to you'—was that a 'pious fraud' or did it not rather indicate that a ray of hope, like pale light from a shrouded sun, shone for him? He 'accounted that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.' Somehow, he knew not how, Isaac slain was still to live and inherit the promises. Anything was possible, but that God's word should fail was impossible. That picture of the father and son alone, the one bearing the wood, the other the fire and the knife, exchanging no word but once, when the innocent wonder of Isaac's question must have shaken Abraham's steadfastness, and made it hard for him to steady his voice to answer, touches the deepest springs of pity and pathetic sublimity. But the answer is in the same spirit as that to the servants, and indicates the same hope. 'God will provide Himself a lamb, my son.' He does not know definitely what he expects; he is ready to slay Isaac, but his faith is not quenched, though the end seems so inevitable and near. Faith was never more sharply tested, and never more triumphantly stood the test.

The divine solution of the riddle was kept back till the last moment, as it usually is. The place is slowly reached, the hill slowly climbed, the altar built, the unresisting Isaac bound (with what deep thoughts in each, who can tell?), the steady hand holding the glittering knife lifted—a moment more and it will be red with heart's blood, and not till then does God speak. It is ever so. The trial has 'its perfect work.' Faith is led to the edge of the precipice, one step farther and all is over. Then God speaks, all but just too late, and yet 'right early.' The willingness to make the sacrifice is tested to the utmost, and being proved, the sacrifice is not required.

Abraham had said to Isaac, 'God will provide a lamb,' and the word 'provide' is that which appears in the name he gave to the place—Jehovah-*jireh*. The name, then, commemorated, not the servant's faith but the Lord's mercy, and the spirit of it was embodied in what became a popular saying, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' If faith dwells there, its surrenders will be richly rewarded. How much more dear was Isaac to Abraham as they journeyed back to Beersheba! And whatever we lay on God's altar comes back a 'hundred-fold more in this life,' and brings in the world to come life everlasting.

Jehovah-Jireh

'And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; (that is, The Lord will provide).'- GENESIS xxii. 14.

As these two, Abraham and Isaac, were travelling up the hill, the son bearing the wood, and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife, the boy said: 'Where is the lamb?' and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.' When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him, and he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose in his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial, but everything of God's provision—'The Lord will see,' or 'The Lord will provide.'

1. The words have become proverbial and threadbare as a commonplace of Christian feeling. But it may be worth our while to ask for a moment what it was exactly that Abraham expected the Lord to provide. We generally use the expression in reference to outward things, and see in it the assurance that we shall not be left without the supply of the necessities for which, because God has made us to feel them, He has bound Himself to make provision. And most blessedly true is that application of them, and many a Christian heart in days of famine has been satisfied with the promise, when the bread that was given has been scant.

But there is a meaning deeper than that in the words. It is true, thank God! that we may cast all our anxiety about all outward things upon Him, in the assurance that He who feeds the ravens will feed us, and that if lilies can blossom into beauty without care, we shall be held by our Father of more value than these. But there is a deeper meaning in the provision spoken of here. What was it that God provided for Abraham? What is it that God provides for us? A way to discharge the arduous duties which, when they are commanded, seem all but impossible for us, and which, the nearer we come to them, look the more dreadful and seem the more impossible. And yet, when the heart has yielded itself in obedience, and we are ready to do the thing that is enjoined, there opens up before us a possibility provided by God, and strength comes to us equal to our day, and some unexpected gift is put into our hand, which enables us to do the thing of which Nature said: 'My heart will break before I can do it'; and in regard to which even Grace doubted whether it was possible for us to carry it through. If our hearts are set in obedience to the command, the farther we go on the path of obedience, the easier the command will appear, and to try to do it is to ensure that God will help us to do it.

This is the main provision that God makes, and it is the highest provision that He can make. For there is nothing in this life that we need so much as to do the will of our Father in heaven. All outward wants are poor compared with that. The one thing worth living for, the one thing which being secured we are blessed, and being missed we are miserable, is compliance in heart with the commandment of our Father; and that compliance wrought out in life. So, of all gifts that He bestows upon us, and of all the abundant provision out of His rich storehouses, is not this the best, that we are made ready for any required service? When we get to the place we shall find some lamb 'caught in the thicket by its horns'; and heaven itself will supply what is needful for our burnt offering.

And then there is another thought here which, though we cannot certainly say it was in the speaker's mind, is distinctly in the historian's intention, 'The Lord will provide.' Provide what? The lamb for the burnt offering which He has commanded. It seems probable that that bare mountain-top which Abraham saw from afar, and named Jehovah-jireh, was the

mountain-top on which afterwards the Temple was built. And perhaps the wood was piled for the altar, on which Abraham was called to lay his only son, on that very piece of primitive rock which still stands visible, though Temple and altar have long since gone; and which for many a day was the place of the altar on which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. It is no mere forcing of Christian meanings on to old stories, but the discerning of that prophetic and spiritual element which God has impressed upon these histories of the past, especially in all their climaxes and crises, when we see in the fact that God provided the ram which became the appointed sacrifice, through which Isaac's life was preserved, a dim adumbration of the great truth that the only Sacrifice which God accepts for the world's sin is the Sacrifice which He Himself has provided.

This is the deepest meaning of all the sacrificial worship, as of Israel so of heathen nations—God Himself will provide a Lamb. The world had built altars, and Israel, by divine appointment, had its altar too. All these express the want which none of them can satisfy. They show that man needed a Sacrifice; and that Sacrifice God has provided. He asked from Abraham less than He gives to us. Abraham's devotion was sealed and certified because he did not withhold his son, his only son, from God. And God's love is sealed because He hath not withheld His only-begotten Son from us.

So this name that came from Abraham's grateful and wondering lips contains a truth which holds true in all regions of our wants. On the lowest level, the outward supply of outward needs; on a higher, the means of discharging hard duties and a path through sharp trials; and, on the highest of all, the spotless sacrifice which alone avails for the world's sins—these are the things which God provides.

2. So, note again on what conditions He provides them.

The incident and the name became the occasion of a proverb, as the historian tells us, which survived down to the period of his writing, and probably long after, when men were accustomed to say, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' The provision of all sorts that we need has certain conditions as to the when and the where of the persons to whom it shall be granted. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' If we wish to have our outward needs supplied, our outward weaknesses strengthened, power and energy sufficient for duty, wisdom for perplexity, a share in the Sacrifice which taketh away the sins of the world, we receive them all on the condition that we are found in the place where all God's provision is treasured. If a man chooses to sit outside the baker's shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a man will not go into the bank, his pockets will be empty, though there may be bursting coffers there to which he has a right. And if we will not ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place by simple faith, and by true communion of heart and life, God's amplest provision is nought to us; and we are empty in the midst of affluence. Get near to God if you would partake of what He has prepared. Live in fellowship with Him by simple love, and often meditate on Him, if you would drink in of His fulness. And be sure of this, that howsoever within His house the stores are heaped and the treasury full, you will have neither part nor lot in the matter, unless you are children of the house. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' And round it there is a waste wilderness of famine and of death.

Further, note *when* the provision is realised.

When the man is standing with the knife in his hand, and next minute it will be red with the son's blood—then the call comes: 'Abraham!' and then he sees the ram caught in the thicket. There had been a long weary journey from their home away down in the dry, sunny south, a long tramp over the rough hills, a toilsome climb, with a breaking heart in the father's bosom, and a dim foreboding gradually stealing on the child's spirit. But there was no sign of respite

or of deliverance. Slowly he piles together the wood, and yet no sign. Slowly he binds his boy, and lays him on it, and still no sign. Slowly, reluctantly, and yet resolvedly, he unsheathes the knife, and yet no sign. He lifts his hand, and then it comes.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven, before His hand is put out to help us. Such is the law, not only because the next moment is always necessarily dark, nor because God will deal with us in any arbitrary fashion, and play with our fears, but because it is best for us that we should be forced to desperation, and out of desperation should 'pluck the flower, safety.' It is best for us that we should be brought to say, 'My foot slippeth!' and then, just as our toes are sliding upon the glacier, the help comes and 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'The Lord is her helper, and that right early.' When He delays, it is not to trifle with us, but to do us good by the sense of need, as well as by the experience of deliverance. At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

So 'it is provided' for the people that quietly and persistently tread the path of duty, and go wherever His hand leads them, without asking anything about where it does lead. The condition of the provision is our obedience of heart and will. To Abraham doing what he was commanded, though his heart was breaking as he did it, the help was granted—as it always will be.

3. And so, lastly, note what we are to do with the provision when we get it.

Abraham christened the anonymous mountain-top, not by a name that reminded him or others of his trial, but by a name that proclaimed God's deliverance. He did not say anything about his agony or about his obedience. God spoke about that, not Abraham. He did not want these to be remembered, but what he desired to hand on to later generations was what God had done for him. Oh! dear friends, is that the way in which we look back upon life? Many a bare, bald mountain-top in your career and mine we have got our names for. Are they names that commemorate our sufferings or God's blessings? When we look back on the past what do we see? Times of trial or times of deliverance? Which side of the wave do we choose to look at, the one that is smitten by the sunshine or the one that is all black and purple in the shadow? The sea looked at from the one side will be all a sunny path, and from the other dark as chaos. Let us name the heights that lie behind us, visible to memory, by names that commemorate, not the troubles that we had on them, but the deliverances that on them we received from God.

This name enshrines the duty of commemoration—ay! and the duty of expectation. 'The Lord will provide.' How do you know that, Abraham? and his answer is, 'Because the Lord did provide.' That is a shaky kind of argument if we use it about one another. Our resources may give out, our patience may weary. If it is a storehouse that we have to go to, all the corn that is treasured in it will be eaten up some day; but if it is to some boundless plain that grows it that we go, then we can be sure that there will be a harvest next year as there has been a harvest last. And so we have to think of God, not as a storehouse, but as the soil from which there comes forth, year by year and generation after generation, the same crop of rich blessings for the needs and the hungers of every soul. If we have to draw from reservoirs we cannot say, 'I have gone with my pitcher to the well six times, and I shall get it filled at the seventh.' It is more probable that we shall have to say, 'I have gone so often that I durst not go any more'; but if we have to go, not to a well, but to a fountain, then the oftener we go, the surer we become that its crystal cool waters will always be ready for us. 'Thou hast been with me in six troubles; and in seven thou wilt not forsake me,' is a bad conclusion to draw about one another; but it is the right conclusion to draw about God.

And so, as we look back upon our past lives, and see many a peak gleaming in the magic light of memory, let us name them all by names that will throw a radiance of hope on the unknown and un-climbed difficulties before us, and say, as the patriarch did when he went down from the mount of his trial and deliverance, ‘The Lord will provide.’

Guidance In The Way

'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'—GENESIS xxiv. 27.

So said Abraham's anonymous servant when telling how he had found Rebekah at the well, and known her to be the destined bride of his master's servant. There is no more beautiful page, even amongst the many lovely ones in these ancient stories, than this domestic idyll of the mission of the faithful servant from far Canaan across the desert. The homely test by which he would determine that the maiden should be pointed out to him, the glimpse of old-world ways at the well, the gracious courtesy of the fair damsel, and the simple devoutness of the speaker, who recognises in what to others were trivial commonplaces God's guidance to the end which He had appointed, his recognition of the divine hand moving beneath all the nothings and littlenesses of daily life—may teach us much.

1. The first thing that these words seem to me to suggest is the conditions under which we may be sure that God leads—'I being in the way.'

Now, of course, some of you may know that the words of our text are, by the Revised Version and others, rendered so as to obliterate the clause telling where the speaker was when the Lord led him, and to make the whole a continuous expression of the one fact—'As for me, the Lord hath led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren.' The literal rendering is, 'I in the way, Jehovah led me.' No doubt the Hebrew idiom admits of the 'I' being thus emphatically premised, and then repeated as 'me' after the verb, and possibly no more is to be made of the words than that. But the fuller and more impressive meaning is possible, and I venture to retain it, and to see in it the expression of the truth that it is when we are 'in the way' that God will certainly lead us.

So that suggests, first, how the people that have any right to expect any kind of guidance from God are those who have their feet upon a path which conscience approves. Many men run into all manner of perplexities by their own folly and self-will, and never ask whether their acts are right or wrong, wise or foolish, until they begin to taste the bitter consequences. Then they cry to God to help them, and think themselves very religious because they do. That is not the way to get God's help. Such folk are like Italian brigands who had an image of the Virgin in their hats, and sometimes had the Pope's commission in their pockets, and therefore went out to murder and ravish, in sure and certain hope of God's favour and protection.

But when we are 'in the way,' and know that we are doing what we ought to do, and conscience says, 'Go on; never mind what stands against you,' it is then, and only then, that we have a right to be sure that the Lord will lead us. Otherwise, the best thing that can happen to us is that the Lord should thwart us when we are on the wrong road. Resistance, indeed, may be guidance; and it is often God's manner of setting our feet in the way of His steps. We have no claim on Him for guidance, indeed, unless we have submitted ourselves to His commandments; yet His mercies go beyond our claims. Just as the obedient child gets guidance, so the petulant and disobedient child gets resistance, which is guidance too. The angel of the Lord stands in front of Balaam, amongst the vines, though the seer sometimes does not see, and blocks the path for him, and hedges up the way with his flaming sword. Only, if we would have the sweet, gracious, companionable guidance of our Lord, let us be sure, to begin with, that we are 'in the way,' and not in any of the bypaths into which arrogance and self-will and fleshly desires and the like are only too apt to divert our feet.

Another consideration suggested by these words, ‘I being in the way,’ is that if we expect guidance we must diligently do present duty. We are led, thank God, by one step at a time. He does with His child, whom He is teaching to read His will, as we sometimes do with our children, when we are occupied in teaching them their first book-learning: we cover the page up, all but the line that we want them to concentrate their eyes upon; and then, when they have got to the end of that, slip the hand down, low enough to allow the next line to come into view. So often God does with us. One thing at a time is enough for the little brains. And this is the condition of mortal life, for the most part—though there do come rare exceptions. Not that we have to look a long way ahead, and forecast what we shall do this time ten years off, or to make decisions that involve a distant future—except once or twice in a lifetime—but that we have to settle what is to be done in this flying minute, and in the one adjacent to it. ‘Do the duty that lies nearest thee,’ and the remoter duty will become clearer. There is nothing that has more power to make a man’s path plain before his feet than that he should concentrate his better self on the manful and complete discharge of the present moment’s service. And, on the other hand, there is nothing that will so fill our sky with mists, and blur the marks of the faint track through the moor, as present negligence, or still more, present sin. Iron in a ship’s hull makes the magnet tremble, and point away from its true source. He that has complied with evil to-day is the less capable of discerning duty to-morrow; and he that does all the duty that he knows will thereby increase the probability that he will know all that he needs. ‘If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching’—enough, at any rate, to direct his steps.

But there is another lesson still in the words; and that is that, if we are to be guided, we must see to it that we expect and obey the guidance.

This servant of Abraham’s, with a very imperfect knowledge of the divine will, had, when he set out on his road, prayed very earnestly that God would lead him. He had ventured to prescribe a certain token, naïve in its simplicity: ‘If the girl drops her pitcher, and gives us drink gladly, and does not grudge to fill the troughs for the cattle, that will show that she is of a good sort, and will make the right wife for Isaac.’ He had prayed thus, and he was ready to accept whomsoever God so designated. He had not made up his mind, ‘Bethuel’s daughter is a relation of my master’s, and so she will be a suitable wife for his son.’ He left it all with God, and then he went straight on his road, and was perfectly sure that he would get the guidance that he had sought. And when it came the good man bowed and obeyed.

Now there is a picture for us all. There are many people that say, ‘O Lord! guide me.’ when all the while they mean, ‘Let me guide Thee.’ They are perfectly willing to accept the faintest and moat questionable indications that may seem to point down the road where their inclination drives them, and like Lord Nelson at Copenhagen, will put the telescope to the blind eye when the flag is flying at the admiral’s peak, signalling ‘Come out of action,’ because they are determined to stay where they are.

Do not let us forget that the first condition of securing real guidance in our daily life is to ask it, and that the next is to look for it, and that a third is to be quite willing to accept it, whether the finger points down the broad road that we would like to go upon, or through some tangled path amongst the brushwood that we would fain avoid. And if you and I, dear brethren, in the littlenesses of our daily life, do fulfil these conditions, the heavens will crumble, and earth will melt, before God will leave His child untaught in the way in which he should go.

Only, let us be patient. Do you remember what Joshua said to the Israelites? ‘Let there be a good space of vacant ground between you and the guiding ark, that you may know by which way you ought to go.’ When men precipitately press on the heels of half-disclosed providences, they are uncommonly apt to mistake the road. We must wait till we are sure of

God's will before we try to do it. If we are not sure of what He would have us do, then, for the present, He would have us do nothing until He speaks. 'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'

2. Now a word about the manner of the guidance.

There was no miracle, no supernatural voice, no pillar of cloud or fire, no hovering glory round the head of the village maiden. All the indications were perfectly natural and trivial. A thousand girls had gone to the wells that day all about Haran and done the very same things that Rebekah did. But the devout man who had prayed for guidance, and was sure that he was getting it, was guided by her most simple, commonplace act; and that is how we are usually to be guided. God leaves a great deal to our common sense. His way of speaking to common sense is by very common things. If any of us fancy that some glow at the heart, some sudden flash as of inspiration, is the test of a divine commandment, we have yet to learn the full meaning of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. For that Incarnation, amongst all its other mighty influences, hallowed the commonest things of life and turned them into ministers of God's purposes. So remember, God's guidance may come to you through so insignificant a girl as Rebekah. It may come to you through as commonplace an incident as tipping the water of a spring out of an earthen pot into a stone trough. None the less is it God's guidance; and what we want is the eye to see it. He will guide us by very common indications of His providence.

3. And now, the last thing that I would say a word about is the realisation in daily life of this guidance as a plain actual fact.

This anonymous trusted servant of Abraham's, whose name we should like to have known, had a mere segment of the full orb of the knowledge of God that shines upon our path. With true Oriental freedom to speak about the deepest matters, he was not afraid nor ashamed to stand before Bethuel and Laban, and all these other strangers that crowded round the doorway, and say, 'The Lord led me.' There is a pattern for some of us tongue-tied, shamefaced Christians. Whatever may be the truth about the degradations of which heathen religion is full, there is a great deal in heathen religion that ought to teach, and does teach, Christendom a lesson, as to willingness to recognise and to confess God's working in daily life. It may be very superficial; it may be very little connected with high morality; but so far as it goes it is a thousand-fold better than the dumb religion that characterises such hosts of Christian people.

A realisation of the divine guidance is the talisman that makes crooked things straight and rough places plain; that brings peace and calmness into our hearts, amid all changes, losses, and sorrows. If we hold fast by that faith, it will interpret for us the mysterious in the providences concerning our own lives, and will help us to feel that, as I said, resistance to our progress may be true guidance, and thwarting our wills may be our highest good. For the road which we travel should, in all its turnings, lead us to God; and whatsoever guides us to Him is only and always blessed.

May I, for one moment, turn these words in another direction, and remind you, dear friends, of how the sublimest application of them is still to be realised? As a climber on a mountain-peak may look down the vale up which he had painfully toiled for many days and see the dusty path lying, like a sinuous snake, down all along it, so, when we get up yonder, 'Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee these many years in the wilderness,' and shalt see the green pastures and the still waters, valleys of the shadow of death, and burning roads with sharp flints, which have all brought thee hither at last. We shall know then what we believe now, that the Lord does indeed go before them who desire to follow Him, and that the God of Israel is their reward. Then we shall say with deepened

thankfulness, deepened by complete understanding of life here, seen in the light of its attained end, ‘I being in the way, the Lord led me,’ and ‘I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.’

The Death Of Abraham

'Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.'—GENESIS xxv. 8.

'Full of years' does not seem to me to be a mere synonym for longevity. That would be an intolerable tautology, for we should then have the same thing said three times over—'an old man,' 'in a good old age,' 'full of years.' There must be some other idea than that in the words. If you notice that the expression is by no means a usual one, that it is only applied to one or two of the Old Testament characters, and those selected characters, I think you will see that there must be some other significance in it than merely to point to length of days.

It may be well to note the instances. In addition to our text, we find it employed, first, in reference to Isaac, in Genesis xxxv. 29, where the words are repeated almost *verbatim*. That calm, contemplative life, so unlike the active, varied career of his father, also attained to this blessing at its close. Then we find that the stormy and adventurous course of the great king David, with its wonderful alternations both of moral character and of fortune, is represented as being closed at last with this tranquil evening glory: 'He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.' Once more we read of the great high priest Jehoiada, whose history had been crowded with peril, change, brave resistance, and strenuous effort, that with all the storms behind him he died at last, 'full of days.' The only other instance of the occurrence of the phrase is at the close of the book of Job, the typical record of the good man suffering, and of the abundant compensations given by a loving God. The fair picture of returning prosperity and family joy, like the calm morning sunshine after a night of storm and wreck, with which that wonderful book ends, has this for its last touch, evidently intended to deepen the impression of peace which is breathed over it all: 'So Job died, being old and full of days.' These are all the instances of the occurrence of this phrase, and I think we may fairly say that in all it is meant to suggest not merely length of days, but some characteristic of the long life over and above its mere length. We shall, I think, understand its meaning a little better if we make a very slight and entirely warranted change, and instead of reading '*full* of years,' read '*satisfied* with years.' The men were satisfied with life; having exhausted its possibilities, having drunk a full draught, having nothing more left to wish for. The words point to a calm close, with all desires gratified, with hot wishes stilled, with no desperate clinging to life, but a willingness to let it go, because all which it could give had been attained.

So much for one of the remarkable expressions in this verse. There is another, 'He was gathered to his people,' of which we shall have more to say presently. Enough for the present to note the peculiarity, and to suggest that it seems to contain some dim hint of a future life, and some glimmer of some of the profoundest thoughts about it.

We have two main things to consider.

1. The tranquil close of a life.

It is possible, then, at the end of life to feel that it has satisfied one's wishes. Whether it does or no will depend mostly on ourselves, and very slightly on our circumstances. Length of days, competence, health, and friends are important; but neither these nor any other externals will make the difference between a life which, in the retrospect, will seem to have been sufficient for our desires, and one which leaves a hunger in the heart. It is possible for us to make our lives of such a sort, that whether they run on to the apparent maturity of old age, or

whether they are cut short in the midst of our days, we may rise from the table feeling that it has satisfied our desires, met our anticipation, and been all very good.

Possibly, that is not the way in which most of us look at life. That is not the way in which a great many of us seem to think that it is an eminent part of Christian and religious character to look at life. But it is the way in which the highest type of devotion and the truest goodness always look at it. There are people, old and young, who, whenever they look back, whether it be over a long tract of years or over a short one, have nothing to say about it except: 'Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit'; a retrospect of weary disappointments and thwarted plans.

How different with some of us the forward and the backward look! Are there not some listening to me, whose past is so dark that it flings black shadows over their future, and who can only cherish hopes for to-morrow, by giving the lie to and forgetting the whole of their yesterdays? It is hard to paint the regions before us like 'the Garden of the Lord,' when we know that the locusts of our own godless desires have made all the land behind us desolate. If your past has been a selfish past, a godless past, in which passion, inclination, whim, anything but conscience and Christ have ruled, your remembrances can scarcely be tranquil; nor your hopes bright. If you have only 'prospects drear,' when you 'backward cast your eye,' it is not wonderful if 'forwards though you cannot see,' you will 'guess and fear.' Such lives, when they come towards an end, are wont to be full of querulous discontent and bitterness. We have all seen godless old men cynical and sour, pleased with nothing, grumbling, or feebly complaining, about everything, dissatisfied with all which life has thus far yielded them, and yet clinging desperately to it, and afraid to go.

Put by the side of such an end this calm picture of the old man going down into his grave, and looking back over all those long days since he came away from his father's house, and became a pilgrim and a stranger. How all the hot anxieties, desires, occupations, of youth have quieted themselves down! How far away now seem the warlike days when he fought the invading kings! How far away the heaviness of heart when he journeyed to Mount Moriah with his boy, and whetted the knife to slay his son! His love had all been buried in Sarah's grave. He has been a lonely man for many years; and yet he looks back, as God looked back over His creative week, and feels that all has been good. 'It was all for the best; the great procession of my life has been ordered from the beginning to its end, by the Hand that shapes beauty everywhere, and has made all things blessed and sweet. I have drunk a full draught; I have had enough; I bless the Giver of the feast, and push my chair back; and get up and go away.' He died an old man, and satisfied with his life.

Ay! And what a contrast that makes, dear friends, to another set of people. There is nothing more miserable than to see a man, as his years go by, gripping harder and tighter at this poor, fleeting world that is slipping away from him; nothing sadder than to see how, as opportunities and capacities for the enjoyment of life dwindle, and dwindle, and dwindle, people become almost fierce in the desire to keep it. Why, you can see on the face of many an old man and woman a hungry discontent, that has not come from the mere wrinkles of old age or care; an eager acquisitiveness looking out of the dim old eyes, tragical and awful. It is sad to see a man, as the world goes from him, grasping at its skirts as a beggar does at the retreating passer-by that refuses him an alms. Are there not some of us who feel that this is our case, that the less we have before us of life here on earth, the more eagerly we grasp at the little which still remains; trying to get some last drops out of the broken cistern which we know can hold no water? How different this blessed acquiescence in the fleeting away of the fleeting; and this contented satisfaction with the portion that has been given him, which this man had who died willingly, being satisfied with life!

Sometimes, too, there is satiety—weariness of life which is not satisfaction, though it looks like it. Its language is: 'Man delights me not; nor woman neither. I am tired of it all.' Those who feel thus sit at the table without an appetite. They think that they have seen to the bottom of everything, and they have found everything a cheat. They expect nothing new under the sun; that which is to be hath already been, and it is all vanity and striving after the wind. They are at once satiated and dissatisfied. Nothing keeps the power to charm.

How different from all this is the temper expressed in this text, rightly understood! Abraham had had a richly varied life. It had brought him all he wished. He has drunk a full draught, and needs no more. He is satisfied, but that does not mean loss of interest in present duties, occupations, or enjoyments. It is possible to keep ourselves fully alive to all these till the end, and to preserve something of the keen edge of youth even in old age, by the magic of communion with God, purity of conduct, and a habitual contemplation of all events as sent by our Father. When Paul felt himself very near his end, he yet had interest enough in common things to tell Timothy all about their mutual friends' occupations, and to wish to have his books and parchments.

So, calmly, satisfied and yet not sickened, keenly appreciating all the good and pleasantness of life, and yet quite willing to let it go, Abraham died. So may it be with us too, if we will, no matter what the duration or the externals of our life. If we too are his children by faith, we shall be 'blessed with faithful Abraham.' And I beseech you to ask yourselves whether the course of your life is such as that, if at this moment God's great knife were to come down and cut it in two, you would be able to say, 'Well! I have had enough, and now contentedly I go.'

Again, it is possible at the end of life to feel that it is complete, because the days have accomplished for us the highest purpose of life. Scaffoldings are for buildings, and the moments and days and years of our earthly lives are scaffolding. What are you building inside the scaffolding, brother? What kind of a structure will be disclosed when the scaffolding is knocked away? What is the end for which days and years are given? That they may give us what eternity cannot take away—a character built upon the love of God in Christ, and moulded into His likeness. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' Has your life helped you to do that? If it has, though you be but a child, you are full of years; if it has not, though your hair be whitened with the snows of the nineties, you are yet incomplete and immature. The great end of life is to make us like Christ, and pleasing to Christ. If life has done that for us, we have got the best out of it, and our life is completed, whatever may be the number of the days. Quality, not quantity, is the thing that determines the perfectness of a life. And like as in northern lands, where there is only a week or two from the melting of the snow to the cutting of the hay, the whole harvest of a life may be gathered in a very little space, and all be done which is needed to make the life complete. Has your life this completeness? Can you be 'satisfied' with it, because the river of the flowing hours has borne down some grains of gold amidst the mass of mud, and, notwithstanding many sins and failures, you have thus far fulfilled the end of your being, that you are in some measure trusting and serving the Lord Jesus Christ?

Again, it is possible, at the end of life, to be *willing* to go as satisfied.

Most men cling to life in grim desperation, like a climber to a cliff giving way, or a drowning man clutching at any straw. How beautiful the contrast of the placid, tranquil acquiescence expressed in that phrase of our text! No doubt there will always be the shrinking of the bodily nature from death. But that may be overcome. There is no passion so weak but in some case it has 'mated and mastered the fear of death,' and it is possible for us all to come to that temper in which we shall be ready for either fortune, to live and serve Him here, or to die and enjoy Him yonder. Or, to return to an earlier illustration, it is possible to be like a man sitting at

table, who has had his meal, and is quite contented to stay on there, restful and cheerful, but is not unwilling to put back his chair, to get up and to go away, thanking the Giver for what he has received.

Ah! that is the way to face the end, dear brethren, and how is it to be done? Such a temper need not be the exclusive possession of the old. It may belong to us at all stages of life. How is it won? By a life of devout communion with God. The secret of it lies in obeying the commandment and realising the truth which Abraham realised and obeyed: 'I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward.' That is to say, a simple communion with God, realising His presence and feeling that He is near, will sweeten disappointment, will draw from it its hidden blessedness, will make us victors over its pains and its woes. Such a faith will make it possible to look back and see only blessing; to look forward and see a great light of hope burning in the darkness. Such a faith will check weariness, avert satiety, promote satisfaction, and will help us to feel that life and the great hereafter are but the outer and inner mansions of the Father's house, and death the short though dark corridor between. So we shall be ready for life or for death.

2. Now I must turn to consider more briefly the glimpse of the joyful society beyond, which is given us in that other remarkable expression of our text: 'He was gathered to his people'

That phrase is only used in the earlier Old Testament books, and there only in reference to a few persons. It is used of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron, and once (Judges ii. 10) of a whole generation. If you will weigh the words, I think you will see that there is in them a dim intimation of something beyond this present life.

'He was gathered to his people' is not the same thing as 'He died,' for, in the earlier part of the verse, we read, 'Abraham gave up the ghost and died … and was gathered to his people.' It is not the same thing as being buried. For we read in the following verse: 'And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre.' It is then the equivalent neither of death nor of burial. It conveys dimly and veiledly that Abraham was buried, and yet that was not all that happened to him. He was buried, but also 'he was gathered to his people.' Why! his own 'people' were buried in Mesopotamia, and his grave was far away from theirs. What is the meaning of the expression? Who were the people he was gathered to? In death or in burial, 'the dust returns to the earth as it was.' What was it that was gathered to his people?

Dimly, vaguely, veiledly, but unmistakably, as it seems to me, is here expressed at least a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham that was not there in what 'his sons Isaac and Ishmael laid in the cave at Machpelah,' but was somewhere else and was for ever. That is the first thing hinted at here—the continuance of the personal being after death.

Is there anything more? I think there is. Now, remember, Abraham's whole life was shaped by that commandment, 'Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy kindred, and from thy country.' He never dwelt with his kindred; all his days he was a pilgrim and a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land. And though he was living in the midst of a civilisation which possessed great cities whose walls reached to heaven, he pitched his tent beneath the terebinth tree at Mamre, and would have nothing to do with the order of things around him, but remained an exotic, a waif, an outcast in the midst of Canaan all his life. Why? Because he 'looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' And now he has gone to it, he is gathered to his people. The life of isolation is over, the true social life is begun. He is no longer separated from those around him, or flung amidst those that are

uncongenial to him. ‘He is gathered to his people’; he dwells with his own tribe; he is at home; he is in the city.

And so, brethren, life for every Christian man must be lonely. After all communion we dwell as upon islands dotted over a great archipelago, each upon his little rock, with the sea dashing between us; but the time comes when, if our hearts are set upon that great Lord, whose presence makes us one, there shall be no more sea, and all the isolated rocks shall be parts of a great continent. Death sets the solitary in families. We are here like travellers plodding lonely through the night and the storm, but soon to cross the threshold into the lighted hall, full of friends.

If we cultivate that sense of detachment from the present, and of having our true affinities in the unseen, if we dwell here as strangers because our citizenship is in heaven, then death will not drag us away from our associates, nor hunt us into a lonely land, but will bring us where closer bonds shall knit the ‘sweet societies’ together, and the sheep shall couch close by one another, because all are gathered round the one shepherd. Then many a broken tie shall be rewoven, and the solitary wanderer meet again the dear ones whom he had ‘loved long since, and lost awhile.’

Further, the expressions suggest that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. ‘He was gathered to his people,’ whom he was like and who were like him; the people with whom he had sympathy, the people whose lives were shaped after the fashion of his own.

Men will be sorted there. Gravitation will come into play undisturbed; and the pebbles will be ranged according to their weights on the great shore where the sea has cast them up, as they are upon Chesil beach, down there in the English Channel, and many another coast besides; all the big ones together and sized off to the smaller ones, regularly and steadily laid out. Like draws to like. Our spiritual affinities, our religious and moral character, will settle where we shall be, and who our companions will be when we get yonder. Some of us would not altogether like to live with the people that are like ourselves, and some of us would not find the result of this sorting to be very delightful. Men in the Dantesque circles were only made more miserable because all around them were of the same sort as, and some of them worse than, themselves. And an ordered hell, with no company for the liar but liars, and none for the thief but thieves, and none for impure men but the impure, and none for the godless but the godless, would be a hell indeed.

‘He was gathered to his people,’ and you and I will be gathered likewise. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Let us follow with our thoughts, and in our lives, those who have gone into the light, and cultivate in heart and character those graces and excellences which are congruous with the inheritance of the saints in light. Above all, let us give our hearts to Christ, by simple faith in Him, to be shaped and sanctified by Him. Then our country will be where He is, and our people will be the people in whom His love abides, and the tribe to which we belong will be the tribe of which He is Chieftain. So when our turn comes, we may rise thankfully from the table in the wilderness, which He has spread for us, having eaten as much as we desired, and quietly follow the dark-robed messenger whom His love sends to bring us to the happy multitudes that throng the streets of the city. There we shall find our true home, our kindred, our King. ‘So shall *we* ever be with the Lord.’

A Bad Bargain

'And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.' GENESIS xxv. 27-34.

Isaac's small household represented a great variety of types of character. He himself lacked energy, and seems in later life to have been very much of a tool in the hands of others. Rebekah had the stronger nature, was persistent, energetic, and managed her husband to her heart's content. The twin brothers were strongly opposed in character; and, naturally enough, each parent loved best the child that was most unlike him or her: Isaac rejoicing in the very wildness of the adventurous, dashing Esau; and Rebekah finding an outlet for her womanly tenderness in an undue partiality for the quiet lad that was always at hand to help her and be petted by her.

One's sympathy goes out to Esau. He was 'a man of the field,'—by which is meant, not cultivated ground, but open country, which we might call prairie. He was a 'backwoodsman,'—liked the wild hunter's life better than sticking at home looking after sheep. He had the attractive characteristics of that kind of men, as well as their faults. He was frank, impulsive, generous, incapable of persevering work or of looking ahead, passionate. His descendants prefer cattle-ranching and gold-prospecting to keeping shops or sitting with their lungs squeezed against a desk.

Jacob had neither the high spirits nor the animal courage of his brother. He was 'a plain man.' The word is literally 'perfect,' but cannot be used in its deepest sense; for Jacob was very far indeed from being that, but seems to have a lower sense, which might perhaps be represented by 'steady-going,' or 'respectable,' in modern phraseology. He went quietly about his ordinary work, in contrast with his daring brother's escapades and unsettledness.

The two types are intensified by civilisation, and the antagonism between them increased. City life tends to produce Jacobs, and its Esaus escape from it as soon as they can. But Jacob had the vices as well as the virtues of his qualities. He was orderly and domestic, but he was tricky, and keenly alive to his own interest. He was persevering and almost dogged in his tenacity of purpose, but he was not above taking mean advantages and getting at his ends by miry roads. He had little love for his brother, in whom he saw an obstacle to his ambition. He had the virtues and vices of the commercial spirit.

But we judge the two men wrongly if we let ourselves be fascinated, as Isaac was, by Esau, and forget that the superficial attractions of his character cover a core worthy of disapprobation. They are crude judges of character who prefer the type of man who spurns the restraints of patient industry and order; and popular authors, who make their heroes out of such, err in taste no less than in morals. There is a very unwholesome kind of literature, which is devoted to glorifying the Esaus as fine fellows, with spirit, generosity, and noble carelessness, whereas at bottom they are governed by animal impulses, and incapable of estimating any good which does not appeal to sense, and that at once.

The great lesson of this story lies on its surface. It is the folly and sin of buying present gratification of appetite or sense at the price of giving up far greater future good. The details are picturesquely told. Esau's eagerness, stimulated by the smell of the mess of lentils, is strikingly expressed in the Hebrew: 'Let me devour, I pray thee, of that red, that red there.' It is no sin to be hungry, but to let appetite speak so clamorously indicates feeble self-control. Jacob's coolness is an unpleasant foil to Esau's impatience, and his cautious bargaining, before he will sell what a brother would have given, shows a mean soul, without generous love to his own flesh and blood. Esau lets one ravenous desire hide everything else from him. He wants the pottage which smokes there, and that one poor dish is for the moment more to him than birthright and any future good. Jacob knows the changeableness of Esau's character, and is well aware that a hungry man will promise anything, and, when fed, will break his promise as easily as he made it. So he makes Esau swear; and Esau will do that, or anything asked. He gets his meal. The story graphically describes the greedy relish with which he ate, the short duration of his enjoyment, and the dark meaning of the seemingly insignificant event, by that accumulation of verbs, 'He did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright.'

Now we may learn, first, how profound an influence small temptations, yielded to, may exert on a life.

Many scoffs have been directed against this story, as if it were unworthy of credence that eating a dish of lentils should have shaped the life of a man and of his descendants. But is it not always the case that trifles turn out to be determining points? Hinges are very small, compared with the doors which move on them. Most lives are moulded by insignificant events. No temptation is small, for no sin is small; and if the occasion of yielding to sense and the present is insignificant, the yielding is not so.

But the main lesson is, as already noted, the madness of flinging away greater future good for present gratifications of sense. One cannot suppose that the spiritual side of 'the birthright' was in the thoughts of either brother. Esau and Jacob alike regarded it only as giving the headship of the family. It was merely the right of succession, with certain material accompanying advantages, which Jacob coveted and Esau parted with. But even in regard to merely worldly objects, the man who lives for only the present moment is distinctly beneath him who lives for a future good, however material it may be. Whoever subordinates the present, and is able steadily to set before himself a remote object, for which he is strong enough to subdue the desire of immediate gratifications of any sort, is, in so far, better than the man who, like a savage or an animal, lives only for the instant.

The highest form of that nobility is when time is clearly seen to be the 'lackey to eternity,' and life's aims are determined with supreme reference to the future beyond the grave. But how many of us are every day doing exactly as Esau did—flinging away a great future for a small present! A man who lives only for such ends as may be attained on this side of the grave is as 'profane' a person as Esau, and despises his birthright as truly. He knew that he was hungry, and that lentil porridge was good, 'What good shall the birthright do me?' He failed to make the effort of mind and imagination needed in order to realise how much of the kind of 'good' that he could appreciate it would do to him. The smell of the smoking food was more to him than far greater good which he could only appreciate by an effort. A sixpence held close to the eye can shut out the sun. Resolute effort is needed to prevent the small, intrusive present from blotting out the transcendent greatness of the final future. And for lack of such effort men by the thousand fling themselves away.

To sell a birthright for a bowl of lentils was plain folly. But is it wiser to sell the blessedness and peace of communion with God here and of heaven hereafter for anything that earth can

yield to sense or to soul? How many shrewd ‘men of the highest commercial standing’ are making as bad a bargain as Esau’s! The ‘pottage’ is hot and comforting, but it is soon eaten; and when the bowl is empty, and the sense of hunger comes back in an hour or two, the transaction does not look quite as advantageous as it did. Esau had many a minute of rueful meditation on his bad bargain before he in vain besought his father’s blessing. And suspicions of the folly of their choice are apt to haunt men who prefer the present to the future, even before the future becomes the present, and the folly is manifest. ‘What doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?’

So a character like Esau’s, though it has many fine possibilities about it, and attracts liking, is really of a low type, and may very easily slide into depths of degrading sensualism, and be dead to all nobleness. Enterprise, love of stirring life, impatience of dull plodding, are natural to young lives. Unregulated, impulsive characters, who live for the moment, and are very sensitive to all material delights, have often an air of generosity and joviality which hides their essential baseness; for it *is* base to live for flesh, either in more refined or more frankly coarse forms. It is base to be incapable of seeing an inch beyond the present. It is base to despise any good that cannot minister to fleeting lusts or fleshly pleasures, and to say of high thought, of ideal aims of any sort, and most of all to say of religion, ‘What good will it do me?’ To estimate such precious things by the standard of gross utility is like weighing diamonds in grocers’ scales. They will do very well for sugar, but not for precious stones. The sacred things of life are not those which do what the Esaus recognise as ‘good.’ They have another purpose, and are valuable for other ends. Let us take heed, then, that we estimate things according to their true relative worth; that we live, not for to-day, but for eternity; and that we suppress all greedy cravings. If we do not, we shall be ‘profane’ persons like Esau, ‘who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.’

Pottage Versus Birthright

'Esau despised his birthright'—GENESIS xxv. 34.

Broad lessons unmistakable, but points strange and difficult to throw oneself back to so different a set of ideas. So

I. Deal with the narrative.

Not to tell it over again, but bring out the following points:—

(*a*) Birthright.—What?

None of them any notion of sacred, spiritual aspect of it.

To all, merely material advantages: headship of the clan. All the loftier aspects gone from Isaac, who thought he could give it for venison, from Esau, and from the scheming Rebekah and the crafty Jacob.

(*b*) The Bargain.

It is not clear whether the transaction was seriously meant, or whether it only shows Jacob's wish to possess the birthright and Esau's indifference to it.

At any rate, the barter was not supposed to complete Jacob's title, as is shown by a subsequent piece of trickery.

Isaac's blessing was conceived to confer it; that blessing, if once given, could not be revoked, even if procured by fraud and given in error.

The belief would fulfil itself, as far as the chieftainship was concerned.

It is significant of the purely 'secular' tone of all the parties concerned that only temporal blessings are included in Isaac's words.

(*c*) The Scripture judgment on all parties concerned.

Great mistakes are made by forgetting that the Bible is a passionless narrator of its heroes' acts, and seldom pauses to censure or praise—so people have thought that Scripture gave its vote for Jacob as against Esau.

The character of the two men.

Esau—frank, impulsive, generous, chivalrous, careless, and sensuous.

Jacob—meditative, reflective, pastoral, timid, crafty, selfish. Each has the defects of his qualities.

But the subsequent history of Jacob shows what heaven thought of him.

This dirty transaction marred his life, sent him a terrified exile from Isaac's tent, and shook his soul long years after with guilty apprehensions when he had to meet Esau.

All subsequent career to beat his crafty selfishness out of him and to lift him to higher level.

II. Broad General Lessons.

1. The Choice.—Birthright *versus* Pottage.

(*a*) The Present *versus* The Future.

Suppose it true that to both brothers the birthright seemed to secure merely material advantage, yet even so the better part would have been to sacrifice material present for material future. Even on plane of worldly things, to live for to-morrow ennobles a man, and he is the higher style of man who 'spurns delights and lives laborious days' for some issue to be realised in the far future.

The very same principle extended leads to the conviction that the highest wisdom is his who lives for the furthest, which is also the most certain, Future.

(*b*) The Seen *versus* The Unseen.

However material the advantages of the birthright were supposed to be, they *then* appealed to imagination, not sense. *There* was the pottage in the pan: 'I can see that and smell it. This birthright, can I eat *it*? Let me get the solid realities, and let who will have the imaginary.'

So the unseen good things, such as intellectual culture, fair reputation, and the like, are better than the gross satisfactions that can be handled, or tasted, or seen.

And, on the very same principle, high above the seeker after these—as high as he is above the drunkard—is the Christian, whose life is shaped by the loftiest Unseen, even 'Him who is invisible.'

2. The grim absurdity of the choice.

The story seems to have a certain undertone of sarcasm, and a keen perception of the immense stupidity of the man.

Pottage and a full belly to-day—that was all he got for such a sacrifice.

'This their way is their folly.'

3. How well the bargain worked at first, and what came of it at last.

No doubt Esau had his meal, and, no doubt, when a man sells his soul to the devil (the mediaeval form of the story), he generally gets the price for which he bargained, more or less, and oftentimes with a dash of vinegar in the porridge, which makes it less palatable.

What comes of it at last. Put side by side the pictures of Esau's animal contentment at the moment when he had eaten up his mess, and of his despair when he wailed, 'Hast thou not one blessing?'

He finds out his mistake. A sense of the preciousness of the despised thing wakes in him.

And it is too late. There *are* irrevocable consequences of every false choice. Youth is gone: cannot alter that. Opportunities gone: cannot alter that. Strength gone: cannot alter that. Habits formed, associations, reputation, position, character, are all determined.

But there is a blessed *contrast* between Esau's experience and what may be ours. The desire to have the birthright is sure to bring it to us. No matter how late the desire is of springing, nor how long and insultingly we have suppressed it, we never go to our Father in vain with the cry, 'Bless me, even me also.'

'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

The First Apostle Of Peace At Any Price

'Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold, and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.'—GENESIS xxvi. 12-25.

The salient feature of Isaac's life is that it has no salient features. He lived out his hundred and eighty years in quiet, with little to make history. Few details of his story are given, and some of these are not very creditable. He seems never to have wandered far from the neighbourhood of Beersheba. These quiet, rolling stretches of thinly peopled land contented him, and gave pasture for his flocks, as well as fields for his cultivation. Like many of the tribes of that district still, he had passed from the purely nomad and pastoral life, such as Abraham led, and had begun to 'sow in that land.' That marks a stage in progress. His father's life had been like a midsummer day, with bursts of splendour and heavy thunder-clouds; his was liker a calm day in autumn, windless and unchanging from morning till serene evening. The world thinks little of such lives, but they are fruitful.

Our text begins with a sweet little picture of peaceful industry, blessed by God, and therefore prospering. Travellers tell us that the land where Isaac dwelt is still marvellously fertile, even to rude farming. But to be merely a successful farmer and sheep-owner might have seemed poor work to the heir of such glowing promises, and the prospect of a high destiny often disgusts its possessor with lowly duties. 'But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it,' and the best way to fit ourselves for great things in the future is to bend our backs and wills to humble toil in the present. Peter expected every day to see the risen Lord, when he said, 'I go a-fishing.'

The Philistines' envy was very natural, since Isaac was an alien, and, in some sense, an intruder. Their stopping of the wells was a common act of hostility, and an effectual one in that land, where everything lives where water comes, and dies if it is cut off. Abimelech's reason for 'extraditing' Isaac might have provoked a more pugnacious person to stay and defy the Philistines to expel him. 'Thou art much mightier than we,' and so he could have said, 'Try to put me out, then,' and the result might have been that Abimelech and his Philistines would have been the ones to go. But the same spirit was in the man as had been in

the lad, when he let his father bind him and lay him on the altar without a struggle or a word, and he quietly went, leaving his fields and pastures. 'Very poor-spirited,' says the world; what does Christ say?

Isaac was not 'original.' He cleaned out the wells which his father had digged, and with filial piety gave them again the old names 'which his father had called them.' Some of us nowadays get credit for being 'advanced and liberal thinkers,' because we regard our fathers' wells as much too choked with rubbish to be worth clearing out, and the last thing we should dream of would be to revive the old names. But the old wells were not enough for the new time, and so fresh ones were added. Isaac and his servants did not say, 'We will have no water but what is drawn from Abraham's wells. What was enough for him is enough for us.' So, like all wise men, they were conservatively progressive and progressively conservative. The Gerar shepherds were sharp lawyers. They took strong ground in saying, 'The *water* is ours; you have dug wells, but we are ground-owners, and what is below the surface, as well as what is on it, is our property.' Again Isaac fielded, moved on a little way, and tried again. A second well was claimed, and given up, and all that Isaac did was to name the two 'Contention' and 'Enmity,' as a gentle rebuke and memorial. Then, as is generally the result, gentleness wearied violence out, and the Philistines tired of annoying before Isaac tired of yielding. So he came into a quiet harbour at last, and traced his repose to God, naming his last well 'Broad Places,' because the Lord had made room for him.

Such a quiet spirit, strong in non-resistance, and ready to yield rather than quarrel, was strangely out of place in these wild days and lands. He obeyed the Sermon on the Mount millenniums before it was spoken. Whether from temperament or from faith, he is the first instance of the Christian type of excellence in the Old Testament. For there ought to be no question that the spirit of meekness, which will not meet violence by violence, is the Christian spirit. Christian morals alter the perspective of moral excellences, and exalt meekness above the 'heroic virtues' admired by the world. The violets and lilies in Christ's garden outshine voluptuous roses and flaunting sunflowers. In this day, when there is a recrudescence of militarism, and we are tempted to canonise the soldier, we need more than ever to insist that the highest type is 'the Lamb of God,' who was 'as a sheep before her shearers.' To fight for my rights is not the Christian ideal, nor is it the best way to secure them. Isaac will generally weary out the Philistines, and get his well at last, and will have escaped much friction and many evil passions.

'Tis safer being meek than fierce.'

Isaac won the friendship of his opponents by his patience, as the verses after the text tell. Their consciences and hearts were touched, and they 'saw plainly that the Lord was with him,' and sued him for alliance. It is better to turn enemies into friends than to beat them and have them as enemies still. 'I'll knock you down unless you love me' does not sound a very hopeful way of cementing peaceful relations. But 'when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' But Isaac won more than the Philistines' favour by his meek peacefulness, for 'the Lord appeared unto him,' and assured him that, undefended and unresisting as he was, he had a strong defence, and need not be afraid: 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price, and that not only for 'a woman'; and it brings visions of God, and assurances of tranquil safety to him who cherishes it. The Spirit of God comes down in the likeness of a dove, and that bird of peace sits 'brooding "only" on the charmed wave' of a heart stilled from strife and wrath, like a quiet summer's sea.

Isaac's new home at Beersheba, having been thus hallowed by the appearance of the Lord, was consecrated by the building of an altar. We should hallow by grateful remembrance the

spots where God has made Himself known to us. The best beginning of a new undertaking is to rear an altar. It is well when new settlers begin their work by calling on the name of the Lord. Beersheba and Plymouth Rock are a pair. First comes the altar, then the tent can be trustfully pitched, but ‘except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’ And if the house is built in faith, a well will not be lacking; for they who ‘seek first the kingdom of God’ will have all needful ‘things added unto them.’

The Heavenly Pathway And The Earthly Heart

'And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.'—GENESIS xxviii. 10-22.

From Abraham to Jacob is a great descent. The former embodies the nobler side of the Jewish character,—its capacity for religious ideas; its elevation above, and separation from, the nations; its consciousness of, and peaceful satisfaction in, a divine Friend; its consequent vocation in the world. These all were deep in the founder of the race, and flowed to it from him. Jacob, on the other hand, has in him the more ignoble qualities, which Christian treatment of the Jew has fostered, and which have become indissolubly attached to the name in popular usage. He is a crafty schemer, selfish, over-reaching, with a keen eye to the main chance. Whoever deals with him has to look sharply after his own interests. Self-advantage in its most earthly form is uppermost in him; and, like all timid, selfish men, shifty ways and evasions are his natural weapons. The great interest of his history lies in the slow process by which the patient God purified him, and out of this 'stone raised up a worthy child to Abraham.' We see in this context the first step in his education, and the very imperfect degree in which he profited by it.

1. Consider the vision and its accompanying promise. Jacob has fled from home on account of his nobler brother's fierce wrath at the trick which their scheming mother and he had contrived. It was an ugly, heartless fraud, a crime against a doting father, as against Esau. Rebekah gets alarmed for her favourite; and her fertile brain hits upon another device to blind Isaac and get Jacob out of harm's way, in the excuse that she cannot bear his marriage with a Hittite woman. Her exaggerated expressions of passionate dislike to 'the daughters of Heth' have no religious basis. They are partly feigned and partly petulance. So the poor old blind father is beguiled once more, and sends his son away. Starting under such auspices, and coming from such an atmosphere, and journeying back to Haran, the hole of the pit whence Abraham had been digged, and turning his back on the land where God had been with his house, the wanderer was not likely to be cherishing any lofty thoughts. His life was in danger;

he was alone, a dim future was before him, perhaps his conscience was not very comfortable. These things would be in his mind as he lay down and gazed into the violet sky so far above him, burning with all its stars. Weary, and with a head full of sordid cares, plans, and possibly fears, he slept; and then there flamed on 'that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude' to the pure, and its terror to the evil, this vision, which speaks indeed to his then need, as he discerned it, but reveals to him and to us the truth which ennobles all life, burns up the dross of earthward-turned aims, and selfish, crafty ways.

We are to conceive of the form of the vision as a broad stair or sloping ascent, rather than a ladder, reaching right from the sleeper's side to the far-off heaven, its pathway peopled with messengers, and its summit touching the place where a glory shone that paled even the lustrous constellations of that pure sky. Jacob had thought himself alone; the vision peoples the wilderness. He had felt himself defenceless; the vision musters armies for his safety. He had been grovelling on earth, with no thoughts beyond its fleeting goods; the vision lifts his eyes from the low level on which they had been gazing. He had been conscious of but little connection with heaven; the vision shows him a path from his very side right into its depths. He had probably thought that he was leaving the presence of his father's God when he left his father's tent; the vision burns into his astonished heart the consciousness of God as there, in the solitude and the night.

The divine promise is the best commentary on the meaning of the vision. The familiar ancestral promise is repeated to him, and the blessing and the birthright thus confirmed. In addition, special assurances, the translation of the vision into word and adapted to his then wants, are given,—God's presence in his wanderings, his protection, Jacob's return to the land, and the promise of God's persistent presence, working through all paradoxes of providence and sins of His servant, and incapable of staying its operations, or satisfying God's heart, or vindicating His faithfulness, at any point short of complete accomplishment of His plighted word.

We pass from the lone desert and the mysterious twilight of Genesis to the beaten ways between Galilee and Jordan, and to the clear historic daylight of the gospel, and we hear Christ renewing the promise to the crafty Jacob, to one whom He called a son of Jacob in his after better days, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.' The very heart of Christ's work was unveiled in the terms of this vision: From henceforth 'ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.' So, then, the fleeting vision was a transient revelation of a permanent reality, and a faint foreshadowing of the true communication between heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is the ladder between God and man. On Him all divine gifts descend; by Him all the angels of human devotion, consecration, and aspiration go up. This flat earth is not so far from the topmost heaven as sense thinks. The despairing question of Jewish wisdom, 'Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? … What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?'—which has likewise been the question of every age that has not been altogether sunk in sensual delights—is answered once for all in the incarnate and crucified and ascended Lord, by and in whom all heaven has stooped to earth, that earth might be lifted to heaven. Every child of man, though lonely and earthly, has the ladder-foot by his side,—like the sunbeam, which comes straight into the eyes of every gazer, wherever he stands. It becomes increasingly evident, in the controversies of these days, that there will remain for modern thought only the alternative,—either Jesus Christ is the means of communication between God and man, or there is no communication. Deism and theism are compromises, and cannot live. The cultivated world in both hemispheres is being more and more shut up to either accepting Christ as revealer, by whom alone we know, and as medium by whom alone we love and approach, God; or sinking into

abysses of negations where choke-damp will stifle enthusiasm and poetry, as well as devotion and immortal hope.

Jacob's vision was meant to teach him, and is meant to teach us, the nearness of God, and the swift directness of communication, whereby His help comes to us and our desires rise to Him. These and their kindred truths were to be to him, and should be to us, the parents of much nobleness. Here is the secret of elevation of aim and thought above the mean things of sense. We all, and especially the young, in whose veins the blood dances, and to whom life is in all its glory and freshness, are tempted to think of it as all. It does us good to have this vision of the eternal realities blazing in upon us, even if it seems to glare at us, rather than to shine with lambent light. The seen is but a thin veil of the unseen. Earth, which we are too apt to make a workshop, or a mere garden of pleasure, is a Bethel,—a house of God. Everywhere the ladder stands; everywhere the angels go up and down; everywhere the Face looks from the top. Nothing will save life from becoming, sooner or later, trivial, monotonous, and infinitely wearisome, but the continual vision of the present God, and the continual experience of the swift ascent and descent of our aspirations and His blessings.

It is the secret of purity too. How could Jacob indulge in his craft, and foul his conscience with sin, as long as he carried the memory of what he had seen in the solitary night on the uplands of Bethel? The direct result of the vision is the same command as Abraham received, 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Realise My presence, and let that kill the motions of sin, and quicken to service.

It is also the secret of peace. Hopes and fears, and dim uncertainty of the future, no doubt agitated the sleeper's mind as he laid him down. His independent life was beginning. He had just left his father's tents for the first time; and, though not a youth in years, he was in the position which youth holds with us. So to him, and to all young persons, here is shown the charm which will keep the heart calm, and preserve us from being 'over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils,' or too eagerly longing for possible good. 'I am with thee' should be enough to steady our souls; and the confidence that God will not leave us till He has accomplished His own purpose for us, should make us willing to let Him do as He will with ours.

2. Notice the imperfect reception of the divine teaching. Jacob's startled exclamation on awakening from his dream indicates a very low level both of religious knowledge and feeling. Nor is there any reason for taking the words in any but their most natural sense; for it is a mistake to ascribe to him the knowledge of God due to later revelation, or, at this stage of his life, any depth of religious emotion. He is alarmed at the thought that God is near. Probably he had been accustomed to think of God's presence as in some special way associated with his father's encampment, and had not risen to the belief of His omnipresence. There seems no joyous leaping up of his heart at the thought that God is here. Dread, not unmingled with the superstitious fear that he had profaned a holy place by laying himself down in it, is his prevailing feeling, and he pleads ignorance as the excuse for his sacrilege. He does not draw the conclusion from the vision that all the earth is hallowed by a near God, but only that he has unwittingly stumbled on His house; and he does not learn that from every place there is an open door for the loving heart into the calm depths where God is throned, but only that *here* he unwittingly stands at the gate of heaven. So he misses the very inner purpose of the vision, and rather shrinks from it than welcomes it. Was that spasm of fear all that passed through his mind that night? Did he sleep again when the glory died out of the heaven? So the story would appear to suggest. But, in any case, we see here the effect of the sudden blazing in upon a heart not yet familiar with the Divine Friend, of the conviction that He is really near. Gracious as God's promise was, it did not dissipate the creeping awe at His

presence. It is an eloquent testimony of man's consciousness of sin, that whensoever a present God becomes a reality to a worldly man, he trembles. 'This place' would not be 'dreadful,' but blessed, if it were not for the sense of discord between God and me.

The morning light brought other thoughts, when it filled the silent heavens, and where the ladder had stretched, there was but empty blue. The lesson is sinking into his mind. He lifts the rude stone and pours oil on it, as a symbol of consecration, as nameless races have done all over the world. His vow shows that he had but begun to learn in God's school. He hedges about his promise with a punctilious repetition of God's undertaking, as if resolved that there should be no mistake. Clause by clause he goes over it all, and puts an 'if' to it. God's word should have kindled something liker faith than that. What a fall from 'Abram believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness'! Jacob barely believed, and will wait to see whether all will turn out as it has been promised. That is not the glad, swift response of a loving, trusting heart. Nor is he contented with repeating to God the terms of his engagement, but he adds a couple of clauses which strike him as being important, and as having been omitted. There was nothing about 'bread to eat, and raiment to put on,' nor about coming back again 'in peace,' so he adds these. A true 'Jew,'—great at a bargain, and determined to get all he can, and to have no mistake about what he must get before he gives anything! Was Jesus thinking at all of the ancestor when He warned the descendants, in words which sound curiously like an echo of Jacob's, not to be anxious 'what ye shall eat,' nor 'what ye shall put on'? As the vow stands in the Authorised Version, it is farther open to the charge of suspending his worship of God upon the fulfilment of these conditions; but it is better to adopt the marginal rendering of the Revised Version, according to which the clause 'then shall the Lord be my God' is a part of the conditions, not of the vow, and is to be read 'And [if] the Lord will be … then this stone … shall be,' etc. If this rendering be adopted, as I think it should be, the vow proper is simply of outward service,—he will rear an altar, and he will tithe his substance. Not a very munificent pledge! And where in it is the surrender of the heart? Where is the outgoing of love and gratitude? Where the clasping of the hand of his heavenly Friend with calm rapture of thankful self-yielding, and steadfastness of implicit trust? God did not want Jacob's altar, nor his tenths; He wanted Jacob. But many a weary year and many a sore sorrow have to leave their marks on him before the evil strain is pressed out of his blood; and by the unwearied long-suffering of his patient Friend and Teacher in heaven, the crafty, earthly-minded Jacob 'the supplanter' is turned into 'Israel, the prince with God, in whom is no guile.' The slower the scholar, the more wonderful the forbearance of the Teacher; and the more may we, who are slow scholars too, take heart to believe that He will not be soon angry with us, nor leave us until He has done that which He has spoken to us of.

Mahanaim: The Two Camps

'And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim' (i.e. Two camps).—GENESIS xxxii. 1, 2.

This vision came at a crisis in Jacob's life. He has just left the house of Laban, his father-in-law, where he had lived for many years, and in company with a long caravan, consisting of wives, children, servants, and all his wealth turned into cattle, is journeying back again to Palestine. His road leads him close by the country of Esau. Jacob was no soldier, and he is naturally terrified to meet his justly incensed brother. And so, as he plods along with his defenceless company trailing behind him, as you may see the Arab caravans streaming over the same uplands to-day, all at once, in the middle of his march, a bright-harnessed army of angels meets him. Whether visible to the eye of sense, or, as would appear, only to the eye of faith, they *are* visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place 'Mahanaim,' two camps. One camp was the little one of his down here, with the helpless women and children and his own frightened and defenceless self, and the other was the great one up there, or rather in shadowy but most real spiritual presence around about him, as a bodyguard making an impregnable wall between him and every foe. We may take some very plain and everlastingly true lessons out of this story.

1. First, the angels of God meet us on the dusty road of common life. 'Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.'

As he was tramping along there, over the lonely fields of Edom, with many a thought on his mind and many a fear at his heart, but feeling 'There is the path that I have to walk on,' all at once the air was filled with the soft rustle of angel wings, and the brightness from the flashing armour of the heavenly hosts flamed across his unexpecting eye. And so is it evermore. The true place for us to receive visions of God is in the path of the homely, prosaic duties which He lays upon us. The dusty road is far more likely to be trodden by angel feet than the remote summits of the mountain, where we sometimes would fain go; and many an hour consecrated to devotion has less of the manifest presence of God than is granted to some weary heart in its commonplace struggle with the little troubles and trials of daily life. These make the doors, as it were, by which the visitants draw near to us.

It is the common duties, 'the narrow round, the daily task,' that not only give us 'all we ought to ask,' but are the selected means and channels by which, ever, God's visitants draw near to us. The man that has never seen an angel standing beside him, and driving his loom for him, or helping him at his counter and his desk, and the woman that has never seen an angel, according to the bold realism and homely vision of the old German picture, working with her in the kitchen and preparing the meal for the household, have little chance of meeting such visitants at any other point of their experience or event of their lives.

If the week be empty of the angels, you will never catch sight of a feather of their wings on the Sunday. And if we do not recognise their presence in the midst of all the prose, and the commonplace, and the vulgarity, and the triviality, and the monotony, the dust of the small duties, we shall go up to the summit of Sinai itself and see nothing there but cold grey stone and everlasting snows. 'Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.' The true field for religion is the field of common life.

And then another side of the same thought is this, that it is in the path where God has bade us walk that we shall find the angels round us. We may meet them, indeed, on paths of our own choosing, but it will be the sort of angel that Balaam met, with a sword in his hand, mighty and beautiful, but wrathful too; and we had better not front him! But the friendly helpers, the emissaries of God's love, the apostles of His grace, do not haunt the roads that we make for ourselves. They confine themselves rigidly to 'the paths in which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.' A man has no right to expect, and he will not get, blessing and help and divine gifts when, self-willedly, he has taken the bit between his teeth, and is choosing his own road in the world. But if he will say, 'Lord! here I am; put me where Thou wilt, and do with me what Thou wilt,' then he may be sure that that path, though it may be solitary of human companionship, and leading up amongst barren rocks and over bare moorlands, where the sun beats down fiercely, will not be unvisited by a better presence, so that in sweet consciousness of sufficiency of rich grace, he will be able to say, 'I, being in the way, the Lord met me.'

2. Still further, we may draw from this incident the lesson that God's angels meet us punctually at the hour of need.

Jacob is drawing nearer and nearer to his fear every step. He is now just on the borders of Esau's country, and close upon opening communications with his brother. At that critical moment, just before the finger of the clock has reached the point on the dial at which the bell would strike, the needed help comes, the angel guards draw near and camp beside him. It is always so. 'The Lord shall help her, and that right early.' His hosts come no sooner and no later than we need. If they appeared before we had realised our danger and our defencelessness, our hearts would not leap up at their coming, as men in a beleaguered town do when the guns of the relieving force are heard booming from afar. Often God's delays seem to us inexplicable, and our prayers to have no more effect than if they were spoken to a sleeping Baal. But such delays are merciful. They help us to the consciousness of our need. They let us feel the presence of the sorrow. They give opportunity of proving the weakness of all other supports. They test and increase desire for His help. They throw us more unreservedly into His arms. They afford room for the sorrow or the burden to work its peaceable fruits. So, and in many other ways, delay of succour fits us to receive succour, and our God makes no tarrying but for our sakes.

It is His way to let us come almost to the edge of the precipice, and then, in the very nick of time, when another minute and we are over, to stretch out His strong right hand and save us. So Peter is left in prison, though prayer is going up unceasingly for him—and no answer comes. The days of the Passover feast slip away, and still he is in prison, and prayer does nothing for him. The last day of his life, according to Herod's purpose, dawns, and all the day the Church lifts up its voice—but apparently there is no answer, nor any that regarded. The night comes, and still the vain cry goes up, and Heaven seems deaf or apathetic. The night wears on, and still no help comes. But in the last watch of that last night, when day is almost dawning, at nearly the last minute when escape would have been possible, the angel touches the sleeping Apostle, and with leisurely calmness, as sure that he had ample time, leads him out to freedom and safety. It was precisely because Jesus loved the Household at Bethany that, after receiving the sisters' message, He abode still for two days in the same place where He was. However our impatience may wonder, and our faithlessness venture sometimes almost to rebuke Him when He comes, with words like Mary's and Martha's—'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, such and such sorrows would not have happened, and Thou couldst so easily have been here'—we should learn the lesson that even if He has delayed so long that the dreaded blow has fallen, He has come soon enough to make it the occasion for a still more

glorious communication of His power. ‘Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.’

3. Again, we learn from this incident that the angels of God come in the shape which we need.

Jacob’s want at the moment was protection. Therefore the angels appear in warlike guise, and present before the defenceless man another camp, in which he and his unwieldy caravan of women and children and cattle may find security. If his special want had been of some blessing of another kind, no doubt another form of appearance, suited with precision to his need, would have been imposed upon these angel helpers. For God’s gifts to us change their character; as the Rabbis fabled that the manna tasted to each man what each most desired. The same pure heavenly bread has the varying savour that commends it to varying palates. God’s grace is Protean. It takes all the forms that man’s necessities require. As water assumes the shape of any vessel into which it is put, so this great blessing comes to each of us, moulded according to the pressure and taking the form of our circumstances and necessities. His fulness is all-sufficient. It is the same blood that, passing to all the members, ministers to each according to the needs and fashion of each. And it is the same grace which, passing to our souls, in each man is shaped according to his present condition and ministers to his present wants.

So, dear brethren, in that great fulness each of us may have the thing that we need. The angel who to one man is protection, to another shall be teaching and inspiration; to another shall appear with chariots of fire and horses of fire to sweep the rapt soul heavenward; to another shall draw near as a deliverer from his fetters, at whose touch the bonds shall fall from off him; to another shall appear as the instructor in duty and the appointer of a path of service, like that vision that shone in the castle to the Apostle Paul, and said, ‘Thou must bear witness for me at Rome’; to another shall appear as opening the door of heaven and letting a flood of light come down upon his darkened heart, as to the Apocalyptic seer in his rocky Patmos. And ‘all this worketh that one and the self-same’ Lord of angels ‘dividing to every man severally as He will,’ and as the man needs. The defenceless Jacob has the manifestation of the divine presence in the guise of armed warriors that guard his unwarlike camp.

I add one last word. Long centuries after Jacob’s experience at Mahanaim, another trembling fugitive found himself there, fearful, like Jacob, of the vengeance and anger of one who was knit to him by blood. When poor King David was flying from the face of Absalom his son, the first place where he made a stand, and where he remained during the whole of the rebellion, was this town of Mahanaim, away on the eastern side of the Jordan. Do you not think that to the kingly exile, in his feebleness and his fear, the very name of his resting-place would be an omen? Would he not recall the old story, and bethink himself of how round that other frightened man

‘Bright-harnessed angels stood in order serviceable’

and would he not, as he looked on his little band of friends, faithful among the faithless, have his eyesight cleared to behold the other camp? Such a vision, no doubt, inspired the calm confidence of the psalm which evidently belongs to that dark hour of his life, and made it possible for the hunted king, with his feeble band, to sing even then, ‘I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety, solitary though I am.’

Nor is the vision emptied of its power to stay and make brave by all the ages that have passed. The vision was for a moment; the fact is for ever. The sun’s ray was flashed back from celestial armour, ‘the next all unreflected shone’ on the lonely wastes of the desert—but the host of God was there still. The transitory appearance of the permanent realities is a

revelation to us as truly as to the patriarch; and though no angel wings may winnow the air around our road, nor any sworded seraphim be seen on our commonplace march, we too have all the armies of heaven with us, if we tread the path which God has marked out, and in our weakness and trembling commit ourselves to Him. The heavenly warriors die not, and hover around us to-day, excelling in the strength of their immortal youth, and as ready to succour us as they were all these centuries ago to guard the solitary Jacob.

Better still, the 'Captain of the Lord's host' is 'come up' to be our defence, and our faith has not only to behold the many ministering spirits sent forth to minister to us, but One mightier than they, whose commands they all obey, and who Himself is the companion of our solitude and the shield of our defencelessness. It was blessed that Jacob should be met by the many angels of God. It is infinitely more blessed that '*the* Angel of the Lord'—the One who is more than the many—'encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.'

The postscript of the last letter which Gordon sent from Khartoum closed with the words, 'The hosts are with me—Mahanaim.' Were they not, even though death was near? Was that sublime faith a mistake—the vision an optical delusion? No, for their ranks are arrayed around God's children to keep them from all evil while He wills that they should live, and their chariots of fire and horses of fire are sent to bear them to heaven when He wills that they should die.

The Twofold Wrestle—God's With Jacob And Jacob's With God

'And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' —GENESIS xxxii. 9-12.

Jacob's subtlety and craft were, as is often the case, the weapons of a timid as well as selfish nature. No wonder, then, that the prospect of meeting his wronged and strong brother threw him into a panic, notwithstanding the vision of the camp of angels by the side of his defenceless caravan of women and children. Esau had received his abject message of propitiation in grim silence, sent no welcome back, but with ominous haste and ambiguous purpose began his march towards him with a strong force. A few hours will decide whether he means revenge. Jacob's fright does not rob him of his ready wit; he goes to work at once to divide his party, so as to ensure safety for half of it. He schemes first, and prays second. The order might have been inverted with advantage, but is like the man—in the lowest phase of his character. His prayer shows that he is beginning to profit by the long years of schooling. Though its burden is only deliverance from Esau, it pleads with God on the grounds of His own command and promise, of Jacob's unworthiness of God's past mercies, and of His firm covenant. A breath of a higher life is stirring in the shifty schemer who has all his life been living by his wits. Now he has come to a point where he knows that his own power can do nothing. With Laban, a man of craft like himself, it was diamond cut diamond; and Jacob was equal to the position. But the wild Bedouin brother, with his four hundred men, is not to be managed so; and Jacob is driven to God by his conscious helplessness. It is the germ, but only the germ, and needs much tending and growth before it matures. The process by which this faint dawning of a better life is broadened into day is begun in the mysterious struggle which forms the main part of this lesson, and is God's answer to his prayer.

1. We have, first, the twofold wrestling. The silent night-long wrestle with the 'traveller unknown' is generally regarded as meaning essentially the same thing as the wonderful colloquy which follows. But I venture to take a somewhat different point of view, and to suggest that there are here two well-marked stages. In the first, which is represented as transacted in unbroken silence, 'a man' wrestles with Jacob, and does not prevail; in the second, which is represented as an interchange of speech, Jacob strives with the 'man,' and does prevail. Taken together, the two are a complete mirror, not only of the manner of the transformation of Jacob into Israel, but of universal eternal truths as to God's dealings with us, and our power with Him.

As to the former stage, the language of the narrative is to be noted, 'There wrestled a man with him.' The attack, so to speak, begins with his mysterious antagonist, not with the patriarch. The 'man' seeks to overcome Jacob, not Jacob the man. There, beneath the deep heavens, in the solemn silence of night, which hides earth and reveals heaven, that strange struggle with an unknown Presence is carried on. We have no material for pronouncing on

the manner of it, whether ecstasy, vision, or an objective and bodily fact. The body was implicated in the consequences, at all events, and the impression which the story leaves is of an outward struggle. But the purpose of the incident is the same, however the question as to its form be answered. Nor can we pronounce, as some have done, on the other question, of the personality of the silent wrestler. Angel, or 'the angel of the covenant,' who is a transient, and possibly only apparent, manifestation in human form of Him who afterwards became flesh and dwelt among us, or some other supernatural embodiment, for that one purpose, of the divine presence,—any of these hypotheses is consistent with the intentionally reticent text. What it leaves unspoken, we shall wisely leave undetermined. God acts and speaks through 'the man.' That is all we can know or need.

What, then, was the meaning of this struggle? Was it not a revelation to Jacob of what God had been doing with him all his life, and was still doing? Was not that merciful striving of God with him the inmost meaning of all that had befallen him since the far-off day when he had left his father's tents, and had seen the opened heavens, and the ladder, which he had so often forgotten? Were not his disappointments, his successes, and all the swift changes of life, God's attempts to lead him to yield himself up, and bow his will? And was not God striving with him now, in the anxieties which gnawed at his heart, and in his dread of the morrow? Was He not trying to teach him how crime always comes home to roost, with a brood of pains running behind it? Was not the weird duel in the brooding stillness a disclosure, which would more and more possess his soul as the night passed on, of a Presence which in silence strove with him, and only desired to overcome that He might bless? The conception of a Divine manifestation wrestling all night long with a man has been declared 'crude,' 'puerile,' and I know not how many other disparaging adjectives have been applied to it. But is it more unworthy of Him, or derogatory to His nature, than the lifelong pleading and striving with each of us, which He undoubtedly carries on? The idea of a man contending with God has been similarly stigmatised; but is it more mysterious than that awful power which the human will does possess of setting at naught His counsels and resisting His merciful strivings?

The close of the first stage of the twofold wrestle is marked by the laming of Jacob. The paradox that He, who could not overcome, could yet lame by a touch, is part of the lesson. If His finger could do that, what would the grip of His hand do, if He chose to put out His power? It is not for want of strength that He has not crushed the antagonist, as Jacob would feel, with deepening wonder and awe. What a new light would be thus thrown on all the previous struggle! It was the striving of a power which cared not for a mere outward victory, nor put forth its whole force, lest it should crush him whom it desired to conquer only by his own yielding. As Job says, 'Will He plead against me with His great power?' No; God mercifully restrains His hand, in His merciful striving with men. Desiring to overcome them, He desires not to do so by mere superior power, but by their willing yielding to Him.

That laming of Jacob's thigh represents the weakening of all the life of nature and self which had hitherto been his. He had trusted to his own cunning and quick-wittedness; he had been shrewd, not over-scrupulous, and successful. But he had to learn that 'by strength shall no man prevail,' and to forsake his former weapons. Wrestling with his hands and limbs is not the way to prevail either with God or man. Fighting with God in his own strength, he is only able to thwart God's merciful purpose towards him, but is powerless as a reed in a giant's grasp if God chooses to summon His destructive powers into exercise. So this failure of natural power is the turning-point in the twofold wrestle, and marks as well as symbolises the transition in Jacob's life and character from reliance upon self and craft to reliance upon his divine Antagonist become his Friend. It is the path by which we must all travel if we are to become princes with God. The life of nature and of dependence on self must be broken and

lamed in order that, in the very moment of discovered impotence, we may grasp the hand that smites, and find immortal power flowing into our weakness from it.

2. So we come to the second stage, in which Jacob strives with God and does prevail. ‘Let me go, for the day breaketh.’ Then did the stranger wish to go; and if he did, why could not he, who had lamed his antagonist, loose himself from his grasp? The same explanation applies here which is required in reference to Christ’s action to the two disciples at Emmaus: ‘He made as though He would have gone further.’ In like manner, when He came to them on the water, He appeared as though He ‘would have passed by.’ In all three cases the principle is the same. God desires to go, if we do not desire Him to stay. He will go, unless we keep Him. Then, at last, Jacob betakes himself to his true weapons. Then, at last, he strangely wishes to keep his apparent foe. He has learned, in some dim fashion, whom he has been resisting, and the blessedness of having Him for friend and companion. So here comes in the account of the whole scene which Hosea gives (Hos. xii. 4): ‘He wept, and made supplication unto Him.’ That does not describe the earlier portion, but is the true rendering of the later stage, of which our narrative gives a more summary account. The desire to retain God binds Him to us. All His struggling with us has been aimed at evoking it, and all His fulness responds to it when evoked. Prayer is power. It conquers God. We overcome Him when we yield. When we are vanquished, we are victors. When the life of nature is broken within us, then from conscious weakness springs the longing which God cannot but satisfy. ‘When I am weak, then am I strong.’ As Charles Wesley puts it, in his grand hymn on this incident:—

‘Yield to me now, for I am weak, But confident in self-despair.’

And God prevails when we prevail. His aim in all the process of His mercy has been but to overcome our heavy earthliness and selfishness, which resists His pleading love. His victory is our yielding, and, in that yielding, obtaining power with Him. He delights to be held by the hand of faith, and ever gladly yields to the heart’s cry, ‘Abide with me.’ I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me,’ is music to His ear; and our saying so, in earnest, persistent clinging to Him, is His victory as well as ours.

3. We have, next, the new name, which is the prize of Jacob’s victory, and the sign of a transformation in his character. Before this time he had been Jacob, the worker with wiles, who supplanted his brother, and met his foes with duplicity and astuteness like their own. He had been mainly of the earth, earthy. But that solemn hour had led him into the presence-chamber, the old craft had been mortally wounded, he had seen some glimpse of God as his friend, whose presence was not ‘awful,’ as he had thought it long ago, nor enigmatical and threatening, as he had at first deemed it that night, but the fountain of blessing and the one thing needful. A man who has once learned that lesson, though imperfectly, has passed into a purer region, and left behind him his old crookedness. He has learned to pray, not as before, prayers for mere deliverance from Esau and the like, but his whole being has gone out in yearning for the continual nearness of his mysterious antagonist-friend. So, though still the old nature remains, its power is broken, and he is a new creature. Therefore he needs a new name, and gets it from Him who can name men, because He sees the heart’s depths, and because He has the right over them. To impose a name is the sign of authority, possession, insight into character. The change of name indicates a new epoch in a life, or a transformation of the inner man. The meaning of ‘Israel’ is ‘He (who) strives with God’; and the reason for its being conferred is more accurately given by the Revised Version, which translates, ‘For thou hast striven with God and with men,’ than in the Authorised rendering. His victory with God involved the certainty of his power with men. All his life he had been trying to get the advantage of them, and to conquer them, not by spear and sword, but by his brains. But now

the true way to true sway among men is opened to him. All men are the servants of the servant and the friend of God. He who has the ear of the emperor is master of many men.

Jacob is not always called Israel in his subsequent history. His new name was a name of character and of spiritual standing, and that might fluctuate, and the old self resume its power; so he is still called by the former appellation, just as, at certain points in his life, the apostle forfeits the right to be 'Peter,' and has to hear from Christ's lips the old name, the use of which is more poignant than many reproachful words; 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you.' But in the last death-bed scene, when the patriarch lifted himself in his bed, and with prophetic dignity pronounced his parting benediction on Joseph's sons, the new name reappears with solemn pathos.

That name was transmitted to his descendants, and has passed over to the company of believing men, who have been overcome by God, and have prevailed with God. It is a charter and a promise. It is a stringent reminder of duty and a lofty ideal. A true Christian is an 'Israel.' His office is to wrestle with God. Nor can we forget how this mysterious scene was repeated in yet more solemn fashion, beneath the gnarled olives of Gethsemane, glistening in the light of the paschal full moon, when the true Israel prayed with such sore crying and tears that His body partook of the struggle, and 'His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' The word which describes Christ's agony is that which is often rendered 'wrestling,' and perhaps is selected with intentional allusion to this incident. At all events, when we think of Jacob by the brook Jabbok, and of a 'greater than our father Jacob' by the brook Kedron, we may well learn what persistence, what earnestness and effort of the whole nature, go to make up the ideal of prayer, and may well blush for the miserable indifference and torpor of what we venture to call our prayers. These are our patterns, 'as many as walk according to this rule,' and are thereby shown to be 'the Israel of God,'—upon them shall be peace.

4. We have, as the end of all, a deepened desire after closer knowledge of God, and the answer to it. Some expositors (as, for instance, Robertson of Brighton, in his impressive sermon on this section) take the closing petition, 'Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name,' as if it were the centre point of the whole incident. But this is obviously a partial view. The desire to know that name does not come to Jacob, as we might have expected, when he was struggling with his unknown foe in the dark there. It is the end, and, in some sense, the issue, of all that has gone before. Not that he was in any doubt as to the person to whom he spoke; it is just because he knows that he is speaking with God, who alone can bless, that he longs to have some deeper, clearer knowledge still of Him. He is not asking for a word by which he may call Him; the name is the expression of the nature, and his parting request is for something far more intimate and deep than syllables which could be spoken by any lips. The certain sequel of the discovery of God as striving in mercy with a man, and of yielding to him, is the thirst for deeper acquaintance with Him, and for a fuller, more satisfying knowledge of His inmost heart. If the season of mysterious intercourse must cease, and day hide more than it discloses, and Jacob go to face Esau, and we come down from the mount to sordid cares and mean tasks, at least we long to bear with us as a love-token some whisper in our inmost hearts that may cheer us with the peaceful truth about Him and be a hidden sweetness. The presence of such a desire is a sure consequence, and therefore a good test, of real prayer.

The Divine answer, which sounds at first like refusal, is anything but that. Why dost thou ask after My name? surely I need not to give thee more revelation of My character. Thou hast enough of light; what thou needest is insight into what thou hast already. We have in what God has made known of Himself already to us—both in His outward revelation, which is so much larger and sweeter to us than it was to Jacob, but also in His providences, and in the

inward communion which we have with Him if we have let Him overcome us, and have gained power to prevail with Him—sources of certain knowledge of Him so abundant and precious that we need nothing but the loving eye which shall take in all their beauty and completeness, to have our most eager desires after His name more than satisfied. We need not ask for more sunshine, but take care to spread ourselves out in the full sunshine which we have, and let it drench our eyes and fire our hearts. ‘And He blessed him there.’ Not till now was he capable of receiving the full blessing. He needed to have self beaten out of him; he needed to recognise God as lovingly striving with Him; he needed to yield himself up to Him; he needed to have his heart thus cleansed and softened, and then opened wide by panting desire for the presence and benediction of God; he needed to be made conscious of his new standing, and of the higher life budding within him; he needed to experience the yearning for a closer vision of the face, a deeper knowledge of the name,—and then it was possible to pour into his heart a tenderness and fulness of blessing which before there had been no room to receive, and which now answered in sweetest fashion the else unanswered desire, ‘Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name.’

In like manner we may each be blessed with the presence and benediction of Him whose merciful strivings, when we knew Him not, came to us in the darkness; and to whom, if we yield, there will be peace and power in our hearts, and upon us, too, the sun will rise as we pass from the place where our foe became our friend, and by faith we saw Him face to face, and drank in life by the gaze.

A Forgotten Vow

'Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother,' GENESIS XXXV. 1.

Thirty years at least had passed since Jacob's vow; ten or twenty since his return. He is in no haste to fulfil it, but has settled down at Shechem and bought land there, and seems to have forgotten all about Bethel.

1. *The lesson of possible negligence*.

(*a*) We are apt to forget vows when God has fulfilled His side of them. Resolutions made in time of trouble are soon forgotten. We pray and think about God more then than when things go well with us. Religion is in many men's judgment for stormy weather only.

(*b*) We are often more resolved to make sacrifices in the beginning of our Christian course than afterwards.

Many a brilliant morning is followed by cloudy day.

Youth is often full of enthusiasms which after-days forget.

2. *The reasons for the negligence*.

Jacob felt a gradual fading away of impressions of need. He was comfortably settled at Shechem. He was surrounded by a wild, godless household who cherished their idols, and he knew that if he went to Bethel idolatry must be given up.

3. *The essentials to communion and service*.

Surrender. Purity. Must bury idols under oak.

4.*The reward of sacrifice and of duty discharged*.

The renewed appearance of God. The confirmation of name Israel. Enlarged promises. So the old man's vision may be better than the youth's, if he lives up to his youthful vows.

The Trials And Visions Of Devout Youth

'And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou Indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.'—GENESIS xxxvii. 1-11.

'The generations of Jacob' are mainly occupied with the history of Joseph, because through him mainly was the divine purpose carried on. Jacob is now the head of the chosen family, since Isaac's death (Gen. xxxv. 29), and therefore the narrative is continued under that new heading. There may possibly be intended a contrast in 'dwelt' and 'sojourned' in verse 1, the former implying a more complete settling down.

There are two principal points in this narrative,—the sad insight that it gives into the state of the household in which so much of the world's history and hopes was wrapped up, and the preludings of Joseph's future in his dreams.

As to the former, the account of it is introduced by the statement that Joseph, at seventeen years of age, was set to work, according to the wholesome Eastern usage, and so was thrown into the company of the sons of the two slave-women, Bilhah and Zilpah. Delitzsch understands 'lad' in verse 2 in the sense in which we use 'boy,' as meaning an attendant. Joseph was, then, told off to be subordinate to these two sets of his rough brothers. The relationship was enough to rouse hatred in such coarse souls. And, indeed, the history of Jacob's household strikingly illustrates the miserable evils of polygamy, which makes families within the family, and turns brothers into enemies. Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons reflected in their hatred of Rachel's their mothers' envy of the true wife of Jacob's heart. The sons of the bondwoman were sure to hate the sons of the free.

If Joseph had been like his brothers, they would have forgiven him his mother. But he was horrified at his first glimpse of unrestrained young passions, and, in the excitement of disgust and surprise, 'told their evil report.' No doubt, his brothers had been unwilling enough to be embarrassed by his presence, for there is nothing that wild young men dislike more than the constraint put on them by the presence of an innocent youth; and when they found out that this 'milk-sop' of a brother was a spy and a telltale, their wrath blazed up. So Joseph had early experience of the shock which meets all young men who have been brought up in godly households when they come into contact with sin in fellow-clerks, servants, students, or the

like. It is a sharp test of what a young man is made of, to come forth from the shelter of a father's care and a mother's love, and to be forced into witnessing and hearing such things as go on wherever a number of young men are thrown together. Be not 'partaker of other men's sins.' And the trial is doubly great when the tempters are elder brothers, and the only way to escape their unkindness is to do as they do. Joseph had an early experience of the need of resistance; and, as long as the world is a world, love to God will mean hatred from its worst elements. If we are 'sons of the day,' we cannot but rebuke the darkness.

It is an invidious office to tell other people's evil-doing, and he who brings evil reports of others generally and deservedly gets one for himself. But there are circumstances in which to do so is plain duty, and only a mistaken sense of honour keeps silence. But there must be no exaggeration, malice, or personal ends in the informer. Classmates in school or college, fellow-servants, employees in great businesses, and the like, have not only a duty of loyalty to one another, but of loyalty to their superior. We are sometimes bound to be blind to, and dumb about, our associates' evil deeds, but sometimes silence makes us accomplices.

Jacob had a right to know, and Joseph would have been wrong if he had not told him, the truth about his brothers. Their hatred shows that his purity had made their doing wrong more difficult. It is a grand thing when a young man's presence deprives the Devil of elbow-room for his tricks. How much restraining influence such a one may exert!

Jacob's somewhat foolish love, and still more foolish way of showing it, made matters worse. There were many excuses for him. He naturally clung to the son of his lost but never-forgotten first love, and as naturally found, in Joseph's freedom from the vices of his other sons, a solace and joy. It has been suggested that the 'long garment with sleeves,' in which he decked the lad, indicated an intention of transferring the rights of the first-born to him, but in any case it meant distinguishing affection; and the father or mother who is weak enough to show partiality in the treatment of children need not wonder if their unwise love creates bitter heart-burnings. Perhaps, if Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons had had a little more sunshine of a father's love, they would have borne brighter flowers and sweeter fruit. It is fatal when a child begins to suspect that a parent is not fair.

So these surly brothers, who could not even say 'Peace be to thee!' (the common salutation) when they came across Joseph, had a good deal to say for themselves. It is a sad picture of the internal feuds of the house from which all nations were to be blessed. The Bible does not idealise its characters, but lets us see the seamy side of the tapestry, that we may the more plainly recognise the Mercy which forgives, and the mighty Providence which works through, such imperfect men. But the great lesson for all young people from the picture of Joseph's early days, when his whiteness rebuked the soiled lives of his brothers, as new-fallen snow the grimy cake, hardened and soiled on the streets, is, 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.' Never mind a world's hatred, if you have a father's love. There is one Father who can draw His obedient children into the deepest secrets of His heart without withholding their portion from the most prodigal.

Joseph's dreams are the other principal point in the narrative. The chief incidents of his life turn on dreams,—his own, his fellow-prisoners', Pharaoh's. The narrative recognises them as divinely sent, and no higher form of divine communication appears to have been made to Joseph, He received no new revelations of religious truth. His mission was, not to bring fresh messages from heaven, but to effect the transference of the nation to Egypt. Hence the lower form of the communications made to him.

The meaning of both dreams is the same, but the second goes beyond the first in the grandeur of the emblems, and in the inclusion of the parents in the act of obeisance. Both sets of

symbols were drawn from familiar sights. The homeliness of the ‘sheaves’ is in striking contrast with the grandeur of the ‘sun, moon, and stars.’ The interpretation of the first is ready to hand, because the sheaves were ‘your sheaves’ and ‘my sheaf.’ There was no similar key included in the second, and his brothers do not appear to have caught its meaning. It was Jacob who read it. Probably Rachel was dead when the dream came, but that need not make a difficulty.

Note that Joseph did not tell his dreams with elation, or with a notion that they meant anything particular. It is plainly the singularity of them that makes him repeat them, as is clearly indicated by the repeated ‘behold’ in his two reports. With perfect innocence of intention, and as he would have told any other strange dream, the lad repeats them. The commentary was the work of his brothers, who were ready to find proofs of his being put above them, and of his wish to humiliate them, in anything he said or did. They were wiser than he was. Perhaps they suspected that Jacob meant to set him at the head of the clan on his decease, and that the dreams were trumped up and told to them to prepare them for the decision which the special costume may have already hinted.

At all events, hatred is very suspicious, and ready to prick up its ears at every syllable that seems to speak of the advancement of its object.

There is a world of contempt, rage, and fear in the questions, ‘Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?’ The conviction that Joseph was marked out by God for a high position seems to have entered these rough souls, and to have been fuel to fire. Hatred and envy make a perilous mixture. Any sin can come from a heart drenched with these. Jacob seems to have been wise enough to make light of the dreams to the lad, though much of them in his heart. Youthful visions of coming greatness are often best discouraged. The surest way to secure their fulfilment is to fill the present with strenuous, humble work. ‘Do the duty that is nearest thee.’ ‘The true apprenticeship for a ruler is to serve.’ ‘Act, act, in the living present.’ The sheaves may come to bow down some day, but ‘my sheaf’ has to be cut and bound first, and the sooner the sickle is among the corn, the better.

But yet, on the other hand, let young hearts be true to their early visions, whether they say much about them or not. Probably it will be wisest to keep silence. But there shine out to many young men and women, at their start in life, bright possibilities of no ignoble sort, and rising higher than personal ambition, which it is the misery and sin of many to see ‘fade away into the light of common day,’ or into the darkness of night. Be not ‘disobedient to the heavenly vision’; for the dreams of youth are often the prophecies of what God means and makes it possible for the dreamer to be, if he wakes to work towards that fair thing which shone on him from afar.

Man's Passions And God's Purpose

'And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood! Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's and captain of the guard.'—GENESIS xxxvii. 23-36.

We have left the serene and lofty atmosphere of communion and saintship far above us. This narrative takes us down into foul depths. It is a hideous story of vulgar hatred and cruelty. God's name is never mentioned in it; and he is as far from the actors' thoughts as from the writer's words. The crime of the brothers is the subject, and the picture is painted in dark tones to teach large truths about sin.

1. The broad teaching of the whole story, which is ever being reiterated in Old Testament incidents, is that God works out His great purposes through even the crimes of unconscious men. There is an irony, if we may so say, in making the hatred of these men the very means of their brother's advancement, and the occasion of blessing to themselves. As coral insects work, not knowing the plan of their reef, still less the fair vegetation and smiling homes which it will one day carry, but blindly building from the material supplied by the ocean a barrier against it; so even evil-doers are carrying on God's plan, and sin is made to counterwork itself, and be the black channel through which the flashing water of life pours. Joseph's words (Gen. 1. 20) give the point of view for the whole story: 'Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good … to save much people alive.' We can scarcely forget the still more wonderful example of the same thing, in the crime of crimes, when his brethren slew the Son of God—like Joseph, the victim of envy—and, by their crime, God's counsel of mercy for them and for all was fulfilled.

2. Following the narrative, verses 23, 24, and 25 show us the poisonous fruit of brotherly hatred. The family, not the nation, is the social unit in Genesis. From the beginning, we find the field on which sin works is the family relation. Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and now the other children of Jacob and Joseph, attest the power of sin when it enters there, and illustrate the principle that the corruption of the best is the worst. The children of Rachel could not but be hated by the children of other mothers. Jacob's

undisguised partiality for Joseph was a fault too, which wrought like yeast on the passions of his wild sons. The long-sleeved garment which he gave to the lad probably meant to indicate his purpose to bestow on him the right of the first-born forfeited by Reuben, and so the violent rage which it excited was not altogether baseless. The whole miserable household strife teaches the rottenness of the polygamous relation on which it rested, and the folly of paternal favouritism. So it carries teaching especially needed then, but not out of date now.

The swift passage of the purely inward sin of jealous envy into the murderous act, as soon as opportunity offered, teaches the short path which connects the inmost passions with the grossest outward deeds. Like Jonah's gourd, the smallest seed of hate needs but an hour or two of favouring weather to become a great tree, with all obscene and blood-seeking birds croaking in its branches. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,' Therefore the solemn need for guarding the heart from the beginnings of envy, and for walking in love.

The clumsy contrivance for murder without criminality, which Reuben suggested, is an instance of the shallow pretexts with which the sophistry of sin fools men before they have done the wrong thing. Sin's mask is generally dropped very soon after. The bait is useless when the hook is well in the fish's gills. 'Don't let us kill him. Let us put him into a cistern. He cannot climb up its bottle-shaped, smooth sides. But that is not our fault. Nobody will ever hear his muffled cries from its depths. But there will be no blood on our hands.' It was not the first time, nor is it the last, that men have tried to blink their responsibility for the consequences which they hoped would come of their crimes. Such excuses seem sound when we are being tempted; but, as soon as the rush of passion is past, they are found to be worthless. Like some cheap castings, they are only meant to be seen in front, where they are rounded and burnished. Get behind them, and you find them hollow.

'They sat down to eat bread,' Thomas Fuller pithily says: 'With what heart could they say grace, either before or after meat?' What a grim meal! And what an indication of their rude natures, seared consciences, and deadened affections!

This picture of the moral condition of the fathers of the Jewish tribes is surely a strong argument for the historical accuracy of the narrative. It would be strange if the legends of a race, instead of glorifying, should blacken, the characters of its founders. No motive can be alleged which would explain such a picture; its only explanation is its truth. The ugly story, too, throws vivid light on that thought, which prophets ever reiterated, 'not for your sakes, but for My name's sake.' The divine choice of Israel was grounded, not on merit, but on sovereign purpose. And the undisguised plainness of the narrative of their sins is but of a piece with the tone of Scripture throughout. It never palliates the faults even of its best men. It tells its story without comment. It never indulges in condemnation any more than in praise. It is a perfect mirror; its office is to record, not to criticise. Many misconceptions of Old Testament morality would have been avoided by keeping that simple fact in view.

3. The ill-omened meal is interrupted by the sudden appearance, so picturesquely described, of the caravan of Ishmaelites with their loaded camels. Dothan was on or near the great trade route to Egypt, where luxury, and especially the custom of embalming, opened a profitable market for spices. The traders would probably not be particular as to the sort of merchandise they picked up on their road, and such an 'unconsidered trifle' as a slave or two would be neither here nor there. This opportune advent of the caravan sets a thought buzzing in Judah's brain, which brings out a new phase of the crime. Hatred darkening to murder is bad enough; but hatred which has also an eye to business, and makes a profit out of a brother, is a shade or two blacker, because it means cold-blooded calculation and selfish advantage instead of raging passion. Judah's cynical question avows the real motive of his intervention. He prefers the paltry gain from selling Joseph to the unprofitable luxury of killing him. It brings in

regard to brotherly ties at the end, as a kind of homage paid to propriety, as if the obligations they involved were not broken as really by his proposal as by murder. Certainly it is strange logic which can say in one breath, 'Let us sell him; … for he is our brother,' and finds the clause between buffer enough to keep these two contradictories from collision.

If any touch of conscience made the brothers prefer the less cruel alternative, one can only see here another illustration of the strange power which men have of limiting the working of conscience, and of the fact that when a greater sin has been resolved on, a smaller one gets to look almost like a virtue. Perhaps Judah and the rest actually thought themselves very kind and brotherly when they put their brother into strangers' power, and so went back to their meal with renewed cheerfulness, both because they had gained their end without bloodshed, and because they had got the money. They did not think that every tear and pang which Joseph would shed and feel would be laid at their door.

We do not suppose that Joseph was meant to be, in the accurate sense of the word, a type of Christ. But the coincidence is not to be passed by, that these same powerful motives of envy and of greed were combined in His case too, and that there again a Judah (Judas) appears as the agent of the perfidy.

We may note that the appearance of the traders in the nick of time, suggesting the sale of Joseph, points the familiar lesson that the opportunity to do ill deeds often makes ill deeds done. The path for entering on evil is made fatally easy at first; that gate always stands wide. The Devil knows how to time his approaches. A weak nature, with an evil bias in it, finds everywhere occasions and suggestions to do wrong. But it is the evil nature which makes innocent things opportunities for evil. Therefore we have to be on our guard, as knowing that if we fall it is not circumstances, but ourselves, that made stumbling-blocks out of what might have been stepping-stones.

4. Leaving Joseph to pursue his sad journey, our narrative introduces for the first time Reuben, whose counsel, as the verses before the text tell us, it had been to cast the poor lad into the cistern. His motive had been altogether good; he wished to save life, and as soon as the others were out of the way, to bring Joseph up again and get him safely back to Jacob. In chapter xlii. 22, Reuben himself reminds his brothers of what had passed. There he says that he had besought them not to 'sin against the child,' which naturally implies that he had wished them to do nothing to him, and that they 'would not hear.' In the verses before the text he proposes the compromise of the pit, and the others 'hear.' So there seem to have been two efforts made by him—first, to shield Joseph from any harm, and then that half-and-half measure which was adopted. He is absent, while they carry out the plan, and from the cruel merriment of the feast—perhaps watching his opportunity to rescue, perhaps in sickness of heart and protest against the deed. Well meant and kindly motived as his action was—and self-sacrificing too, if, as is probable, Joseph was meant by Jacob as his successor in the forfeited birthright—his scheme breaks down, as attempts to mitigate evil by compliance and to make compromises with sinners usually do. The only one of the whole family who had some virtue in him, was too timid to take up a position of uncompromising condemnation. He thought it more polite to go part of the way, and to trust to being able to prevent the worst. That is always a dangerous experiment. It is often tried still; it never answers. Let a man stand to his guns, and speak out the condemnation that is in his heart; otherwise, he will be sure to go farther than he meant, he will lose all right of remonstrance, and will generally find that the more daring sinners have made his well-meant schemes to avert the mischief impossible.

5. The cruel trick by which Jacob was deceived is perhaps the most heartless bit of the whole heartless crime. It came as near an insult as possible. It was maliciously meant. The snarl

about the coat, the studied use of ‘thy son’ as if the brothers disowned the brotherhood, the unfeeling harshness of choosing such a way of telling their lie—all were meant to give the maximum of pain, and betray their savage hatred of father and son, and its causes. Was Reuben’s mouth shut all this time? Evidently. From his language in chapter xlii., ‘His blood is required,’ he seems to have believed until then that Joseph had been killed in his absence. But he dared not speak. Had he told what he did know, the brothers had but to add, ‘And he proposed it himself,’ and his protestations of his good intentions would have been unheeded. He believed his brother dead, and perhaps thought it better that Jacob should think him slain by wild beasts than by brothers’ hands, as Reuben supposed him to be. But his shut mouth teaches again how dangerous his policy had been, and how the only road, which it is safe, in view of the uncertainties of the future, to take, is the plain road of resistance to evil and non-fellowship with its doers.

6. And what of the poor old father? His grief is unworthy of God’s wrestler. It is not the part of a devout believer in God’s providence to refuse to be comforted. There was no religious submission in his passionate sorrow. How unlike the quiet resignation which should have marked the recognition that the God who had been his guide was working here too! No doubt the hypocritical condolences of his children were as vinegar upon nitre. No doubt the loss of Joseph had taken away the one gentle and true son on whom his loneliness rested since his Rachel’s death, while he found no solace in the wild, passionate men who called him ‘father’ and brought him no ‘honour.’ But still his grief is beyond the measure which a true faith in God would have warranted; and we cannot but see that the dark picture which we have just been looking at gets no lighter or brighter tints from the demeanour of Jacob.

There are few bitterer sorrows than for a parent to see the children of his own sin in the sins of his children. Jacob might have felt that bitterness, as he looked round on the lovelessness and dark, passionate selfishness of his children, and remembered his own early crimes against Esau. He might have seen that his unwise fondness for the son of his Rachel had led to the brothers’ hatred, though he did not know that that hatred had plunged the arrow into his soul. Whether he knew it or not, his own conduct had feathered the arrow. He was drinking as he had brewed; and the heart-broken grief which darkened his later years had sprung from seed of his own sowing. So it is always. ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’

It is a miserable story of ignoble jealousy and cruel hate; and yet, over all this foaming torrent, God’s steadfast bow of peace shines. These crimes and this ‘affliction of Joseph’ were the direct path to the fulfilment of His purposes. As blind instruments, even in their rebellion and sin, men work out His designs. The lesson of Joseph’s bondage will one day be the summing up of the world’s history. ‘Thou makest the wrath of man to praise Thee: and with the remainder thereof Thou girdest Thyself.’

Goodness In A Dungeon

'And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.'—GENESIS xxxix. 20-23.

'And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward. And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you. And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler. But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.'—GENESIS xl. 1-15.

Potiphar was 'captain of the guard,' or, as the title literally runs, chief of the executioners. In that capacity he had charge of the prison, which was connected with his house (Gen. xl. 3). It is, therefore, quite intelligible that he should have put Joseph in confinement on his own authority, and the distinction drawn between such a prisoner and the 'king's prisoners,' who were there by royal warrant or due process of law, is natural. Such high-handed treatment of a slave was a small matter, and it was merciful as well as arrogant, for death would have been the punishment of the crime of which Joseph was accused. Either Potiphar was singularly lenient, or, as is perhaps more probable, he did not quite believe his wife's story, and thought it best to hush up a scandal. The transfer of Joseph from the house to the adjoining prison would be quietly managed, and then no more need be said about an ugly business.

So now we see him at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, flung down in a moment by a lie from the height to which he had slowly been climbing, having lost the confidence of his master, and earned the unslumbering hatred of a wicked woman. He had wrecked his career by his goodness. 'What a fool!' says the world. 'How badly managed things are in this life,' say doubters, 'that virtue should not be paid by prosperity!' But the end, even the nearer end in

this life, will show whether he was a fool, and whether things are so badly arranged; and the lesson enforced by the picture of Joseph in his dungeon, and which young beginners in life have special need to learn, is that, come what will of it, right is right, and sin is sin, that consequences are never to deter from duty, and that it is better to have a clean conscience and be in prison than do wickedness and sit at a king's table. A very threadbare lesson, but needing to be often repeated.

'But the Lord was with Joseph.' That is one of the eloquent 'buts' of Scripture. The prison is light when God is there, and chains do not chafe if He wraps His love round them. Many a prisoner for God since Joseph's time has had his experience repeated, and received tenderer tokens from Him in a dungeon than ever before. Paul the prisoner, John in Patmos, Bunyan in Bedford jail, George Fox in Lancaster Castle, Rutherford in Aberdeen, and many more, have found the Lord with them, and showing them His kindness. We may all be sure that, if ever faithfulness to conscience involves us in difficulties, the faithfulness and the difficulties will combine to bring to us sweet and strong tokens of God's approval and presence, the winning of which will make a prison a palace and a gate of heaven.

Joseph's relations to jailer and fellow-prisoners are beautiful and instructive. The former is called 'the keeper of the prison,' and is evidently Potiphar's deputy, in more immediate charge of the prison. Of course, the great man had an underling to do the work, and probably that underling was not chosen for sweetness of temper or facile leniency to his charges. But he fell under the charm of Joseph's character—all the more readily, perhaps, because his occupation had not brought many good men to his knowledge. This jewel would flash all the more brightly for the dark background of criminals, and the jailer would wonder at a type of character so unlike what he was accustomed to. Eastern prisons to-day present a curious mixture of cruelty and companionship. The jailers are on intimate terms with prisoners, and yet are ready to torture them. There is no discipline, nor any rules, nor inspection. The jailer does as he likes. So it seems to have been in Egypt, and there would be nothing unnatural in making a prisoner jailer of the rest, and leaving everything in his hands. The 'keeper of the prison' was lazy, like most of us, and very glad to shift duties on to any capable shoulders. Such a thing would, of course, be impossible with us, but it is a bit of true local colouring here.

Joseph won hearts because God was with him, as the story is careful to point out. Our religion should recommend us, and therefore itself, to those who have to do with us. It is not enough that we should be severely righteous, as Joseph had been, or ready to meet trouble with stoical resignation, but we are to be gentle and lovable, gracious towards men, because we receive grace from God. We owe it to our Lord and to our fellows, and to ourselves, to be magnets to attract to Jesus, by showing how fair He can make a life. Joseph in prison found work to do, and he did not shirk it. He might have said to himself: 'This is poor work for me, who had all Potiphar's house to rule. Shall such a man as I come down to such small tasks as this?' He might have sulked or desponded in idleness, but he took the kind of work that offered, and did his best by it. Many young people nowadays do nothing, because they think themselves above the small humdrum duties that lie near them. It would do some of us good to remember Joseph in the jail, and his cheerful discharge of what his hands found to do there.

Of course, work done 'because the Lord was with him,' in the consciousness of His presence, and in obedience to Him, went well. 'The Lord made it to prosper,' as He always will make such work.

'When thou dost favour any action, It runs, it flies.'

And even if, sometimes, work done in the fear of the Lord does not outwardly prosper, it does so in deepest truth, if it work in us the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We need to have a more Christian idea of what constitutes prosperity, and then we shall understand that there are no exceptions to the law that, if a man does his work by God and with God and for God, 'that which he does, the Lord makes it to prosper.'

The help that Joseph gave by interpreting the two high officials' dreams cannot be considered here in detail, but we note that the names of similar officers, evidently higher in rank than we should suppose, with our notions of bakers and butlers, are found in Egyptian documents, and that these two were 'king's prisoners,' and put in charge of Potiphar, who alleviated their imprisonment by detailing Joseph as their attendant, thus showing that his feeling to the young Hebrew was friendly still. Dreams are the usual method of divine communication in Genesis, and belong to a certain stage in the process of revelation. The friend of God, who is in touch with Him, can interpret these. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,' and it is still true that they who live close by God have insight into His purposes. Joseph showed sympathy with the two dreamers, and his question, 'Why look ye so sadly?' unlocked their hearts. He was not so swallowed up in his own trouble as to be blind to the signs of another's sorrow, or slow to try to comfort. Grief is apt to make us selfish, but it is meant to make us tender of heart and quick of hand to help our fellows in calamity. We win comfort for our own sorrows by trying to soothe those of others. Jesus stooped to suffer that He might succour them that suffer, and we are to tread in His steps.

Joseph, The Prime Minister

'And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same.' GENESIS xli. 38-48.

At seventeen years of age Joseph was sold for a slave; at thirty he was prime minister of Egypt (Gen. xxxvii, 2; xli. 46). How long his prison life lasted is uncertain; but it was long enough for the promises contained in his early dreams to 'try him' (Ps. cv. 19) whether his faith would stand apparent disappointment and weary delay. Like all the Scripture narratives, this history of Joseph has little to say about feelings, and prefers facts. But we can read between the lines, and be tolerably sure that the thirteen years of trial were well endured, and that the inward life had grown so as to fit him for his advancement. We have here a full-length portrait of the prime minister, or vizier, which brings out three points—his elevation, his naturalisation, and his administration.

Joseph had not only interpreted Pharaoh's dream, but had suggested a policy in preparation for the coming famine. He had recommended the appointment of 'a wise and discreet man,' with supreme authority over the land. Pharaoh first consulted 'his servants,' and, with their consent, possibly not very hearty, appointed the proposer of the plan as its carrier-out, quoting to him his own words, 'wise and discreet.'

The sudden installing of an unknown prisoner in high office has often been thought hard to believe, and has been pointed to as proof of the legendary character of the story. But the ground on which Pharaoh put it goes far to explain it. He and his servants had come to believe that 'God' spoke through this man, that 'the Spirit of God' was in him. So here was a divinely sent messenger, whom it would be impiety and madness to reject. Observe that Pharaoh and Joseph both speak in this chapter of 'God.' There was a common ground of recognition of a divine Being on which they met. The local colour of the story indicates a period before the fuller revelation, which drew so broad a line of demarcation between Israel and the other nations.

Joseph's sudden promotion is made the more intelligible by the probability which the study of Egyptian history has given, that the Pharaoh who made him his second in command was one of the Hyksos conquerors who dominated Egypt for a long period. They would have no prejudices against Joseph on account of his being a foreigner. A dynasty of alien conquerors

has generally an open door for talent, and cares little who a man's father is, or where he comes from, if he can do his work. And Joseph, by not being an Egyptian born, would be all the fitter an instrument for carrying out the policy which he had suggested.

His ceremonial investiture with the insignia of office is true to Egyptian manners. The signet ring, as the emblem of full authority; the chain, as a mark of dignity; the robe of 'fine linen' (or rather of cotton), which was a priestly dress—all are illustrated by the monuments. The proclamation made before him as he rode in the second chariot has been very variously interpreted. It has been taken for a Hebraised Egyptian word, meaning 'Cast thyself down'; and this interpretation was deemed the most probable, until Assyrian discovery brought to light 'that *abarakku* is the Assyrian name of the grand vizier' (Fr. Delitzsch, *Hebrew Language Viewed in the Light of Assyrian Research*, p. 26). Sayce proposes another explanation, also from the cuneiform tablets: 'There was a word *abrik* in the Sumerian language, which signified a seer, and was borrowed by the Semitic Babylonians under the varying forms of *abrikku* and *abarakku*. It is *abrikku* which we have in Genesis, and the title applied by the people to the "seer" Joseph proves to be the one we should most naturally expect.' The Tel el-Amarna tablets show that the knowledge of cuneiform writing was common in Egypt (Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 214). This explanation is tempting, but it is perhaps scarcely probable that the proclamation should have been in any other language than Egyptian, or should have had reference to anything but Joseph's new office. It was not as seer that he was to be obeyed, but as Pharaoh's representative, even though he had become the latter because he had proved himself the former.

But in any case, the whole context is accurately and strongly Egyptian. Was there any point in the history of Israel, down to an impossibly late date, except the time of Moses, at which Jewish writers were so familiar with Egypt as to have been capable of producing so true a picture?

The lessons of this incident are plain. First stands out, clear and full, the witness it bears to God's faithfulness, and to His sovereign sway over all events. What are all the persons concerned in the narrative but unconscious instruments of His? The fierce brothers, the unconcerned slave-dealers, Potiphar, his wife, the prisoners, Pharaoh, are so many links in a chain; but they are also men, and therefore free to act, and guilty if acting wrongly. Men execute God's purposes, even when unconscious or rebellious, but are responsible, and often punished, for the acts which He uses to effect His designs.

Joseph's thirteen years of trial, crowned with sudden prosperity, may read all of us, and especially young men and women, a lesson of patience. Many of us have to fight our way through analogous difficulties at the outset of our career; and we are apt to lose heart and get restive when success seems slow to come, and one hindrance after another blocks our road. But hindrances are helps. If one of Joseph's misfortunes had been omitted, his good fortune would never have come. If his brethren had not hated him, if he had not been sold, if he had not been imprisoned, he would never have ruled Egypt. Not one thread in the tapestry could have been withdrawn without spoiling the pattern. We cannot afford to lose one of our sorrows or trials. There would be no summer unless winter had gone before. There is a bud or a fruit for every snowflake, and a bird's song for every howl of the storm.

Plainly, too, does the story read the lesson of quiet doing of the work and accepting the circumstances of the moment. Joseph was being prepared for the administration of a kingdom by his oversight of Potiphar's house and of the prison. His character was matured by his trials, as iron is consolidated by heavy hammers. To resist temptation, to do modestly and sedulously whatever work comes to our hands, to be content to look after a jail even though we have dreamed of sun and moon bowing down to us, is the best apprenticeship for

whatever elevation circumstances—or, to speak more devoutly, God—intends for us. Young men thrown into city life far away from their homes, and whispered to by many seducing voices, have often to suffer for keeping themselves unspotted; but they are being strengthened by rough discipline, and will get such promotion, in due time, as is good for them. But outward success is not God's best gift. It was better to be the Joseph who deserved his high place, than to have the place. The character which he had grown into was more than the trappings which Pharaoh put on him. And such a character is always the reward of such patience, faith, and self-control, whether chains and chariots are added or not.

Little need be said about the other points of the story. Joseph's naturalisation as an Egyptian was complete. His name was changed, in token that he had completely become a subject of Pharaoh's. The meaning of the formidable-looking polysyllable, which Egyptian lips found easier than 'Joseph,' is uncertain. 'At present the origin of the first syllable is still doubtful, and though the latter part of the name is certainly the Egyptian *n-ti-pa-ankh* ("of the life"), it is difficult to say in which of its different senses the expression *pa-ankh* ("the life") is employed' (Sayce, *ut supra*, p. 213). The prevailing opinion of Egyptian experts is that it means 'Support of life.'

The naturalising was completed by his marriage to Asenath (supposed to mean 'One belonging to the goddess Neith'), a daughter of a high officer of state, Poti-phera (meaning, like its shortened form, Potiphar, 'The gift of Ra' the sun-god). Such an alliance placed him at once in the very innermost circle of Egyptian aristocracy. It may have been a bitter pill for the priest to swallow, to give his daughter to a man of yesterday, and an alien; but, just as probably, he too looked to Joseph with some kind of awe, and was not unwilling to wed Asenath to the first man in the empire, wherever he had started up from.

But should not Joseph's religion have barred such a marriage? The narrator gives no judgment on the fact, and we have to form our own estimate. But it is not to be estimated as if it had occurred five or six centuries later. The family of Jacob was not so fenced off, nor was its treasure of revelation so complete, as afterwards. We may be fairly sure that Joseph felt no inconsistency between his ancestral faith, which had become his own in his trials, and this union. He was risking a great deal; that is certain. Whether the venture ended well or ill, we know not. Only we may be very sure that a marriage in which a common faith is not a strong bond of union lacks its highest sanctity, and is perilously apt to find that difference in religious convictions is a strong separator.

Joseph's administration opens up questions as to Egyptian land tenure, and the like, which cannot be dealt with here. 'In the earlier days of the monarchy the country was in the hands of great feudal lords; … the land belonged to them absolutely…. But after the convulsion caused by the Hyksos conquest and the war of independence, this older system of land tenure was completely changed…. The Pharaoh is the fountain head, not only of honour, but of property as well…. The people ceased to have any rights of their own' (Sayce, *ut supra*, p. 216).

We may note Joseph's immediate entrance upon office and his characteristic energy in it. He 'went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.' No grass grew under this man's feet. He was ubiquitous, personally overseeing everything for seven long years. Wasteful consumption of the abundant crops had to be restrained, storehouses to be built, careful records of the contents to be made, after Egyptian fashion. The people, who could not look so far as seven years ahead, and wanted to enjoy, or make money out of, the good harvests, had to be looked after, and an army of officials to be kept in order. Dignity meant work for him. Like all true men, he thought more of his duty than of his honours.

Depend on it, he did not wear his fine clothes or ride in the second chariot, when he was hurrying about the country at his task.

He had come ‘out of prison to reign,’ and, as we all find, if we are God’s servants, to reign means to serve, and the higher the place the harder the task. The long years of waiting had nourished powers which the seven years of busy toil tested. We must make ourselves, by God’s help, ready, in obscurity, and especially in youth, for whatever may be laid on us in after days. And if we understand what life here means, we shall be more covetous of spheres of diligent service than of places of shining dignity. Whatever our task, let us do it, as Joseph did his, with strenuous concentration, knowing, as he did, that the years in which it is possible are but few at the longest.

Recognition And Reconciliation

'Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him. Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.' GENESIS xlv. 1-15.

I

If the writer of this inimitable scene of Joseph's reconciliation with his brethren was not simply an historian, he was one of the great dramatic geniuses of the world, master of a vivid minuteness like Defoe's, and able to touch the springs of tears by a pathetic simplicity like his who painted the death of Lear. Surely theories of legend and of mosaic work fail here.

1. We have, first, disclosure. The point at which the impenetrable, stern ruler breaks down is significant. It is after Judah's torrent of intercession for Benjamin, and self-sacrificing offer of himself for a substitute and a slave. Why did this touch Joseph so keenly? Was it not because his brother's speech shows that filial and fraternal affection was now strong enough in him to conquer self? He had sent Joseph to the fate which he is now ready to accept. He and the rest had thought nothing of the dagger they plunged into their father's heart by selling Joseph; but now he is prepared to accept bondage if he may save his father's grey head an ache. The whole of Joseph's harsh, enigmatical treatment had been directed to test them, and to ascertain if they were the same fierce, cruel men as of old. Now, when the doubt is answered, he can no longer dam back the flood of forgiving love. The wisest pardoning kindness seeks the assurance of sorrow and change in the offender, before it can safely and wholesomely enjoy the luxury of letting itself out in tears of reconciliation. We do not call Joseph a type of Christ; but the plain process of forgiveness in his brotherly heart is moulded by the law which applies to God's pardon as to ours. All the wealth of yearning pardon is there, before contrition and repentance; but it is not good for the offender that it should be lavished on him, impenitent.

What a picture that is of the all-powerful ruler, choking down his emotion, and hurriedly ordering the audience chamber to be cleared! How many curious glances would be cast over their shoulders, by the slowly withdrawing crowd, at the strange group—the viceroy, usually so calm, thus inexplicably excited, and the huddled, rude shepherds, bewildered and afraid of what was coming next, in this unaccountable country! How eavesdroppers would linger as near as they durst, and how looks would be exchanged as the sounds of passionate weeping rewarded their open ears! The deepest feelings are not to be flaunted before the world. The man who displays his tears, and the man who is too proud to shed them, are both wrong; but perhaps it is worse to weep in public than not to weep at all.

'I am Joseph.' Were ever the pathos of simplicity, and the simplicity of pathos, more nobly expressed than in these two words?—(There are but two in the Hebrew.) Has the highest dramatic genius ever winged an arrow which goes more surely to the heart than that? The question, which hurries after the disclosure, seems strange and needless; but it is beautifully self-revealing, as expressive of agitation, and as disclosing a son's longing, and perhaps, too, as meant to relieve the brothers' embarrassment, and, as it were, to wrap the keen edge of the disclosure in soft wool.

2. We have, next, conscience-stricken silence. No wonder his brethren 'could not answer' and 'were troubled at his presence.' They had found their brother a ruler; they had found the ruler their brother. Their former crime had turned what might have been a joy into a terror. Already they had come to know and regret it. It might seem to their startled consciences as if now they were about to expiate it. They would remember the severity of Joseph's past intercourse; they see his power, and cannot but be doubtful of his intentions. Had all his strange conduct been manoeuvring to get them, Benjamin and all, into his toils, that one blow might perfect his revenge? Our suspicions are the reflections of our own hearts. So there they stand in open-mouthed, but dumb, wonder and dread. It would task the pencil of him who painted, on the mouldering refectory wall at Milan, the conflicting emotions of the apostles, at the announcement of the betrayer, to portray that silent company of abased and trembling criminals. They are an illustration of the profitlessness of all crime. Sin is, as one of its Hebrew names tells us, missing the mark—whether we think of it as fatally failing to reach the ideal of conduct, or as always, by a divine nemesis, failing to hit even the shabby end it aims at. 'Every rogue is a roundabout fool.' They put Joseph in the pit, and here he is on a throne. They have stained their souls, and embittered their father's life for twenty-two long years, and the dreams have come true, and all their wickedness has not turned the stream of the divine purpose, any more than the mud dam built by a child diverts the Mississippi. One flash has burned up their whole sinful past, and they stand scorched and silent among the ruins. So it always is. Sooner or later the same certainty of the futility of his sin will overwhelm every sinful man, and dumb self-condemnation will stand in silent acknowledgment of evil desert before the throne of the Brother, who is now the Prince and the Judge, on whose fiat hangs life or death. To see Christ enthroned should be joy; but it may be turned into terror and silent anticipation of His just condemnation.

3. We have encouragement and complete forgiveness. That invitation to come close up to him, with which Joseph begins the fuller disclosure of his heart, is a beautiful touch. We can fancy how tender the accents, and how, with some lightening of fear, but still hesitatingly and ashamed, the shepherds, unaccustomed to courtly splendours, approached. The little pause while they draw near helps him to self-command, and he resumes his words in a calmer tone. With one sentence of assurance that he is their brother, he passes at once into that serene region where all passion and revenge die, unable to breathe its keen, pure air. The comfort which he addresses to their penitence would have been dangerous, if spoken to men blind to the enormity of their past. But it will not make a truly repentant conscience less sensitive,

though it may alleviate the aching of the wound, to think that God has used even its sin for His own purposes. It will not take away the sense of the wickedness of the motive to know that a wonderful providence has rectified the consequences. It will rather deepen the sense of evil, and give new cause of adoration of the love that pardons the wrong, and the providence that neutralises the harm.

Joseph takes the true point of view, which we are all bound to occupy, if we would practise the Christian grace of forgiveness. He looks beyond the mere human hate and envy to the divine purpose. 'The sword is theirs; the hand is Thine.' He can even be grateful to his foes who have been unintentionally his benefactors. He thinks of the good that has come out of their malice, and anger dies within him.

Highest attainment of all, the good for which he is grateful is not his all-but-regal dignity, but the power to save and gladden those who would fain have slain, and had saddened him for many a weary year. We read in these utterances of a lofty piety and of a singularly gentle heart, the fruit of sorrow and the expression of thoughts which had slowly grown up in his mind, and had now been long familiar there. Such a calm, certain grasp of the divine shaping and meaning of his life could not have sprung up all at once in him, as he looked at the conscience-stricken culprits cowering before him. More than natural sweetness and placability must have gone to the making of such a temper of forgiveness. He must have been living near the Fountain of all mercy to have had so full a cup of it to offer. Because he had caught a gleam of the divine pardon, he becomes a mirror of it; and we may fairly see in this ill-used brother, yearning over the half-sullen sinners, and seeking to open a way for his forgiveness to steal into their hearts, and rejoicing over his very sorrows which have fitted him to save them alive, and satisfy them in the days of famine, an adumbration of our Elder Brother's forgiving love and saving tenderness.

4. The second part of Joseph's address is occupied with his message to Jacob, and shows how he longed for his father's presence. There is something very natural and beautiful in the repeated exhortations to haste, as indicating the impatient love of a long-absent son. If his heart was so true to his father, why had he sent him no message for all these years? Egypt was near enough, and for nine years now he had been in power. Surely he could have gratified his heart. But he could not have learned by any other means his brethren's feelings, and if they were still what they had been, no intercourse would be possible. He could only be silent, and yearn for the way to open in God's providence, as it did.

The message to Jacob is sent from 'thy son Joseph,' in token that the powerful ruler lays his dignity at his father's feet. No elevation will ever make a true son forget his reverence for his father. If he rise higher in the world, and has to own an old man, away in some simple country home, for his sire, he will be proud to do it. The enduring sanctity of the family ties is not the least valuable lesson from our narrative for this generation, where social conditions are so often widely different in parents and in children. There is an affectionate spreading out of all his glory before his father's old eyes; not that he cared much about it for himself, since, as we have seen, elevation to him meant mainly work, but because he knew how the eyes would glisten at the sight. His mother, who would have been proud of him, is gone, but he has still the joy of gladdening his father by the exhibition of his dignity. It bespeaks a simple nature, unspoiled by prosperity, to delight thus in his father's delight, and to wish the details of all his splendour to be told him. A statesman who takes most pleasure in his elevation because of the good he can do by it, and because it will please the old people at home, must be a pure and lovable man. The command has another justification in the necessity to assure his father of the wisdom of so great a change. God had set him in the Promised Land, and a very plain divine injunction was needed to warrant his leaving it. Such a one was afterwards

given in vision; but the most emphatic account of his son's honour and power was none the less required to make the old Jacob willing to abandon so much, and go into such strange conditions.

We have another instance of the difference between man's purposes and God's counsel in this message. Joseph's only thought is to afford his family temporary shelter during the coming five years of famine. Neither he nor they knew that this was the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham, and the bringing of them into the land of their oppression for four centuries. No shadow of that future was cast upon their joy, and yet, the steady march of God's plan was effected along the path which they were ignorantly preparing. The road-maker does not know what bands of mourners, or crowds of holiday makers, or troops of armed men may pass along it.

5. This wonderfully beautiful scene ends with the kiss of full reconciliation and frank communion. All the fear is out of the brothers' hearts. It has washed away all the envy along with it. The history of Jacob's household had hitherto been full of sins against family life. Now, at last, they taste the sweetness of fraternal love. Joseph, against whom they had sinned, takes the initiative, flinging himself with tears on the neck of Benjamin, his own mother's son, nearer to him than all the others, crowding his pent-up love in one long kiss. Then, with less of passionate affection, but more of pardoning love, he kisses his contrite brothers. The offender is ever less ready to show love than the offended. The first step towards reconciliation, whether of man with man or of man with God, comes from the aggrieved. We always hate those whom we have harmed; and if enmity were ended only by the advances of the wrong-doer, it would be perpetual. The injured has the prerogative of praying the injurer to be reconciled. So was it in Pharaoh's throne-room on that long past day; so is it still in the audience chamber of heaven. 'He that might the vantage best have took found out the remedy.' 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'

The pardoned men find their tongues at last. Forgiveness has opened their lips, and though their reverence and thanks are no less, their confidence and familiarity are more. How they would talk when once the terror was melted away! So should it be with the soul which has tasted the sweetness of Christ's forgiving love, and has known 'the kisses of His mouth.' Long, unrestrained, and happy should be the intercourse which we forgiven sinners keep up with our Brother, the Prince of all the land. 'After that his brethren talked with him.'

Joseph, The Pardoner And Preserver

II

THE noble words in which Joseph dissipates his brothers' doubts have, as their first characteristic, the recognition of the God by whom his career had been shaped, and, for their next, the recognition of the purpose for which it had been. There is a world of tenderness and forgivingness in the addition made to his first words in verse 4, 'Joseph, *your brother*.' He owns the mystic bond of kindred, and thereby assures them of his pardon for their sin against it. It was right that he should remind them of their crime, even while declaring his pardon. But he rises high above all personal considerations and graciously takes the place of soother, instead of that of accuser. Far from cherishing thoughts of anger or revenge, he tries to lighten the reproaches of their own consciences. Thrice over in four verses he traces his captivity to God. He had learned that wisdom in his long years of servitude, and had not forgotten it in those of rule.

There will be little disposition in us to visit offences against ourselves on the offenders, if we discern God's purpose working through our sorrows, and see, as the Psalmist did, that even our foes are 'men which are Thy hand, O Lord.' True, His overruling providence does not make their guilt less; but the recognition of it destroys all disposition to revenge, and injured and injurer may one day unite in adoring the result of what the One suffered at the other's hands. Surely, some Christian persecutors and their victims have thus joined hands in heaven. If we would cultivate the habit of seeing God behind second causes, our hearts would be kept free from much wrath and bitterness.

Joseph was as certain of the purpose as of the source of his elevation. He saw now what he had been elevated for, and he eagerly embraced the task which was a privilege. No doubt, he had often brooded over the thought, 'Why am I thus lifted up?' and had felt the privilege of being a nation's saviour; but now he realises that he has a part to play in fulfilling God's designs in regard to the seed of Abraham. Cloudy as his outlook into the future may have been, he knew that great promises affecting all nations were intertwined with his family, separation from whom had been a sorrow for years. But now the thought comes to him with sudden illumination and joy: 'This, then, is what it all has meant, that I should be a link in the chain of God's workings.' He knows himself to be God's instrument for effecting His covenant promises. How small a thing honour and position became in comparison!

We cannot all have great tasks in the line of God's purposes, but we can all feel that our little ones are made great by being seen to be in it. The less we think about chariots and gold chains, and the more we try to find out what God means by setting us where we are, and to do that, the better for our peace and true dignity. A true man does not care for the rewards of work half as much as for the work itself. Find out what God intends, and never mind whether He puts you in a dungeon or in a palace. Both places lie on the road which He has marked and, in either, the main thing is to do His will.

Next comes the swiftly devised plan for carrying out God's purpose. It sounds as if Joseph, with prompt statesmanship, had struck it out then and there. At all events, he pours it forth with contagious earnestness and haste. Note how he says over and over again 'My father,' as if he loved to dwell on the name, but also as if he had not yet completely realised the renewal of the broken ties of brotherhood. It was some trial of the stuff he was made of, to have to bring his father and his family to be stared at, and perhaps mocked at, by the court. Many a successful man would be very much annoyed if his old father, in his country clothes, and

hands roughened by toil, sat down beside him in his prosperity. Joseph had none of that baseness. Jacob would come, if at all, as a half-starved immigrant, and would be ‘an abomination to the Egyptians.’ But what of that? He was ‘my father,’ and his son knows no better use to make of his dignity than to compel reverence for Jacob’s grey hairs, which he will take care shall *not* be ‘brought down with sorrow to the grave.’ It is a very homely lesson—never be ashamed of your father. But in these days, when children are often better educated than their parents, and rise above them in social importance, it is a very needful one.

The first overtures of reconciliation should come from the side of the injured party. That is Christ’s law, and if it were Christians’ practice, there would be fewer alienations among them. It is Christ’s law, because it is Christ’s own way of dealing with us. He, too, was envied, and sold by His brethren. His sufferings were meant ‘to preserve life.’ Stephen’s sermon in the Sanhedrin dwells on Joseph as a type of Christ; and the typical character is seen not least distinctly in this, that He against whom we have sinned pleads with us, seeks to draw us nearer to Himself, and to lead us to put away all hard thoughts of Him, and to cherish all loving ones towards Him, by showing us how void His heart is of anger against us, and how full of yearning love and of gracious intention to provide for us a dwelling-place, with abundance of all needful good, beside Himself, while the years of famine shall last.

Growth By Transplanting

'Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen. And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.' —GENESIS xlvii. 1-12.

1. The conduct of Joseph in reference to the settlement in Goshen is an example of the possibility of uniting worldly prudence with high religious principle and great generosity of nature. He had promised his brothers a home in that fertile eastern district, which afforded many advantages in its proximity to Canaan, its adaptation to pastoral life, and its vicinity to Joseph when in Zoan, the capital. But he had not consulted Pharaoh, and, however absolute his authority, it scarcely stretched to giving away Egyptian territory without leave. So his first care, when the wanderers arrive, is to manage the confirmation of the grant. He goes about it with considerable astuteness—a hereditary quality, which is redeemed from blame because used for unselfish purposes and unstained by deceit. He does not tell Pharaoh how far he had gone, but simply announces that his family are in Goshen, as if awaiting the monarch's further pleasure. Then he introduces a deputation, no doubt carefully chosen, of five of his brothers (as if the whole number would have been too formidable), previously instructed how to answer. He knows what Pharaoh is in the habit of asking, or he knows that he can lead him to ask the required question, which will bring out the fact of their being shepherds, and utilise the prejudice against that occupation, to ensure separation in Goshen. All goes as he had arranged. Thanks partly to the indifference of the king, who seems to have been rather a *roi fainéant* in the hands of his energetic *maire du palais*, and to have been contented to give, with a flourish of formality, as a command to Joseph, what Joseph had previously carefully suggested to him (vers. 6, 7). There is nothing unfair in all this. It is good, shrewd management, and no fault can be found with it; but it is a new trait in the ideal character of a servant of God, and contrasts strongly with the type shown in Abraham. None the less, it is a legitimate element in the character and conduct of a good man, set down to do God's work in such a world. Joseph is a saint and a politician. His shrewdness is never craft; sagacity is not alien to consecration. No doubt it has to be carefully watched lest it degenerate; but prudence is as needful as enthusiasm, and he is the complete man who has a burning fire down in his

heart to generate the force that drives him, and a steady hand on the helm, and a keen eye on the chart, to guide him. Be ye ‘wise as serpents’ but also ‘harmless as doves.’

2 We may note in Joseph’s conduct also an instance of a man in high office and not ashamed of his humble relations. One of the great lessons meant to be taught by the whole patriarchal period was the sacredness of the family. That is, in some sense, the keynote of Joseph’s history. Here we see family love, which had survived the trial of ill-usage and long absence, victorious over the temptation of position and high associates. It took some nerve and a great deal of affection, for the viceroy, whom envious and sarcastic courtiers watched, to own his kin. What a sweet morsel for malicious tongues it would be, ‘Have you heard? He is only the son of an old shepherd, who is down in Goshen, come to pick up some crumbs there!’ One can fancy the curled lips and the light laugh, as the five brothers, led by the great man himself, made their rustic reverences to Pharaoh. It is as if some high official in Paris were to walk in half a dozen peasants in blouse and sabots, and present them to the president as ‘my brothers.’ It was a brave thing to do; and it teaches a lesson which many people, who have made their way in the world, would be nobler and more esteemed if they learned.

3. The brother’s words to Pharaoh are another instance of that ignorant carrying out of the divine purposes which we have already had to notice. They evidently contemplate only a temporary stay in the country. They say that they are come ‘to *sojourn*’—the verb from which are formed the noun often rendered ‘*strangers*,’ and that which Jacob uses in verse 9, ‘my *pilgrimage*.’ The reason for their coming is given as the transient scarcity of pasturage in Canaan, which implies the intention of return as soon as that was altered. Joseph had the same idea of the short duration of their stay; and though Jacob had been taught by vision that the removal was in order to their being made a great nation, it does not seem that his sons’ intentions were affected by that—if they knew it. So mistaken are our estimates. We go to a place for a month, and we stay in it for twenty years. We go to a place to settle for life, and our tent-pegs are pulled up in a week. They thought of five years, and it was to be nearly as many centuries. They thought of temporary shelter and food; God meant an education of them and their descendants. Over all this story the unseen Hand hovers, chastising, guiding, impelling; and the human agents are free and yet fulfilling an eternal purpose, blind and yet accountable, responsible for motives, and mercifully ignorant of consequences. So we all play our little parts. We have no call to be curious as to what will come of our deeds. This end of the action, the motive of it, is our care; the other end, the outcome of it, is God’s business to see to.

4. We may also observe how trivial incidents are wrought into God’s scheme. The Egyptian hatred of the shepherd class secured one of the prime reasons for the removal from Canaan—the unimpeded growth of a tribe into a nation. There was no room for further peaceful and separate expansion in that thickly populated country. Nor would there have been in Egypt, unless under the condition of comparative isolation, which could not have been obtained in any other way. Thus an unreasonable prejudice, possibly connected with religious ideas, became an important factor in the development of Israel; and, once again, we have to note the wisdom of the great Builder who uses not only gold, silver, and precious stones, but even wood, hay, stubble—follies and sins—for His edifice.

5. The interview of Jacob with Pharaoh is pathetic and beautiful. The old man comports himself, in all the later history of Joseph, as if done with the world, and waiting to go. ‘Let me die, since I have seen thy face,’ was his farewell to life. He takes no part in the negotiation about Goshen, but has evidently handed over all temporal cares to younger hands. A halo of removedness lies round his grey hairs, and to Pharaoh he behaves as one withdrawn from fleeting things, and, by age and nearness to the end, superior even to a king’s dignity.

As he enters the royal presence he does not do reverence, but invokes a blessing upon him. 'The less is blessed of the better.' He has nothing to do with court ceremonials or conventionalities. The hoary head is a crown of honour, Pharaoh recognises his right to address him thus by the kindly question as to his age, which implied respect for his years. The answer of the 'Hebrew Ulysses,' as Stanley calls him, breathes a spirit of melancholy not unnatural in one who had once more been uprooted, and found himself again a wanderer in his old age. The tremulous voice has borne the words across all the centuries, and has everywhere evoked a response in the hearts of weary and saddened men. Look at the component parts of this pensive retrospect.

Life has been to him a 'pilgrimage'. He thinks of all his wanderings from that far-off day when at Bethel he received the promise of God's presence 'in all places whither thou goest,' till this last happy and yet disturbing change. But he is thinking not only, perhaps not chiefly, of the circumstances, but of the spirit, of his life. This is, no doubt, the confession 'that they were strangers and pilgrims' referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was a pilgrim, not because he had often changed his place of abode, but because he sought the 'city which hath foundations,' and therefore could not be at home here. The goal of his life lay in the far future; and whether he looked for the promises to be fulfilled on earth, or had the unformulated consciousness of immortality, and saluted the dimly descried coast from afar while tossing on life's restless ocean, he was effectually detached from the present, and felt himself an alien in the existing order. We have to live by the same hope, and to let it work the same estrangement, if we would live noble lives. Not because all life is change, nor because it all marches steadily on to the grave, but because our true home—the community to which we really belong, the metropolis, the mother city of our souls—is above, are we to feel ourselves strangers upon earth. They who only take into account the transiency of life are made sad, or sometimes desperate, by the unwelcome thought. But they whose pilgrimage is a journey home may look that transiency full in the face, and be as glad because of it as colonists on their voyage to the old country which they call 'home,' though they were born on the other side of the world and have never seen its green fields.

To Jacob's eyes his days seem 'few.' Abraham's one hundred and seventy-five years, Isaac's one hundred and eighty, were in his mind. But more than these was in his mind. The law of the moral perspective is other than that of the physical. The days in front, seen through the glass of anticipation, are drawn out; the days behind, viewed through the telescope of memory, are crowded together. What a moment looked all the long years of his struggling life—shorter now than even had once seemed the seven years of service for his Rachel, that love had made to fly past on such swift wings! That happy wedded life, how short it looked! A bright light for a moment, and

'Ere a man could say "Behold!" The jaws of darkness did devour it up.'

It is well to lay the coolness of this thought on our fevered hearts, and, whether they be torn by sorrows or gladdened with bliss, to remember 'this also will pass' and the longest stretch of dreary days be seen in retrospect, in their due relation to eternity, as but a moment. That will not paralyse effort nor abate sweetness, but it will teach proportion, and deliver from the illusions of this solid-seeming shadow which we call life.

The pensive retrospect darkens as the old man's memory dwells upon the past. His days have not only been few—that could be borne—but they have been 'evil' by which I understand not unfortunate so much as faulty. We have seen in preceding pages the slow process by which the crafty Jacob had his sins purged out of him, and became 'God's wrestler.' Here we learn that old wrong-doing, even when forgiven—or, rather, when and because forgiven—leaves regretful memories lifelong. The early treachery had been long ago repented of and pardoned

by God and man. The nature which hatched it had been renewed. But here it starts up again, a ghost from the grave, and the memory of it is full of bitterness. No lapse of time deprives a sin of its power to sting. As in the old story of the man who was killed by a rattlesnake's poison fang embedded in a boot which had lain forgotten for years, we may be wounded by suddenly coming against it, long after it is forgiven by God and almost forgotten by ourselves. Many a good man, although he knows that Christ's blood has washed away his guilt, is made to possess the iniquities of his youth. 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.'

But this shaded retrospect is one-sided. It is true, and in some moods seems all the truth; but Jacob saw more distinctly, and his name was rightly Israel, when, laying his trembling hands on the heads of Joseph's sons, he laid there the blessing of 'the God which fed me all my life long, … 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' That was his last thought about his life, as it began to be seen in the breaking light of eternal day. Pensive and penitent memory may call the years few and evil, but grateful faith even here, and still more the cleared vision of heaven, will discern more truly that they have been a long miracle of loving care, and that all their seeming evil has been transmuted into good.

Two Retrospects Of One Life

'And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.'—GENESIS xlvii. 9.

'The God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' —GENESIS xlviii. 15,16.

These are two strangely different estimates of the same life to be taken by the same man. In the latter Jacob categorically contradicts everything that he had said in the former. 'Few and evil,' he said before Pharaoh. 'All my life long,' 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil,' he said on his death-bed.

If he meant what he said when he spoke to Pharaoh, and characterised his life thus, he was wrong. He was possibly in a melancholy mood. Very naturally, the unfamiliar splendours of a court dazzled and bewildered the old man, accustomed to a quiet shepherd life down at Hebron. He had not come to see Pharaoh, he only cared to meet Joseph; and, as was quite natural, the new and uncongenial surroundings depressed him. Possibly the words are only a piece of the etiquette of an Eastern court, where it is the correct thing for the subject to depreciate himself in all respects as far inferior to the prince. And there may be little more than conventional humility in the words of my first text. But I am rather disposed to think that they express the true feeling of the moment, in a mood that passed and was followed by a more wholesome one.

I put the two sayings side by side just for the sake of gathering up one or two plain lessons from them.

1. We have here two possible views of life.

Now the key to the difference between these two statements and moods of feeling seems to me to be a very plain one. In the former of them there is nothing about God. It is all Jacob. In the latter we notice that there is a great deal more about God than about Jacob, and that determines the whole tone of the retrospect. In the first text Jacob speaks of 'the days of the years of *my* pilgrimage,' 'the days of the years of *my* life,' and so on, without a syllable about anything except the purely earthly view of life. Of course, when you shut out God, the past is all dark enough, grey and dismal, like the landscape on some cloudy day, where the woods stand black, and the rivers creep melancholy through colourless fields, and the sky is grey and formless above. Let the sun come out, and the river flashes into a golden mirror, and the woods are alive with twinkling lights and shadows, and the sky stretches a blue pavilion above them, and all the birds sing. Let God into your life, and its whole complexion and characteristics change. The man who sits whining and complaining, when he has shut out the thought of a divine Presence, finds that everything alters when he brings that in.

And, then, look at the two particulars on which the patriarch dwells. 'I am only one hundred and thirty years old,' he says; a mere infant compared with Abraham and Isaac! How did he know he was not going to live to be as old as either of them? And 'if his days were evil,' as he said, was it not a good thing that they were few? But, instead of that, he finds reasons for complaint in the brevity of the life which, if it were as evil as he made it out to be, must often have seemed wearisomely long, and dragged very slowly. Now, both things are true—life is short, life is long. Time is elastic—you can stretch it or you can contract it. It is short compared with the duration of God; it is short, as one of the Psalms puts it pathetically, as compared with this Nature round us—'The earth abideth for ever'; we are strangers upon it,

and there is no abiding for us. It is short as compared with the capacities and powers of the creatures that possess it; but, oh! if we think of our days as a series of gifts of God, if we look upon them, as Jacob looked upon them when he was sane, as being one continued shepherding by God, they stretch out into blessed length. Life is long enough if it manifests that God takes care of us, and if we learn that He does. Life is long enough if it serves to build up a God-pleasing character.

It is beautiful to see how the thought of God enters into the dying man's remembrances in the shape which was natural to him, regard being had to his own daily avocations. For the word translated 'fed' means much more than supplied with nourishment. It is the word for doing the office of shepherd, and we must not forget, if we want to understand its beauty, that Jacob's sons said, 'Thy servants are shepherds; both we and also our fathers.' So this man, in the solitude of his pastoral life, and whilst living amongst his woolly people who depended upon his guidance and care, had learned many a lesson as to how graciously and tenderly and constantly fed, and led, and protected, and fostered by God were the creatures of His hand.

It was he, I suppose, who first gave to religious thought that metaphor which has survived temple and sacrifice and priesthood, and will survive even earth itself; for 'I am the Good Shepherd' is as true to-day as when first spoken by Jesus, and 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them,' and be their Shepherd when the flock is carried to the upper pastures and the springs that never fail. The life which has brought us that thought of a Shepherd-God has been long enough; and the days which have been so expanded as to contain a continuous series of His benefits and protections need never be remembered as 'few,' whatsoever be the arithmetic that is applied to them.

The other contradiction is equally eloquent and significant. 'Few and evil' have my days been, said Jacob, when he was not thinking about God; but when he remembered the Angel of the Presence, that mysterious person with whom he had wrestled at Peniel, and whose finger had lamed the thigh while His lips proclaimed a blessing, his view changed, and instead of talking about 'evil' days, he says, 'The Angel that redeemed me from all evil.' Yes, his life had been evil, whether by that we mean sorrowful or sinful, and the sorrows and the sins had been closely connected. A sorely tried man he had been. Far away back in the past had been his banishment from home; his disappointment and hard service with the churlish Laban; the misbehaviour of his sons; the death of Rachel—that wound which was never stanched; and then the twenty years' mourning for Rachel's son, the heir of his inheritance. These were the evils, the sins were as many, for every one of the sorrows, except perhaps the chiefest of them all, had its root in some piece of duplicity, dishonesty, or failure. But he was there in Egypt beside Joseph. The evils had stormed over him, but he was there still. And so at the end he says, 'The Angel … redeemed me from evil, though it smote me. Sorrow became chastisement, and I was purged of my sin by my calamities.' The sorrows are past, like some raging inundation that comes up for a night over the land and then subsides; but the blessing of fertility which it brought in its tawny waves abides with me yet. Joseph is by my side. 'I had not thought to see thy face, and God hath showed me the face of thy seed.' That sorrow is over. Rachel's grave is still by the wayside, and that sorest of sorrows has wrought with others to purify character. Jacob has been tried by sorrows; he has been purged from sins. 'The Angel delivered me from all evil.' So, dear friends, sorrow is not evil if it helps to strip us from the evil that we love, and the ills that we bear are good if they alienate our affections from the ills that we do.

2. Secondly, note the wisdom and the duty of taking the completer and brighter view.

These first words of Jacob's are very often quoted as if they were the pattern of the kind of thing people ought to say, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage.'

That is a text from which many sermons have been preached with approbation of the pious resignation expressed in it. But it does not seem to me that that is the tone of them. If the man believed what he said, then he was very ungrateful and short-sighted, though there were excuses to be made for him under the circumstances. If the days had been evil, he had made them so.

But the point which I wish to make now is that it is largely a matter for our own selection which of the two views of our lives we take. We may make our choice whether we shall fix our attention on the brighter or on the darker constituents of our past.

Suppose a wall papered with paper of two colours, one black, say, and the other gold. You can work your eye and adjust the focus of vision so that you may see either a black background or a gold one. In the one case the prevailing tone is gloomy, relieved by an occasional touch of brightness; and in the other it is brightness, heightened by a background of darkness. And so you can do with life, fixing attention on its sorrows, and hugging yourselves in the contemplation of these with a kind of morbid satisfaction, or bravely and thankfully and submissively and wisely resolving that you will rather seek to learn what God means by darkness, and not forgetting to look at the unenigmatical blessings, and plain, obvious mercies, that make up so much of our lives. We have to govern memory as well as other faculties, by Christian principle. We have to apply the plain teaching of Christian truth to our sentimental, and often unwholesome, contemplations of the past. There is enough in all our lives to make material for plenty of whining and complaining, if we choose to take hold of them by that handle. And there is enough in all our lives to make us ashamed of one murmuring word, if we are devout and wise and believing enough to lay hold of them by that one. Remember that you can make your view of your life either a bright one or a dark one, and there will be facts for both; but the facts that feed melancholy are partial and superficial, and the facts that exhort, ‘Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice,’ are deep and fundamental.

3. So, lastly, note how blessed a thing it is when the last look is the happiest.

When we are amongst the mountains, or when we are very near them, they look barren enough, rough, stony, steep. When we travel away from them, and look at them across the plain, they lie blue in the distance; and the violet shadows and the golden lights upon them and the white peaks above make a dream of beauty. Whilst we are in the midst of the struggle, we are often tempted to think that things go hardly with us and that the road is very rough. But if we keep near our dear Lord, and hold by His hand, and try to shape our lives in accordance with His will—whatever be their outward circumstances and texture—then we may be very sure of this, that when the end comes, and we are far enough away from some of the sorrows to see what they lead to and blossom into, then we shall be able to say, It was all very good, and to thank Him for all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

In the same conversation in which the patriarch, rising to the height of a prophet and organ of divine revelation, gives this his dying testimony of the faithfulness of God, and declares that he has been delivered from all evil, he recurs to the central sorrow of his life; and speaks, though in calm words, of that day when he buried Rachel by ‘Ephrath, which is Bethel.’ But the pain had passed and the good was present to him. And so, leaving life, he left it according to his own word, ‘satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord.’ So we in our turns may, at the last, hope that what we know not now will largely be explained; and may seek to anticipate our dying verdict by a living confidence, in the midst of our toils and our sorrows, that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God.’

‘The Hands Of The Mighty God Of Jacob’

The archers shot at him, but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.’ GENESIS xlix. 23, 24.

These picturesque words are part of what purports to be one of the oldest pieces of poetry in the Bible—the dying Jacob’s prophetic blessing on his sons. Of these sons there are two over whom his heart seems especially to pour itself—Judah the ancestor of the royal tribe, and Joseph. The future fortunes of their descendants are painted in most glowing colours. And of these two, the blessing on the ‘son who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found’ is the fuller of tender desire and glad prediction. The words of our text are probably to be taken as prophecy, not as history—as referring to the future conflicts and victories of the tribe, not to the past trials and triumphs of its father. But be that as it may, they contain, in most vivid metaphor, the earliest utterance of a very familiar truth. They are the first hint of that thought which is caught up and expanded in many a later saying of psalmist, and prophet, and apostle. We hear their echoes in the great song ascribed to David ‘in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul’: ‘He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms’; and the idea receives its fullest carrying out and noblest setting forth, in the trumpet-call of the apostle, who had seen more formidable weapons and a more terrible military discipline in Rome’s legions than Jacob knew, and who pressed them into his stimulating call: ‘Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.’ ‘Put on the whole armour of God.’ Strength for conflict by contact with the strength of God is the common thought of all these passages—a very familiar thought, which may perhaps be freshened for us by the singular intensity with which this metaphor of our text presents it. Look at the picture.—Here stands the solitary man, ringed all round by enemies full of bitter hate. Their arrows are on the string, their bows drawn to the ear. The shafts fly thick, and when they have whizzed past him, and he can be seen again, he stands unharmed, grasping his unbroken bow. The assault has shivered no weapon, has given no wound. He has been able to stand in the evil day—and look! a pair of great, gentle, strong hands are laid upon his hands and arms, and strength passes into his feebleness from the touch of ‘the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.’ So the enemy have two, not one, to reckon with. By the side of the hunted man stands a mighty figure, and it is His strength, not the mortal’s impotence, that has to be overcome. Some dream of such divine help in the struggle of battle has floated through the minds, and been enshrined in the legends, of many people, as when the panoplied Athene has been descried leading the Grecian armies, or, through the dust of conflict, the gleaming armour and white horses of the Twin Brethren were seen far in advance of the armies of Rome. But the dream is for us a reality. It *is* true that we go not to warfare at our own charges, nor by our own strength. If we love Him and try to make a brave stand against our own evil, and to strike a manful blow for God in this world, we shall not have to bear the brunt alone. Remember he who fights for God never fights without God.

There is a strange story in a later book of Scripture, which almost reads as if it had been modelled on some reminiscence of these words of the dying Jacob—and is, at any rate, a remarkable illustration of them. The kingdom of Israel, of which the descendants of Joseph were the most conspicuous part, was in the very crisis and agony of one of its Syrian wars. Its principal human helper was ‘fallen sick of the sickness whereof he died.’ And to his death-bed came, in a passion of perplexity and despair, the irresolute weakling who was then king, bewailing the impending withdrawal of the nation’s best defence. The dying Elisha, with curt authority, pays no heed to the tears of Joash, but bids him take bow and arrows. ‘And he said

to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow,' and he put his hand upon it; and '*Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands*.' Then, when the thin, wasted, transparent fingers of the old man were thus laid, guiding and infusing strength, by a strange paradox, into the brown, muscular hands of the young king, he tells him to open the casement that looked eastward towards the lands of the enemy, and, as the blinding sunshine and the warm air streamed into the sick-chamber, he bids him draw the bow. He was obeyed, and, as the arrow whizzed Jordanwards, the dying prophet followed its flight with words brief and rapid like it, 'the arrow of the Lord's deliverance.' Here we have all the elements of our text singularly repeated—the dying seer, the king the representative of Joseph in the royal dignity to which his descendants have come, the arrows and the bow, the strength for conflict by the touch of hands that had the strength of God in them. The lesson of that paradox that the dying gave strength to the living, the feeble to the strong, was the old one which is ever new, that mere human power is weakness when it is strongest, and that power drawn from God is omnipotent when it seems weakest. And the further lesson is the lesson of our text, that our hands are then strengthened, when His hands are laid upon them, of whom it is written: 'Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand.

As a father in old days might have taken his little boy out to the butts, and put a bow into his hand, and given him his first lesson in archery, directing his unsteady aim by his own firmer finger, and lending the strength of his wrist to his child's feebler pull, so God does with us. The sure, strong hand is laid on ours, and is 'profitable to direct.' A wisdom not our own is ever at our side, and ready for our service. We but dimly perceive the conditions of the conflict, and the mark at which we should aim is ever apt to be obscured to our perceptions. But in all cases where conscience is perplexed, or where the judgment is at fault, we may, if we will, have Him for our teacher. And when we know not where to strike the foes that seem invulnerable, like the warrior who was dipped in the magic stream, or clothed in mail impenetrable as rhinoceros' hide, He will make us wise to know the one spot where a wound is fatal. We shall not need to fight as he that beats the air; to strike at random; or to draw our bow at a venture, if we will let Him guide us.

Or if ever the work be seen clearly enough, but our poor hands cannot take aim for very trembling, or shoot for fear of striking something very dear to us, He will steady our nerves and make our aim sure and true. We have often, in our fight with ourselves, and in our struggle to get God's will done in the world, to face as cruel a perplexity as the father who had to split the apple on his son's head. The evil against which we have to contend is often so closely connected with things very precious to us, that it is hard to smite the one when there is such danger of grazing the other. Many a time our tastes, our likings, our prejudices, our hopes, our loves, make our sight dim, and our pulses too tumultuous to allow of a good, long, steady gaze and a certain aim. It is hard to keep the arrow's point firm when the heart throbs and the hand shakes. But in all such difficult times He is ready to help us. 'Behold, we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee,' is a prayer never offered in vain.

The word that is here rendered 'made strong,' might be translated 'made pliable,' or 'flexible' conveying the notion of deftness and dexterity rather than that of simple strength. It is practised strength that He will give, the educated hand and arm, masters of the manipulation of the weapon. The stiffness and clumsiness of our handling, the obstinate rigidity as well as the throbbing feebleness of our arms, the dimness of our sight, may all be overcome. At His touch the raw recruit is as the disciplined veteran; the prophet who cannot speak because he is a child, gifted with a mouth and wisdom which all the adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor to resist. Do not be disheartened by your inexperience, or by your ignorance; but as the prophet said to the young king, Take the bow and shoot. God's strong hand will hold yours, and the arrow will fly true.

That strong hand is laid on ours, and lends its weight to our feeble pull. The bow is often too heavy for us to bend, but we do not need to strain our strength in the vain attempt to do it alone. Tasks seem too much for us. The pressure of our daily work overwhelms us. The burden of our daily anxieties and sorrows is too much. Some huge obstacle starts up in our path. Some great sacrifice for truth, honour, duty, which we feel we cannot make, is demanded of us. Some daring defiance of some evil, which has caught us in its toils, or which it is unfashionable to fight against, seems laid upon us. We cannot rise to the height of the occasion, or bring ourselves to the wrench that is required. Or the wearing recurrence of monotonous duties seems to take ail freshness out of our lives, and all spring out of ourselves; and we are ready to give over struggling any more, and let ourselves drift. Can we not feel that large hand laid on ours; and does not power, more and other than our own, creep into our numb and relaxed fingers? Yes, if we will let Him. His strength is made perfect in our weakness; and every man and woman who will make life a noble struggle against evil, vanity, or sin, may be very sure that God will direct and strengthen their hands to war, and their fingers to fight.

But the remarkable metaphor of the text not only gives the fact of divine strength being bestowed, but also the *manner* of the gift. What a boldness of reverent familiarity there is in that symbol of the hands of God laid on the hands of the man! How strongly it puts the contact between us and Him as the condition of our reception of power from Him! A true touch, as of hand to hand, conveys the grace. It is as when the prophet laid himself down with his warm lip on the dead boy's cold mouth, and his heart beating against the still heart of the corpse, till the life passed into the clay, and the lad lived. So, if we may say it, our Quickener bends Himself over all our deadness, and by His own warmth reanimates us.

Perhaps this same thought is one of the lessons which we are meant to learn from the frequency with which our Lord wrought His miracles of healing by the touch of His hand. 'Come and lay Thy hand on him, and he shall live.' 'And He put forth His hand and touched him, and said, I will, be thou clean.' 'Many said, He is dead; but Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.' The touch of His hand is healing and life. The touch of our hands is faith. In the mystery of His incarnation, in the flow of His sympathy, in the forth-putting of His power, He lays hold not on angels, but He lays hold on the seed of Abraham. By our lowly trust, by the forth-putting of our desires, we stretch 'lame hands of faith,' and, blessed be God! we do not 'grope,' but we grasp His strong hand and are held up.

The contact of our spirits with His Spirit is a contact far more real than the touch of earthly hands that grasp each other closest. There is ever some film of atmosphere between the palms. But 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and he that clasps Christ's outstretched hand of help with his outstretched hand of weakness, holds Him with a closeness to which all unions of earth are gaping gulfs of separation. You remember how Mary cast herself at Christ's feet on the resurrection morning, and would have flung her arms round them in the passion of her joy. The calm word which checked her has a wonderful promise in it. 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father'; plainly leading to the inference, 'When I am ascended, then you may touch Me.' And that touch will be more reverent, more close, more blessed, than any clasping of His feet, even with such loving hands, and is possible for us all for evermore.

Nothing but such contact will give us strength for conflict and for conquest. And the plain lesson therefore is—see to it, that the contact is not broken by you. Put away the metaphor, and the simple English of the advice is just this:—First, live in the desire and the confidence of His help in all your need, of His strength as all your power. As a part of that confidence—its reverse and under side, so to speak—cherish the profound sense of your own weakness.

‘In our own strength we nothing can; Full soon were we down-ridden’—

as Luther has taught us to sing. Let there be a constant renewal, in the midst of your duties and trials, of that conscious dependence and feeling of insufficiency. Stretch out the empty hands to Him in that desire and hope, which, spoken or silent, is prayer. Keep the communications open, by which His strength flows into your souls. Let them not be choked with self-confidence, with vanities, with the rubbish of your own nature, or of the world. Do not twitch away your hands from under the strong hands that are laid so gently upon them. But let Him cover, direct, cherish, and strengthen your poor fingers till they are strong and nimble for all your work and warfare. If you go into the fight trusting to your own wit and wisdom, to the vigour of your own arm, or the courage of your own heart, that very foolhardy confidence is itself defeat, for it is sin as well as folly, and nothing can come of it but utter collapse and disaster. But if you will only go to your daily fight with yourself and the world, with your hand grasping God’s hand, you will be able to ‘withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’ The enemies may compass you about like bees, but in the name of the Lord you can destroy them. Their arrows may fly thick enough to darken the sun, but, as the proud old boast has it, ‘then we can fight in the shade’; and when their harmless points have buried themselves in the ground, you will stand unhurt, your unshivered bow ready for the next assault, and your hands made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. ‘In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.’

The Shepherd, The Stone Of Israel

'... The mighty God of Jacob. From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel.'—GENESIS xlix. 24.

A slight alteration in the rendering will probably bring out the meaning of these words more correctly. The last two clauses should perhaps not be read as a separate sentence. Striking out the supplement 'is,' and letting the previous sentence run on to the end of the verse, we get a series of names of God, in apposition with each other, as the sources of the strength promised to the arms of the hands of the warlike sons of Joseph. From the hands of the mighty God of Jacob—from thence, from the Shepherd, the stone of Israel—the power will come for conflict and for conquest. This exuberant heaping together of names of God is the mark of the flash of rapturous confidence which lit up the dying man's thoughts when they turned to God. When he begins to think of Him he cannot stay his tongue. So many aspects of His character, so many remembrances of His deeds, come crowding into his mind; so familiar and so dear are they, that he must linger over the words, and strive by this triple repetition to express the manifold preciousness of Him whom no name, nor crowd of names, can rightly praise. So earthly love ever does with its earthly objects, inventing and reiterating epithets which are caresses. Such repetitions are not tautologies, for each utters some new aspect of the one subject, and comes from a new gush of heart's love towards it. And something of the same rapture and unwearied recurrence to the Name that is above every name should mark the communion of devout souls with their heavenly Love. What a wonderful burst of such praise flowed out from David's thankful heart, in his day of deliverance, like some strong current, with its sevenfold wave, each crested with the Name—'The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.'

Those three names which we find here are striking and beautiful in themselves; in their juxtaposition; in their use on Jacob's lips. They seem to have been all coined by him, for, if we accept this song as a true prophecy uttered by him, we have here the earliest instance of their occurrence. They all have a history, and appear again expanded and deepened in the subsequent revelation. Let us look at them as they stand.

1. *The Mighty God of Jacob*.—The meaning of such a name is clear enough. It is He who has shown Himself mighty and mine by His deeds for me all through my life. The dying man's thoughts are busy with all that past from the day when he went forth from the tent of Isaac, and took of the stones of the field for his pillow when the sun went down. A perplexed history it had been, with many a bitter sorrow, and many a yet bitterer sin. Passionate grief and despairing murmurs he had felt and flung out, while it slowly unfolded itself. When the Pharaoh had asked, 'How old art thou?' he had answered in words which owe their sombreness partly to obsequious assumption of insignificance in such a presence, but have a strong tinge of genuine sadness in them too: 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' But lying dying there, with it all well behind him, he has become wiser; and now it all looks to him as one long showing forth of the might of his God, who had been with him all his life long, and had redeemed him from all evil. He has got far enough away to see the lie of the land, as he could not do while he was toiling along the road. The barren rocks and white snow glow with purple as the setting sun touches them. The struggles with Laban; the fear of Esau; the weary work of toilsome years; the sad day when Rachel died, and left to him the 'son of her sorrow'; the heart sickness of the long years of Joseph's loss—all have faded away, or been changed into thankful wonder at God's guidance. The one thought which the

dying man carries out of life with him is: God has shown Himself mighty, and He has shown Himself mine.

For each of us, our own experience should be a revelation of God. The things about Him which we read in the Bible are never living and real to us till we have verified them in the facts of our own history. Many a word lies on the page, or in our memories, fully believed and utterly shadowy, until in some soul's conflict we have had to grasp it, and found it true. Only so much of our creed as we have proved in life is really ours. If we will only open our eyes and reflect upon our history as it passes before us, we shall find every corner of it filled with the manifestations to our hearts and to our minds of a present God. But our folly, our stupidity, our impatience, our absorption with the mere outsides of things, our self-will, blind us to the Angel with the drawn sword who resists us, as well as to the Angel with the lily who would lead us. So we waste our days; are deaf to His voice speaking through all the clatter of tongues, and blind to His bright presence shining through all the dimness of earth; and, for far too many of us, we never can see God in the present, but only discern Him when He has passed by, like Moses from his cleft. Like this same Jacob, we have to say: 'Surely God was in this place, and I knew it not.' Hence we miss the educational worth of our lives, are tortured with needless cares, are beaten by the poorest adversaries, and grope amidst what seems to us a chaos of pathless perplexities, when we might be marching on assured and strong, with God for our guide, and the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob for our defence.

Notice, too, how distinctly the thought comes out in this name—that the very vital centre of a man's religion is his conviction that God is his. Jacob will not be content with thinking of God as the God of his fathers; he will not even be content with associating himself with them in the common possession; but he must feel the full force of the intensely personal bond that knits him to God, and God to him. Of course such a feeling does not ignore the blessed fellowship and family who also are held in this bond. The God of Jacob is to the patriarch also the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. But that comes second, and this comes first. Each man for himself must put forth the hand of his own faith, and grasp that great hand for his own guide. '*My* Lord and *my* God' is the true form of the confession. 'He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*,' is the shape in which the Gospel of Christ melts the soul. God is mine because His love individualises me, and I have a distinct place in His heart, His purposes, and His deeds. God is mine, because by my own individual act—the most personal which I can perform—I cast myself on Him, by my faith appropriate the common salvation, and open my being to the inflow of His power. God is mine, and I am His, in that wonderful mutual possession, with perpetual interchange of giving and receiving not only gifts but selves, which makes the very life of love, whether it be love on earth or love in heaven.

Remember, too, the profound use which our Lord made of this name, wherein Jacob claims to possess God. Because Moses at the bush called God, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, they cannot have ceased to be. The personal relations, which subsist between God and the soul that clasps Him for its own, demand an immortal life for their adequate expression, and make it impossible that Death's skeleton fingers should have power to untie such a bond. Anything is conceivable, rather than that the soul which can say 'God is mine' should perish. And that continued existence demands, too, a state of being which shall correspond to itself, in which its powers shall all be exercised, its desires fulfilled, its possibilities made facts. Therefore there must be the resurrection. 'God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.'

The dying patriarch left to his descendants the legacy of this great name, and often, in later times, it was used to quicken faith by the remembrance of the great deeds of God in the past. One instance may serve as a sample of the whole. 'The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of

Jacob is our refuge.' The first of these two names lays the foundation of our confidence in the thought of the boundless power of Him whom all the forces of the universe, personal and impersonal, angels and stars, in their marshalled order, obey and serve. The second bids later generations claim as theirs all that the old history reveals as having belonged to the 'world's grey fathers.' They had no special prerogative of nearness or of possession. The arm that guided them is unwearied, and all the past is true still, and will for evermore be true for all who love God. So the venerable name is full of promise and of hope for us: 'The God of Jacob is our refuge.'

2. *The Shepherd*.—How that name sums up the lessons that Jacob had learned from the work of himself and of his sons! 'Thy servants are shepherds' they said to Pharaoh; 'both we, and also our sons.' For fourteen long, weary years he had toiled at that task. 'In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes,' and his own sleepless vigilance and patient endurance seem to him to be but shadows of the loving care, the watchful protection, the strong defence, which 'the God, who has been my Shepherd all my life long,' had extended to him and his. Long before the shepherd king, who had been taken from the sheepcotes to rule over Israel, sang his immortal psalm, the same occupation had suggested the same thought to the shepherd patriarch. Happy they whose daily work may picture for them some aspect of God's care—or rather, happy they whose eyes are open to see the dim likeness of God's care which every man's earthly relations, and some part of his work, most certainly present.

There can be no need to draw out at length the thoughts which that sweet and familiar emblem has conveyed to so many generations. Loving care, wise guidance, fitting food, are promised by it; and docile submission, close following at the Shepherd's heels, patience, innocence, meekness, trust, are required. But I may put emphasis for a moment on the connection between the thought of 'the mighty God of Jacob' and that of 'the Shepherd.' The occupation, as we see it, does not call for a strong arm, or much courage, except now and then to wade through snowdrifts, and dig out the buried and half-dead creatures. But the shepherds whom Jacob knew, had to be hardy, bold fighters. There were marauders lurking ready to sweep away a weakly guarded flock. There were wild beasts in the gorges of the hills. There was danger in the sun by day on these burning plains, and in the night the wolves prowled round the flock. We remember how David's earliest exploits were against the lion and the bear, and how he felt that even his duel with the Philistine bully was not more formidable than these had been. If we will read into our English notions of a shepherd this element of danger and of daring, we shall feel that these two clauses are not to be taken as giving the contrasted ideas of strength and gentleness, but the connected ones of strength, and therefore protection and security. We have the same connection in later echoes of this name. 'Behold, the Lord God shall come with *strong* hand; He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.' And our Lord's use of the figure brings into all but exclusive prominence the good shepherd's conflict with the ravening wolves—a conflict in which he must not hesitate even 'to lay down his life for the sheep.' As long as the flock are here, amidst dangers and foes, and wild weather, the arm that guides must be an arm that can guard; and none less mighty than the Mighty One of Jacob can be the Shepherd of men. But a higher fulfilment yet awaits this venerable emblem, when in other pastures, where no lion nor any ravening beast shall come, the 'Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne,' and is Shepherd as well as Lamb, 'shall feed them, and lead them by living fountains of waters.'

3. *The Stone of Israel*.—Here, again, we have a name, that after-ages have caught up and cherished, used for the first time. I suppose the Stone of Israel means much the same thing as the Rock. If so, that symbol, too, which is full of such large meanings, was coined by Jacob. It is, perhaps, not fanciful to suppose that it owes its origin to the scenery of Palestine. The

wild cliffs of the eastern region where Peniel lay, or the savage fastnesses in the southern wilderness, a day's march from Hebron, where he lived so long, came back to his memory amid the flat, clay land of Egypt; and their towering height, their immovable firmness, their cool shade, their safe shelter, spoke to him of the unalterable might and impregnable defence which he had found in God. So there is in this name the same devout, reflective laying-hold upon experience which we have observed in the preceding.

There is also the same individualising grasp of God as his very own; for 'Israel' here is, of course, to be taken not as the name of the nation but as his own name, and the intention of the phrase is evidently to express what God had been to him personally.

The general idea of this symbol is perhaps firmness, solidity. And that general idea may be followed out in various details. God is a rock for a foundation. Build your lives, your thoughts, your efforts, your hopes there. The house founded on the rock will stand though wind and rain from above smite it, and floods from beneath beat on it like battering rams. God is a rock for a fortress. Flee to Him to hide, and your defence shall be the 'munitions of rocks,' which shall laugh to scorn all assault, and never be stormed by any foe. God is a rock for shade and refreshment. Come close to Him from out of the scorching heat, and you will find coolness and verdure and moisture in the clefts, when all outside that grateful shadow is parched and dry.

The word of the dying Jacob was caught up by the great law-giver in his dying song. 'Ascribe ye greatness to our God. He is the Rock.' It reappears in the last words of the shepherd king, whose grand prophetic picture of the true King is heralded by 'The Book of Israel spake to me.' It is heard once more from the lips of the greatest of the prophets in his glowing prophecy of the song of the final days: 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages,' as well as in his solemn prophecy of the Stone which God would lay in Zion. We hear it again from the lips that cannot lie: 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner?' And for the last time the venerable metaphor which has cheered so many ages appears in the words of that Apostle who was 'surnamed Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone': 'To whom coming as unto a living Stone, yea also as living stones are built up.' As on some rocky site in Palestine, where a hundred generations in succession have made their fortresses, one may see stones with the bevel that tells of early Jewish masonry, and above them Roman work, and higher still masonry of crusading times, and above it the building of to-day; so we, each age in our turn, build on this great rock foundation, dwell safe there for our little lives, and are laid to peaceful rest in a sepulchre in the rock. On Christ we may build. In Him we may dwell and rest secure. We may die in Jesus, and be gathered to our own people, who, having died, live in Him. And though so many generations have reared their dwellings on that great rock, there is ample room for us too to build. We have not to content ourselves with an uncertain foundation among the shifting rubbish of perished dwellings, but can get down to the firm virgin rock for ourselves. None that ever builded there have been confounded. We clasp hands with all who have gone before us. At one end of the long chain this dim figure of the dying Jacob, amid the strange vanished life of Egypt, stretches out his withered hands to God the Stone of Israel; at the other end, we lift up ours to Jesus, and cry:—

'Rock of Ages! cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.'

The faith is one. One will be the answer and the reward. May it be yours and mine!

A Calm Evening, Promising A Bright Morning

'And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.'—GENESIS l. 14-26.

Joseph's brothers were right in thinking that he loved Jacob better than he did them; and they knew only too well that he had reasons for doing so. But their fear that Jacob's death would be followed by an outbreak of long-smothered revenge betrayed but too clearly their own base natures. They thought him like themselves, and they knew themselves capable of nursing wrath to keep it warm through long years of apparent kindliness. They had no room in their hearts for frank, full forgiveness. So they had lived on through numberless signs of their brother's love and care, and still kept the old dread, and, probably, not a little of the old envy. How much happiness they had lost by their slowness to believe in Joseph's love!

Is there nothing like this in our thoughts of God? Do men not live for years on His bounty, and all the while cherish suspicions of His heart? 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.' It is hard to believe in a love which has no faintest trace of desire for vengeance for all past slights. It is hard for hearts conscious of their own slowness to pardon, to realise undoubtingly God's infinite placability.

The brothers' procedure is marked by unwarrantable lack of trust in Joseph. Why did they not go to him at once, and appeal to his brotherly affection? Their roundabout way of going to work by sending a messenger was an insult to their brother, though it may have been meant as honour to the viceroy. The craft which was their father's by nature seems to have been amply transmitted. The story of Jacob's dying wish looks very apocryphal. If he had been afraid of Joseph's behaviour when he was gone, he was much more likely to have spoken to Joseph about it before he went, than to have left the gun loaded and bid them fire it after his death. Jacob knew his son better, and trusted him more than his brothers did.

We note, too, the ingenious way of slipping in motives for forgiving, first in putting the mention of their relationship into Jacob's mouth, and then claiming to be worshippers of 'thy

(not our) father's God.' They had proved how truly they were both, when they sold him to the Midianites!

Joseph's tears were a good answer. No doubt they were partly drawn out by the shock of finding that he had been so misunderstood, but they were omens of his pardon. So, when they were reported to the brothers, they came themselves, and fulfilled the old dream by falling down before him in abjectness. They do not call themselves his brethren, but his slaves, as if grovelling was the way to win love or to show it. A little affection would have gone farther than much submission. If their attitude truly expressed their feelings, their hearts were as untouched by Joseph's years of magnanimous kindness as a rock by falling rain. If it was a theatrical display of feigned subjection, it was still worse. Our Brother, against whom we have sinned, wants love, not cowering; and if we believe in His forgiveness, we shall give Him the hearts which He desires, and after that shall render the unconditional submission which only trust and love can yield.

Joseph's answer is but the reiteration of his words at his first making himself known. He soothes unworthy fears, says not a word of reproach for their misunderstanding of him, waives all pretension to deal out that retribution which God alone sends, and shows that he has lost all bitterness in thinking of the past, since he sees in it, not the working of their malice, but of God's providence, and is ready to thank, if not them, at any rate Him, for having, by even so painful a way, made him the instrument of widespread good. A man who sees God's hand in his past, and thinks lightly of his sorrows and nobly of the opportunities of service which they have brought him, will waste no feeling on the men who were God's tools. If we want to live high above low hatreds and revenges, let us cultivate the habit of looking behind men to God. So we shall be saved from many fruitless pangs over irrevocable losses and from many disturbing feelings about other people.

The sweet little picture of the great minister's last days is very tenderly touched. Surrounded by his kindred, probably finding in a younger generation the reverence and affection which the elder had failed to give, he wears away the calm evening of the life which had opened so stormily. It 'came in like a lion, it goes out like a lamb.' The strong domestic instincts so characteristic of the Hebrew race had full gratification. Honours and power at court and kingdom probably continued, but these did not make the genial warmth which cheered the closing years. It was that he saw his children's children's children, and that they gathered round his knees in confidence, and received from him his benediction.

But it is in his death that the flame shoots up most brightly at the last. 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.' He had been an Egyptian to all appearance all his life from the day of his captivity, filling his place at court, marrying an Egyptian woman, and bearing an Egyptian name, but his dying words show how he had been a stranger in the midst of it all. As truly as his fathers who dwelt in tents, he too felt that he here had no continuing city. He lived by faith in God's promises, and therefore his heart was in the unseen future far more than in the present.

He died with the ancestral assurance on his lips. Jacob, dying, had said to him, 'Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers' (Gen. xlviii. 21). Joseph hands on the hope to his descendants. It is a grand instance of indomitable confidence in God's word, not nonplussed, bewildered, or weakened, though the man who cherishes it dies without seeing even a beginning of fulfilment. Such a faith bridges the gulf of death as a very small matter. In the strength of it we may drop our unfinished tasks, and, needful as we may seem to wider or narrower circles, may be sure that God and His word

live, though we die. No man is necessary. Israel was safe in Egypt, and sure to come out of it, though Joseph's powerful protection was withdrawn.

His career may teach another lesson; namely, that true faith does not detach us from strenuous interest and toil in the present. Though the great hope burned in his heart, he did all his work as prime minister all the better because of it. It should always be so. Life here is not worth living if there is not another. The distance dignifies the foreground. The highest importance and nobleness of the life that now is, lie in its being preparation or apprenticeship for the greater future. The Egyptian vizier, with Canaan written on his heart, and Egypt administered by his hands, is a type of what every Christian should be.

Possibly Joseph's 'commandment concerning his bones may have been somewhat influenced by the Egyptian belief which underlies their practice of embalming the body. He, too, may have thought that, in some mysterious way, he would share in the possession of the land in which his bones were to be laid. Or he may simply have been yielding to natural sentiment. It is noteworthy that Jacob desired to be laid beside his ancestors, and Joseph to be kept in Egypt for a time. Both had the same assurance as to future possession of Canaan, but it led to different wishes as to burial. Perhaps Joseph felt that his position in Egypt required that his embalmed body should for a while remain there. Perhaps he wished to leave with his people a silent witness of his own hope, and a preacher, eloquent in its dumbness, of the duty of their keeping alive that hope, whatever might come upon them.

'In a coffin in Egypt'—so the book ends. It might seem that that mummy-case proclaimed rather the futility of the hope of restoration to the land, and, as centuries rolled away, and the bondage became heavier, no doubt many a wondering and doubting look was turned to it. But there it lay, perhaps neglected, for more than three hundred years, the visible embodiment of a hope which smiled at death and counted centuries as nothing. At last the day came which vindicated the long-deferred confidence; and, as the fugitives in their haste shouldered the heavy sarcophagus, and set out with it for the Land of Promise, surely some thrill of trust would pass through their ranks, and in some hearts would sound the exhortation, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.'

We have not a dead Joseph to bid us wait with patience and never lose our firm grip of God's promises, but we have a living Jesus. Our march to the land of rest is headed, not by the bones of a departed leader, but by the Forerunner, 'who is for us entered' whither He will bring all who trust in Him. Therefore we should live, as Joseph lived, with desires and trust reaching out beyond things seen to the land assured to us by God's promise, doing our day's task all the more vigorously because we do not belong to the order of things in the midst of which we live; and then, when we lie down at the end of our life's work, we shall not be saddened by disappointed hopes, nor reluctantly close our eyes on good to come, when we shall not be there to share it, but be sure that we shall 'see the good of Thy chosen,' and 'rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation.'

Joseph's Faith

'Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.'—GENESIS l. 25.

This is the one act of Joseph's life which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews selects as the sign that he too lived by faith. 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.'

It was at once a proof of how entirely he believed God's promise, and of how earnestly he longed for its fulfilment. It was a sign too of how little he felt himself at home in Egypt, though to outward appearance he had become completely one of its people. The ancestral spirit was in him true and strong though he was 'separate from his brethren.' He bore an Egyptian name, a swelling title, he married an Egyptian woman, he had an Egyptian priest for father-in-law, but he was an Israelite in heart; and in the midst of official cares and a surfeit of honours, his desires turned away from them all towards the land promised by God to his fathers.

And when he lay dying, he could not bear to think that his bones should moulder in the country where his life had been spent. 'I know that this is not our land after all; swear to me that when the promise that has tarried so long comes at last, you will take me, all that is left of me, and carry it up, and lay it in some corner of the blessed soil, that I too may somehow share in the inheritance of His people. God shall surely visit you. Carry my bones up hence.'

Perhaps there is in this wish a trace of something besides faith in God's promises. Of course, there is a natural sentiment which no clearness of knowledge of a future state wholly dispels. We all feel as if somehow our bodies remain a part of ourselves even after death, and we have wishes where they shall lie. But perhaps Joseph had a more definite belief on the matter than that. What theory of another life does an Egyptian mummy express? Why all that sedulous care to preserve the poor relics? Was it not a consequence of the belief that somehow or other there could be no life without a body, and that in some mysterious way the preservation of that contributed to the continuance of this? And so Joseph, who was himself going to be embalmed and put into a mummy-case, may have caught something of the tone of thought prevalent around him, and have believed that to carry his bones to the land of promise was, in some obscure manner, to carry *him* thither. Be that as it may, whether the wish came from a mistake about the relation of flesh and spirit, or only from the natural desire which we too possess, that our graves may not be among strangers, but beside our father's and our mother's—that is not the main thing in this fact. The main thing is that this dying man believed God's promise, and claimed his share in it.

And on this the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whoever he was, fastens. Neglecting the differences in knowledge between Joseph and the Christians whom he addresses, and pointing back to the strong confidence in God and longing for participation in the promises which brightened the glazing eye and gave *him* 'hope in his death,' he declares that the principle of action which guided this man in the dim twilight of early revelation, is that same faith which ought to guide us who live in the full light of the unsetting sun.

Taking, then, this incident, with the New Testament commentary upon it, it leads us to a truth which we often lose sight of, but which is indispensable if we would understand the relations of the earlier and later days.

1. *Faith is always the same, though knowledge varies.*—There is a vast difference between a man's creed and a man's faith. The one may vary, does vary within very wide limits; the other remains the same. The things believed have been growing from the beginning—the attitude of mind and will by which they have been grasped has been the same from the beginning, and will be the same to the end. And not only so, but it will be substantially the same in heaven as it is on earth. For there is but one bond which unites men to God; and that emotion of loving trust is one and the same in the dim twilight of the world's morning, and amid the blaze of the noonday of heaven. The contents of faith, that on which it relies, the treasure it grasps, changes; the essence of faith, the act of reliance, the grasp which holds the treasure, does not change.

It is difficult to decide how much Joseph's gospel contained. From our point of view it was very imperfect. The spiritual life was nourished in him and in the rest of 'the world's grey fathers' on what looks to us but like seven basketsful of fragments. They had promises, indeed, in which we, looking at them with the light of fulfilment blazing upon them, can see the broad outlines of the latest revelation, and can trace the future flower all folded together and pale in the swelling bud. But we shall err greatly if we suppose, as we are apt to do, that those promises were to them anything like what they are to us. It requires a very vigorous exercise of very rare gifts to throw ourselves back to their position, and to gain any vivid and approximately accurate notion of the theology of these ancient lovers of God.

This, at any rate, we may, perhaps, say: they had a sure and clear knowledge of the living God, who had talked with them as with a friend; they knew His inspiring, guiding presence; they knew the forgiveness of sins; they knew, though they very dimly understood, the promise, 'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' How far they looked across the gulf of death and beheld anything—even cloudland—on the other side, is a question very hard to answer, and about which confident dogmatism, either affirmative or negative, is unwarranted. But it is to be remembered that, whether they had any notion of a future state or no, they had a promise which fulfilled for them substantially the same office as that does for us. The promise of the land of Canaan gleaming before them through the mists, bare and 'earthly' as it seems to us when compared with our hope of an inheritance incorruptible in the heavens, is, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, identified with that hope of ours, for he expressly says that, whilst they were looking for an earthly Canaan, they were 'desiring a better country, that is an heavenly.' So that, whether they definitely expected a life after death or not, the anticipation of the land promised to them and to their fathers held the same place in their creed, and as a moral agent in their lives, which the rest that remains for the people of God ought to do in ours.

And it is to be taken into account also that fellowship with God has in it the germ of the assurance of immortality. It seems almost impossible to suppose a state of mind in which a man living in actual communion with God shall believe that death is to end it all. Christ's proof that immortal life was revealed in the Pentateuch, was the fact that God there called Himself the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob; by which our Lord meant us to learn that men who are brought into personal relations with God can never die, that it is impossible that a soul which has looked up to the face of the unseen Father with filial love should be left in the grave, or that those who are separated to be His, as He is theirs, should see corruption. The relation once established is eternal, and some more or less definite expectation of that eternity seems inseparable from the consciousness of the relation.

But be that as it may, and even taking the widest possible view of the contents of the patriarchal creed, what a rude outline it looks beside ours! Can there be anything in common between us? Can they be in any way a pattern for us? Yes; as I said, faith is one thing, creed

is another. Joseph and his ancestors were joined to God by the very same bond which unites us to Him. There has never been but one path of life: 'They *trusted* God and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' In that Old Covenant the one thing needful was trust in the living Jehovah. In the New, the one thing needful is the very same emotion, directed to the very same Lord, manifested now and incarnate in the divine Son, our Saviour. In this exercise of loving confidence, in which reason and will and affection blend in the highest energy and holiest action, Joseph and we are one. Across the gulf of centuries we clasp hands; and in despite of all superficial differences of culture and civilisation, and all deeper differences in knowledge of God and His loving will, Pharaoh's prime minister, and the English workman, and the Hindoo ryot, may be alike in what is deepest—the faith which grasps God. How all that mysterious Egyptian life fades away as we think of the fundamental identity of religious emotion then and now! It disguises our brother from us, as it did from the wandering Arabs who came to buy corn, and could not recognise in the swarthy, imperious Egyptian, with strange head-dress and unknown emblems hanging by chains of gold about his neck, the fair boy whom they had sold to the merchants. But beneath it all is the brother's heart, fed by the same life-blood which feeds ours. He trusts in God, he expects a future because God has promised it, and, therefore, he is separated from those among whom he dwells, and knit to us in this far-off island of the sea, who so many centuries after are partakers of like precious faith.

And incomplete as his creed was, Joseph may have been a better Christian than some of us, and was so, if what he knew nourished his spiritual life more than what we know nourishes ours, and if his heart and will twined more tenaciously round the fragments of revelation which he possessed, and drew from them more support and strength than we do from the complete Gospel which we have.

Brethren, what makes us Christians is not the theology we have in our heads, but the faith and love we have in our hearts. We must, indeed, have a clear statement of truth in orderly propositions—that is, a system of dogmas—to have anything to trust to at all. There can be no saving faith in an unseen Person, except through the medium of thoughts concerning Him, which thoughts put into words are a creed. The antithesis which is often eagerly urged upon us—not doctrines, but Christ—is a very incomplete and misleading one. 'Christ' is a mere name, empty of all significance till it is filled with definite statements of who and what Christ is. But whilst I, for my part, believe that we must have doctrines to make Christ a reality and an object of faith to grasp at all, I would urge all the more earnestly, because I thus believe, that, when we have these doctrines, it is not the creed that saves, but the faith. We are united to Christ, not by the doctrine of His nature and work, needful as that is, but by trusting in Him as that which the doctrine declares Him to be—Redeemer, Friend, Sacrifice, Divine Lover of our souls. Let us always remember that it is not the amount of religious knowledge which I have got, but the amount which I use, that determines my religious position and character. Most of us have in our creeds principles that have no influence upon our moral and active life; and, if so, it matters not one whit how pure, how accurate, how comprehensive, how consistent, how scriptural my conceptions of the Gospel may be. If they are not powers in my soul, they only increase my responsibility and my liability to condemnation. The dry light of the understanding is of no use to anybody. You must turn your creed into a faith before it has power to bless and save.

There are hosts of so-called Christians who get no more good out of the most solemn articles of their orthodox belief than if they were heathens. What in the use of your saying that you believe in God the Father Almighty, when there is no child's love and happy confidence in your heart? What the better are you for believing in Jesus Christ, His divine nature, His death and glory, when you have no reliance on Him, nor any least flutter of trembling love towards

Him? Is your belief in the Holy Ghost of the smallest consequence, if you do not yield to His hallowing power? What does it matter that you believe in the forgiveness of sins, so long as you do not care a rush whether yours are pardoned or no? And is it anything to you or to God that you believe in the life everlasting, if all your work, and hopes, and longings are confined to 'this bank and shoal of time'? Are you any more a Christian because of all that intellectual assent to these solemn verities? Is not your life like some secularised monastic chamber, with holy texts carved on the walls, and saintly images looking down from glowing windows on revellers and hucksters who defile its floor? Your faith, not your creed, determines your religion. Many a 'true believer' is a real 'infidel.'

Thank God that the soul may be wedded to Christ, even while a very partial conception of Christ is in the understanding. The more complete and adequate the creed, indeed, the mightier and more fruitful in blessing will the faith naturally be; and every portion of the full orb of the Sun of Righteousness which is eclipsed by the shadow of our intellectual misconceptions, will diminish the light and warmth which falls upon our souls. It is no part of our duty to pronounce what is the minimum of a creed which faith needs for its object. For myself, I confess that I do not understand how the spiritual life can be sustained in its freshness and fervour, in its fulness and reality, without a belief in the divinity and saving work of Jesus Christ. But with that belief for the centre which faith grasps, the rest may vary indefinitely. All who stand around that centre, some nearer, some further off, some mazed in errors which others have cast behind them, some of them seeing and understanding more, and some less of Him and of His work—are His. He loves them, and will save them all. Knowledge varies. The faith which unites to God remains the same.

2. We may gather from this incident another consideration, namely, that *Faith has its noblest office in detaching from the present*.

All his life long, from the day of his captivity, Joseph was an Egyptian in outward seeming. He filled his place at Pharaoh's court, but his dying words open a window into his soul, and betray how little he had felt that he belonged to the order of things in the midst of which he had been content to live. This man, too, surrounded by an ancient civilisation, and dwelling among granite temples and solid pyramids and firm-based sphinxes, the very emblems of eternity, confessed that here he had no continuing city, but sought one to come. As truly as his ancestors who dwelt in tabernacles, like Abraham journeying with his camels and herds, and pitching his tent outside the walls of Hebron, like Isaac in the grassy plains of the South country, like Jacob keeping himself apart from the families of the land, their descendant, an heir with them of the same promise, showed that he too regarded himself as a 'stranger and a sojourner.' Dying, he said, 'Carry my bones up from hence. Therefore we may be sure that, living, the hope of the inheritance must have burned in his heart as a hidden light, and made him an alien everywhere but on its blessed soil.

And faith will always produce just such effects. In exact proportion to its strength, that living trust in God will direct our thoughts and desires to the 'King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.' In proportion as our thoughts and desires are thus directed, they will be averted from what is round about us; and the more longingly our eyes are fixed on the furthest horizon, the less shall we see the flowers at our feet. To behold God pales the otherwise dazzling lustre of created brightness. They whose souls are fed with heavenly manna, and who have learned that it is their necessary food, will scent no dainties in the fleshpots of Egypt, for all their rank garlic and leeks. It is simply a question as to which of two classes of ideas occupies the thoughts, and which of two sets of affections engages the heart. If vulgar brawling and rude merrymakers fill the inn, there will be no room for the pilgrim thoughts which bear the Christ in their bosom, and have angels for their guard; and if

these holy wayfarers enter, their serene presence will drive forth the noisy crowd, and turn the place into a temple. Nothing but Christian faith gives to the furthest future the solidity and definiteness which it must have, if it is to be a breakwater for us against the fluctuating sea of present cares and thoughts.

If the unseen is ever to rule in men's lives, it must be through their thoughts. It must become intelligible, clear, real. It must be brought out of the flickering moonlight of fancy and surmises, into the sunlight of certitude and knowledge. Dreams, and hopes, and peradventures are too unsubstantial stuff to be a bulwark against the very real, undeniable present. And such certitude is given through faith which grasps the promises of God, and twines the soul round the risen Saviour so closely that it sits with Him in heavenly places. Such certitude is given by faith alone.

If the unseen is ever to rule in men's lives, it must become not only an object for certain knowledge, but also for ardent wishes. The vague sense of possible evils lurking in its mysteries must be taken out of the soul, and there must come somehow an assurance that all it wraps in its folds is joy and peace. It must cease to be doubtful, and must seem infinitely desirable. Does anything but Christian faith engage the heart to love, and all the longing wishes to set towards, the things that are unseen and eternal? Where besides, then, can there be found a counterpoise weighty enough to heave up the souls that are laden with the material, and cleaving to the dust? Nowhere. The only possible deliverance from the tyrannous pressure of the trifles amidst which we live is in having the thoughts familiarised with Christ in heaven, which will dwarf all that is on earth, and in having the affections fixed on Him, which will emancipate them from the pains and sorrows that ever wait upon love of the mutable and finite creatures.

Let us remember that such deliverance from the present is the condition of all noble, joyous, pure life. It needs Christianity to effect it indeed, but it does not need Christianity to see how desirable it is, and how closely connected with whatever is lovely and of good report is this detachment from the near and the visible. A man that is living for remote objects is, in so far, a better man than one who is living for the present. He will become thereby the subject of a mental and moral discipline that will do him good. And, on the other hand, a life which has no far-off light for its guiding star, has none of the unity, of the self-restraint, of the tension, of the conscious power which makes our days noble and strong. Whether he accomplish them or fail, whether they be high or low, the man who lets future objects rule present action is in advance of others. 'To scorn delights and live laborious days,' which is the prerogative of the man with a future, is always best. He is rather a beast than a man, who floats lazily on the warm, sunny wavelets as they lift him in their roll, and does not raise his head high enough above them to see and steer for the solid shore where they break. But only he has found the full, controlling, blessing, quickening power that lies in the thought of the future, and in life directed by it, to whom that future is all summed in the name of his Saviour. Whatever makes a man live in the past and in the future raises him; but high above all others stand those to whom the past is an apocalypse of God, with Calvary for its centre, and all the future is fellowship with Christ, and joy in the heavens. Having these hopes, it will be our own faults if we are not pure and gentle, calm in changes and sorrows, armed against frowning dangers, and proof against smiling temptations. They are our armour—'Put on the breastplate of faith … and for an helmet the hope of salvation.'

A very sharp test for us all lies in these thoughts. This change of the centre of interest from earth to heaven is the uniform effect of faith. What, then, of us? On Sundays we profess to seek for a city; but what about the week, from Monday morning to Saturday night? What difference does our faith make in the current of our lives? How far are they unlike—I do not

mean externally and in occupations, but in principle—the lives of men who ‘have no hope’? Are you living for other objects than theirs? Are you nurturing other hopes in your hearts, as a man may guard a little spark of fire with both his hands, to light him amid the darkness and the howling storm? Do you care to detach yourself from the world? or are you really ‘men of this world, which have their portion in this life,’ even while Christians by profession? A question which I have no right to ask, and no power to answer but for myself; a question which it concerns your souls to ask and to answer very definitely for yourselves. There is no need to preach an exaggerated and impossible abstinence from work and enjoyment in the world where God has put us, or to set up a standard ‘too high for mortal life beneath the sky.’ Whatever call there may have sometimes been to protest against a false asceticism, and withdrawing from active life for the sake of one’s personal salvation, times are changed now. What we want to-day is: ‘Come ye out and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.’ In my conscience I believe that multitudes are having the very heart of the Christian life eaten out by absorption in earthly pursuits and loves, and by the effacing of all distinction in outward life, in occupation, in recreation, in tastes and habits, between people who call themselves Christians, and people who do not care at all whether there is another world or not. There can be but little strength in our faith if it does not compel us to separation. If it has any power to do anything at all, it will certainly do that. If we are naturalised as citizens there, we cannot help being aliens here. ‘Abraham,’ says the New Testament, ‘dwelt in tabernacles, *for* he looked for a city.’ Just so! The tent life will always be the natural one for those who feel that their mother-country is beyond the stars. We should be like the wandering Swiss, who hear in a strange land the rude, old melody that used to echo among the Alpine pastures. The sweet, sad tones kindle home-sickness that will not let them rest. No matter where they are, or what they are doing, no matter what honour they have carved out for themselves with their swords, they throw off the livery of the alien king which they have worn, and turning their backs upon pomp and courts, seek the free air of the mountains, and find home better than a place by a foreign throne. Let us esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and go forth to Him without the camp, for here have we no continuing city.

3. Again, we have here an instance that *Faith makes men energetic in the duties of the present*.

The remarks which I have been making must be completed by that consideration, or they become hurtful and one-sided. You know that common sarcasm, that Christianity degrades this present life by making it merely the portal to a better, and teaches men to think of it as only evil, to be scrambled through anyhow. I confess that I wish the sneer were a less striking contrast to what Christian people really think. But it is almost as gross a caricature of the teaching of Christianity as it is of the practice of Christians.

Take this story of Joseph as giving us a truer view of the effect on present action of faith in, and longing for, God’s future. He was, as I said, a true Hebrew all his days. But that did not make him run away from Pharaoh’s service. He lived by hope, and that made him the better worker in the passing moment, and kept him tugging away all his life at the oar, administering the affairs of a kingdom.

Of course it is so. The one thing which saves this life from being contemptible is the thought of another. The more profoundly we feel the reality of the great eternity whither we are being drawn, the greater do all things here become. They are made less in their power to absorb or trouble, but they are made infinitely greater in importance as preparations for what is beyond. When they are first they are small, when they are second they are great. When the mist lifts, and shows the snowy summits of the ‘mountains of God,’ the nearer lower ranges, which we

thought the highest, dwindle indeed, but gain in sublimity and meaning by the loftier peaks to which they lead up. Unless men and women live for eternity, they *are* 'merely players,' and all their busy days 'like a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, *signifying nothing*.' How absurd, how monotonous, how trivial it all is, all this fret and fume, all these dying joys and only less fleeting pains, all this mill-horse round of work which we pace, unless we are, mill-horse-like, driving a shaft that goes *through the wall*, and grinds something that falls into 'bags that wax not old' on the other side. The true Christian faith teaches us that this world is the workshop where God makes men, and the next, the palace where He shows them. All here is apprenticeship and training. It is of no more value than the attitudes into which gymnasts throw themselves, but as a discipline most precious. The end makes the means important; and if we believe that God is preparing us for immortal life with Him by all our work, then we shall do it with a will: otherwise we may well be languid as we go on for thirty or forty years, some of us, doing the same trivial things, and getting nothing out of them but food, occupation of time, and a mechanical aptitude for doing what is not worth doing.

It is the horizon that gives dignity to the foreground. A picture without sky has no glory. This present, unless we see gleaming beyond it the eternal calm of the heavens, above the tossing tree-tops with withering leaves, and the smoky chimneys, is a poor thing for our eyes to gaze at, or our hearts to love, or our hands to toil on. But when we see that all paths lead to heaven, and that our eternity is affected by our acts in time, then it is blessed to gaze, it is possible to love, the earthly shadows of the uncreated beauty, it is worth while to work.

Remember, too, that faith will energise us for any sort of work, seeing that it raises all to one level and brings all under one sanction, and shows all as cooperating to one end. Look at that muster-roll of heroes of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and mark the variety of grades of human life represented there—statesmen, soldiers, prophets, shepherds, widow women, martyrs—all fitted for their tasks and delivered from the snare that was in their calling, by that faith which raised them above the world, and therefore fitted them to come down on the world with stronger strokes of duty. This is the secret of doing with our might whatsoever our hand finds to do-to trust Christ, to live *with* Him, and *by* the hope of the inheritance.

Then, brethren, let us see that our clearer revelation bears fruit in a faith in the great divine promises as calm and firm as this dying patriarch had. Then the same power will work not only the same detachment and energy in life, but the same calmness and solemn light of hope in death. It is very beautiful to notice how Joseph dying almost overleaps the thought of death as a very small matter. His brethren who stood by his bedside might well fear what might be the consequences to their people when the powerful protector, the prime minister of the kingdom, was gone. But the dying man has firm hold of God's promises, and he knows that these will be fulfilled, whether he live or no. 'I die,' says he, 'but God shall surely visit you. *He* is not going to die; and though I stand no more before Pharaoh, you will be safe.'

Thus we may contemplate our own going away, or the departure of the dearest from our homes, and of the most powerful for good in human affairs, and in the faith of God's true promises may feel that no one is indispensable to our well-being or to the world's good. God's chariot is self-moving. One after another, who lays his hand upon the ropes, and hauls for a little space, drops out of the ranks. But it will go on, and in His majesty He will ride prosperously.

And for himself, too, the dying man felt that death was a very small matter. 'Whether I live or die I shall have a share in the promise. Living, perhaps my feet would stand upon its soil; dying, my bones will rest there.' And we, who know a resurrection, have in it that which makes Joseph's fond fancy a reality, and reduces the importance of that last enemy to nothing. Some will be alive and remain till the coming of the Lord, some will be laid in the

grave till His voice calls them forth, and carries their bones up from hence to the land of the inheritance. But whether we be of generations that fell on sleep looking for the promise of His coming, or whether of the generation that go forth to meet Him when He comes, it matters not. All who have lived by faith will then be gathered at last. The brightest hopes of the present will be forgotten. Then, when we too shall stand in the latter day, wearing the likeness of His glory, and extricated wholly from the bondage of corruption and the dust of death, we, perfected in body, soul, and spirit, shall enter the calm home, where we shall change the solitude of the desert and the transitoriness of the tent and the dangers of the journey, for the society and the stability and the security of the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

A Coffin In Egypt

'They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.' —GENESIS l. 26.

So closes the book of Genesis. All its recorded dealings of God with Israel, and all the promises and the glories of the patriarchal line, end with 'a coffin in Egypt'. Such an ending is the more striking, when we remember that a space of three hundred years intervenes between the last events in Genesis and the first in Exodus, or almost as long a time as parts the Old Testament from the New. And, during all that period, Israel was left with a mummy and a hope. The elaborately embalmed body of Joseph lay in its gilded and pictured case, somewhere in Goshen, and was, no doubt, in the care of the Israelites, as is plain from the fact that they carried it with them at the exodus. For three centuries, that silent 'coffin in Egypt' preached its impressive messages. What did it say? It spoke, no doubt, to ears often deaf, but still some faint whispers of its speechless testimony would sound in some hearts, and help to keep vivid some hopes.

First, it was a silent reminder of mortality. Egyptian consciousness was much occupied with death. The land was peopled with tombs. But the corpse of Joseph was perhaps not laid in one of these, but remained housed somewhere in sight, as it were, of all Israel. Many a passer-by would pause for a moment, and think; Here is the end of dignity second only to Pharaoh's, to this has come that strong brain, that true heart, Israel's pride and protection is shut up in that wooden case.

'The glories of our birth and state Are shadows, not substantial things; There is no armour against fate, Death lays his icy hand on kings.'

Yes, but let us remember that while that silent sarcophagus enforced the old, old lesson to the successive generations that looked on it and little heeded its stern, sad teaching of mortality, it had other brighter truths to tell. For the shrivelled, colourless lips that lay in it, covered with many a fold of linen, had left as their last utterance, 'I die, but God will surely visit you,' No man is necessary. Israel can survive the loss of the strongest and wisest. God lives, though a hundred Josephs die. It is pure gain to lose human helpers, if thereby we become more fully conscious of our need of a divine arm and heart, and more truly feel that we have these for our all-sufficient stay. Blessed is the fleeting of all that can pass, if its withdrawal lets the calm light of the Eternal, which cannot pass, stream in uninterrupted on us! When the leaves fall, we see more clearly the rock which their short-lived greenness in its pride veiled. When the many-hued and ever-shifting clouds are swept out of the sky by the wind, the sun that lent them all their colour shines the more brightly. The message of every death-bed and grave is meant to be, 'This and that man dies, but God lives.' The last result of our contemplation of mortality, as affecting our dearest and most needful ones, and as sure to include ourselves in its far-reaching, close-woven net, ought to be to drive us to God's breast, that there we may find a Friend who does not pass, and may dwell in 'the land of the living,' on whose soil the foot of all-conquering Death dare never tread.

Nor are these thoughts all the message of that 'coffin in Egypt.' In the first verses of the next book, that of Exodus, there is a remarkable juxtaposition of ideas, when we read that 'Joseph died and all his brethren and all that generation.' But was that the end of Israel? By no means, for the narrative goes on immediately to say—linking the two things together by a simple 'and'—that 'the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty.'

So life springs side by side with death. There are cradles as well as graves.

‘The individual withers, And the race is more and more.’

Leaves drop and new leaves come. The April days are not darkened, and the tender green of the fresh leaf-buds is all the more vigorous and luxuriant, because it is fed from the decaying leaves that litter the roots of the long-lived oak. Thus through the ages the pathetic alternation goes on. Penelope’s web is ever being woven and run down and woven again. Joseph dies; Israel grows. Let us not take half-views, nor either fix our thoughts on the universal law of dissolution and decay, nor on the other side of the process—the universal emergence of life from death, reconstruction from dissolution. In our individual histories and on the wider field of the world’s history, the same large law is at work, which is expressed in the simplest terms by these old words, ‘Joseph died, and all his brethren and all that generation’—and ‘the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly.’ So the wholesome lesson of mortality is stripped of much of its sadness, and retains all its pathos, solemnity, and power to purify the heart.

Again, that ‘coffin in Egypt’ was a herald of Hope. The reason for Joseph’s dying injunction that his body should be preserved after the Egyptian fashion, and laid where it could be lifted and carried away, when the long-expected deliverance was effected, was the dying patriarch’s firm confidence that, though he died, he had still somehow a share in God’s faithful promise. We do not know the precise shape which his thought of that share took. It may have been merely the natural sentiment which desires that the unconscious frame shall moulder quietly beside the mouldering forms which once held our dear ones. This naturalised Egyptian did his work manfully in the land of his adoption, and flung himself eagerly into its interests, but his heart turned to the cave at Machpelah, and, though he lived in Egypt, he could not bear to think of lying there for ever when dead, especially of being left there alone. There may have been some trace in his wish of the peculiar Egyptian belief that the preservation of the body contributed in some way to the continuance of personal life, and that a certain shadowy self hovered about the spot where the mummy was laid. Our knowledge of the large place filled by a doctrine of a future life in Egyptian thought makes it most probable that Joseph had at least some forecast of that hope of immortality, which seems to us to be inseparable from the consciousness of present communion with God.

But, in any case, Israel had charge of that coffin because the dead man that lay in it had, on the very edge of the gulf of death, believed that he had still a portion in Israel’s hope, and that, when he had taken the plunge into the great darkness, he had not sunk below the reach of God’s power to give him personal fulfilment of His yet unfulfilled promise. His dying command was the expression of his unshaken faith that, though he was dead, God would visit him with His salvation, and give him to see the prosperity of His chosen, that he might rejoice in the gladness of the nation, and glory with His inheritance. He had lived, trusting in God’s bare promise, and, as he lived, he died. The Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold of the true motive power in the incident, when it points to Joseph’s dying ‘commandment concerning his bones’ as a noble instance of Faith.

Thus, through slow creeping centuries, this silent preacher said—’Hope on, though the vision tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come. God is faithful, and will perform His word.’ There was much to make hope faint. To bring Israel out of Canaan seemed a strange way of investing it with the possession of Canaan. As the tardy years trickled away, drop by drop, and the promise seemed no nearer fulfilment, some film of doubt must have crept over Hope’s bright eyes. When new dynasties reigned, and Israel slowly sank into the state of bondage, it must have been still harder to believe that the shortest road to the inheritance was round by Goshen. But through all the darkening course of Israel in these sad centuries, there

stood the ‘coffin,’ the token of a triumphant faith which had leapt, as a trifle, over the barrier of death, and grasped as real the good which lay beyond that frowning wall. We have a better Herald of hope than a mummy-case and a pyramid built round it. We have an empty grave and an occupied Throne, by which to nourish our confidence in Immortality and our estimate of the insignificance of death. Our Joseph does not say—’I die, but God will surely visit you,’ but He gives us the wonderful assurance of identification with Himself, and consequent participation in His glory—’Because I live, ye shall live also.’ Therefore our hope should be as much brighter and more confirmed than this ancient one was as that on which it is based is better and more joyous. But, alas, there is no invariable proportion between food supplied and strength derived. An orchid can fling out gorgeous blooms, though it grows on a piece of dry wood, but plants set in rich soil often show poor flowers. Our hope will be worthy of its foundation, only on condition of our habitually reflecting on the firmness of that foundation, and cultivating familiarity with the things hoped for.

There are many ways in which the apostle’s great saying that ‘we are saved by hope’ approves itself as true. Whatever leads us to grasp the future rather than the present, even if it is but an earthly future, and to live by hope rather than by fruition, even if it is but a short-reaching hope, lifts us in the scale of being, ennobles, dignifies, and in some respects purifies us. Even men whose expectations have not wing-power enough to cross the dreadful ravine of Death, are elevated in the degree in which they work towards a distant goal. Short-sighted hopes are better than blind absorption in the present. Whatever puts the centre of gravity of our lives in the future is a gain, and most of all is that hope blessed, which bids us look forward to an eternal sitting with Jesus at the right hand of God.

If such hope has any solidity in it, it will certainly detach us from the order of things in which we dwell. The world is always tempting us to ‘forget the imperial palace’ whither we go. The Israelites must have been swayed by many inducements to settle down for good and all in the low levels of fertile Goshen, and to think themselves better off there than if going out on a perilous enterprise to win no richer pastures than they already possessed. In fact, when the deliverance came, it was not particularly welcome, oven though oppression was embittering the peoples’ lives. But, when hope had died down in them, and desire had become languid, and ignoble contentment with their flocks and herds had dulled their spirits, Joseph’s silent coffin must have pealed in their ears—’This is not your rest; arise and claim your inheritance.’ In like manner, the pressure of the apparently solid realities of to-day, the growth of the ‘scientific’ temper of mind which confines knowledge to physical facts, the drift of tendency among religious people to regard Christianity mainly in its aspect of dealing with social questions and bringing present good, powerfully reinforce our natural sluggishness of Hope, and have brought it about that the average Christian of this day has fewer of his thoughts directed to the future life than his predecessors had, or than it is good for him to have.

Among the many truths which almost need to be rediscovered by their professed believers, that of the rest that remains for the people of God is one. For the test of believing a truth is its influence on conduct, and no one can affirm that the conduct of the average Christian of our times bears marks of being deeply influenced by that Future, or by the hope of winning it. Does he live as if he felt that he was an alien among the material things surrounding him? Does it look as if his true affinities were beyond the grave and above the stars? If we did thus feel, not at rare intervals, when ‘in seasons of calm weather, our souls have sight of that immortal sea,’ which lies glassy before the throne, and on whose banks the minstrels stand singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, but habitually and with a vivid realisation, which makes the things hoped for more solid than what we touch and handle, our lives would be far other than they are. We should not work less, but more, earnestly at our present duties,

whatever these may be, for they would be seen in new importance as bearing on our place in that world of consequences. The more our goal and prize are seen gleaming through the dust of the race-ground, the more strenuous our effort here. Nothing ennobles the trifles of our lives in time like the streaming in on these of the light of eternity. That vision ever present with us will not sadden. The fact of mortality is grim enough, if forced upon us unaccompanied by the other fact that Death opens the gate of our Home. But when the else depressing thought that 'here we have no continuing city' is but the obverse and result of the fact that 'we seek one to come,' it is freed from its sadness, and becomes powerful for good and even for joy. We need, even more than Israel in its bondage did, to realise that we are strangers and pilgrims. It concerns the depth of our religion and the reality of our profiting by the discipline, as well as of our securing the enjoyment of the blessings, of the fleeting and else trivial present, that we shall keep very clear in view the great future which dignifies and interprets this enigmatical earthly life.

Further, that 'coffin in Egypt' was a preacher of patience. As we have seen, three centuries at least, probably a somewhat longer period, passed between the time when Joseph's corpse was laid in it, and the night when it was lifted out of it by the departing Israelites. No doubt, hope deferred had made many a heart sick, and the weary question, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' had in some cases changed into bitter disbelief that the promise would ever be fulfilled. But, for all these years, the dumb monitor stood there proclaiming, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it.'

Surely we need the same lesson. It is hard for us to acquiesce in the slow march of the divine purposes. Life is short, and desire would fain see the great harvests reaped before death seals our eyes. Sometimes the very prospect of the great things that shall one day be accomplished in the world, and we not there to see, weighs heavily on us. Reformers, philanthropists, idealists of all sorts are constitutionally impatient, and in their generous haste to see their ideals realised, forget that 'raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay' and are indignant with man for his sluggishness and with God for His majestic slowness. Not less do we fret and fume and think the days drag with intolerable slowness, before some eagerly expected good rises like a star on our individual lives. But there is deep truth in Paul's apparent paradox, that 'if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' The more sure the confidence, the more quiet the patient waiting. It is uncertainty which makes earthly hope short of breath, and impatient of delay.

But since a Christian man's hope is consolidated into certainty, and when it is set on God, cannot only say, I trust that it will be so and so, but, I know that it shall, it may well be content to be patient for the fulfilment, 'as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it.' 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years' in respect of the magnitude of the changes which may be wrought by the instantaneous operation of His hand when the appointed hour shall strike, and therefore it should not strain our patience nor stagger our faith that 'a thousand years' should be 'as one day,' in respect of the visible approximation achieved in them, towards the establishment of His purpose. The world was prepared for man through countless millenniums. Man was prepared for the advent of Christ through long centuries. Nineteen hundred years have effected comparatively little in incorporating the issues of Christ's work in the consciousness and characters of mankind. Much of the slowness of that progress of Christianity is due to the faithlessness and sloth of professing Christians. But it still remains true that God lifts His foot slowly, and plants it firmly, in His march through the world. So, both in regard to the progress of truth, and the diffusion of the highest, and of the secondary, blessings of Christianity through the nations, and in respect to the reception of individual good gifts, we shall do wisely to leave God to settle the 'when' since we are sure that He has bound Himself to accomplish the fact.

Finally, that ‘coffin in Egypt’ was a pledge of possession. It lay long among the Israelites to uphold fainting faith, and at last was carried up before their host, and reverently guarded during forty years’ wanderings, till it was deposited in the cave at Machpelah, beside the tombs of the fathers of the nation. Thus it became to the nation, and remains for us, a symbol of the truth that no hope based upon God’s bare word is ever finally disappointed. From all other anticipations grounded on anything less solid, the element of uncertainty is inseparable, and Fear is ever the sister of Hope. With keen insight Spenser makes these two march side by side, in his wonderful procession of the attendants of earthly Love. There is always a lurking sadness in Hope’s smiles, and a nameless dread in her eyes. And all expectations busied with or based upon the contingencies of this poor life, whether they are fulfilled or disappointed, prove less sweet in fruition than in prospect, and often turn to ashes in the eating, instead of the sweet bread which we had thought them to be. One basis alone is sure, and that is the foundation on which Joseph rested and risked everything—the plain promise of God. He who builds on that rock will never be put to shame, and when floods sweep away every refuge built on sand, he will not need to ‘make haste’ to find, amid darkness and storm, some less precarious shelter, but will look down serenely on the wildest torrent, and know it to be impotent to wash away his fortress home.

There is no nobler example of victorious faith which prolonged confident expectation beyond the insignificant accident of death than Joseph’s dying ‘commandment concerning his bones.’ His confidence, indeed, grasped a far lower blessing than ours should reach out to clasp. It was evoked by less clear and full promises and pledges than we have. The magnitude and loftiness of the Christian hope of Immortality, and the certitude of the fact on which it reposes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, should result in a corresponding increase in the firmness and clearness of our hope, and in its power in our lives. The average Christian of to-day may well be sent to school to Joseph on his death-bed. Is our faith as strong as—I will not ask if it is stronger than—that of this man who, in the morning twilight of revelation, and with a hope of an eternal possession of an earthly inheritance, which, one might have thought, would be shattered by death, was able to fling his anchor clean across the gulf when he gave injunction, ‘Carry my bones up hence’? We have a better inheritance, and fuller, clearer promises and facts on which to trust. Shame to us if we have a feebler faith.

The Book Of Exodus

Four Shaping Centuries

'Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt: every man and his household came with Jacob. 2. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4. Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. 6. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7, And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10. Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure-cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. 13. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: 14. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.'—EXODUS i. 1-14.

The four hundred years of Israel's stay in Egypt were divided into two unequal periods, in the former and longer of which they were prosperous and favoured, while in the latter they were oppressed. Both periods had their uses and place in the shaping of the nation and its preparation for the Exodus. Both carry permanent lessons.

I. The long days of unclouded prosperity. These extended over centuries, the whole history of which is summed up in two words: death and growth. The calm years glided on, and the shepherds in Goshen had the happiness of having no annals. All that needed to be recorded was that, one by one, the first generation died off, and that the new generations 'were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty.' The emphatic repetitions recall the original promises in Genesis xii. 2, xvii. 4,5, xviii. 18. The preceding specification of the number of the original settlers (repeated from Genesis xlvi. 27) brings into impressive contrast the small beginnings and the rapid increase. We may note that eloquent setting side by side of the two processes which are ever going on simultaneously, death and birth.

One by one men pass out of the warmth and light into the darkness, and so gradually does the withdrawal proceed that we scarcely are aware of its going on, but at last 'all that generation' has vanished. The old trees are all cleared off the ground, and everywhere their place is taken by the young saplings. The web is ever being woven at one end, and run down at the other. 'The individual withers, but the race is more and more.' How solemn that continual play of opposing movements is, and how blind we are to its solemnity!

That long period of growth may be regarded in two lights. It effected the conversion of a horde into a nation by numerical increase, and so was a link in the chain of the divine working. The great increase, of which the writer speaks so strongly, was, no doubt, due to the favourable circumstances of the life in Goshen, but was none the less regarded by him, and rightly so, as God's doing. As the Psalmist sings, '*He* increased His people greatly.' 'Natural processes' are the implements of a supernatural will. So Israel was being multiplied, and the end for which it was peacefully growing into a multitude was hidden from all but God. But

there was another end, in reference to which the years of peaceful prosperity may be regarded; namely, the schooling of the people to patient trust in the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. That hope had burned bright in Joseph when he died, and he being dead yet spake of it from his coffin to the successive generations. Delay is fitted and intended to strengthen faith and make hope more eager. But that part of the divine purpose, alas! was not effected as the former was. In the moral region every circumstance has two opposite results possible. Each condition has, as it were, two handles, and we can take it by either, and generally take it by the wrong one. Whatever is meant to better us may be so used by us as to worsen us. And the history of Israel in Egypt and in the desert shows only too plainly that ease weakened, if it did not kill, faith, and that Goshen was so pleasant that it drove the hope and the wish for Canaan out of mind. 'While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.' Is not Israel in Egypt, slackening hold of the promise because it tarried, a mirror in which the Church may see itself? and do *we* not know the enervating influence of Goshen, making us reluctant to shoulder our packs and turn out for the pilgrimage? The desert repels more strongly than Canaan attracts.

II. The shorter period of oppression. Probably the rise of a 'new king' means a revolution in which a native dynasty expelled foreign monarchs. The Pharaoh of the oppression was, perhaps, the great Rameses II., whose long reign of sixty-seven years gives ample room for protracted and grinding oppression of Israel. The policy adopted was characteristic of these early despotisms, in its utter disregard of humanity and of everything but making the kingdom safe. It was not intentionally cruel, it was merely indifferent to the suffering it occasioned. 'Let us deal *wisely* with them'—never mind about justice, not to say kindness. Pharaoh's 'politics,' like those of some other rulers who divorce them from morality, turned out to be impolitic, and his 'wisdom' proved to be roundabout folly. He was afraid that the Israelites, if they were allowed to grow, might find out their strength and seek to emigrate; and so he set to work to weaken them with hard bondage, not seeing that that was sure to make them wish the very thing that he was blunderingly trying to prevent. The only way to make men glad to remain in a community is to make them at home there. The sense of injustice is the strongest disintegrating force. If there is a 'dangerous class' the surest way to make them more dangerous is to treat them harshly. It was a blunder to make 'lives bitter,' for hearts also were embittered. So the people were ripened for revolt, and Goshen became less attractive.

God used Pharaoh's foolish wisdom, as He had used natural laws, to prepare for the Exodus. The long years of ease had multiplied the nation. The period of oppression was to stir them up out of their comfortable nest, and make them willing to risk the bold dash for freedom. Is not that the explanation, too, of the similar times in our lives? It needs that we should experience life's sorrows and burdens, and find how hard the world's service is, and how quickly our Goshens may become places of grievous toil, in order that the weak hearts, which cling so tightly to earth, may be detached from it, and taught to reach upwards to God. 'Blessed is the man … in whose heart are thy ways,' and happy is he who so profits by his sorrows that they stir in him the pilgrim's spirit, and make him yearn after Canaan, and not grudge to leave Goshen. Our ease and our troubles, opposite though they seem and are, are meant to further the same end,—to make us fit for the journey which leads to rest and home. We often misuse them both, letting the one sink us in earthly delights and oblivion of the great hope, and the other embitter our spirits without impelling them to seek the things that are above. Let us use the one for thankfulness, growth, and patient hope, and the other for writing deep the conviction that this is not our rest, and making firm the resolve that we will gird our loins and, staff in hand, go forth on the pilgrim road, not shrinking from the wilderness, because we see the mountains of Canaan across its sandy flats.

Death And Growth

'And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty….'—EXODUS i. 6, 7.

These remarkable words occur in a short section which makes the link between the Books of Genesis and of Exodus. The writer recapitulates the list of the immigrants into Egypt, in the household of Jacob, and then, as it were, having got them there, he clears the stage to prepare for a new set of actors. These few words are all that he cares to tell us about a period somewhat longer than that which separates us from the great Protestant Reformation. He notes but two processes—silent dropping away and silent growth. 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' Plant by plant the leaves drop, and the stem rots and its place is empty. Seed by seed the tender green spikelets pierce the mould, and the field waves luxuriant in the breeze and the sunshine. 'The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly.'

I. Now, then, let us look at this twofold process which is always at work—silent dropping away and silent growth.

It seems to me that the writer, probably unconsciously, being profoundly impressed with certain features of that dropping away, reproduces them most strikingly in the very structure of his sentence: 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' The uniformity of the fate, and the separate times at which it befell individuals, are strongly set forth in the clauses, which sound like the threefold falls of earth on a coffin. They all died, but not all at the same time. They went one by one, one by one, till, at the end, they were all gone. The two things that appeal to our imagination, and ought to appeal to our consciences and wills, in reference to the succession of the generations of men, are given very strikingly, I think, in the language of my text—namely, the stealthy assaults of death upon the individuals, and its final complete victory.

If any of you were ever out at sea, and looked over a somewhat stormy water, you will have noticed, I dare say, how strangely the white crests of the breakers disappear, as if some force, acting from beneath, had plucked them under, and over the spot where they gleamed for a moment runs the blue sea. So the waves break over the great ocean of time; I might say, like swimmers pulled under by sharks, man after man, man after man, gets twitched down, till at the end—'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and *all* that generation.'

There is another process going on side by side with this. In the vegetable world, spring and autumn are two different seasons: May rejoices in green leaves and opening buds, and nests with their young broods; but winter days are coming when the greenery drops and the nests are empty, and the birds flown. But the singular and impressive thing (which we should see if we were not so foolish and blind) which the writer of our text lays his finger upon is that at the same time the two opposite processes of death and renewal are going on, so that if you look at the facts from the one side it seems nothing but a charnel-house and a Golgotha that we live in, while, seen from the other side, it is a scene of rejoicing, budding young life, and growth.

You get these two processes in the closest juxtaposition in ordinary life. There is many a house where there is a coffin upstairs and a cradle downstairs. The churchyard is often the

children's playground. The web is being run down at the one end and woven at the other. Wherever we look—

'Every moment dies a man, Every moment one is born.'

'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel … multiplied … exceedingly.'

But there is another thought here than that of the contemporaneousness of the two processes, and that is, as it is written on John Wesley's monument in Westminster Abbey, 'God buries the workmen and carries on the work.' The great Vizier who seemed to be the only protection of Israel is lying in 'a coffin in Egypt.' And all these truculent brothers of his that had tormented him, they are gone, and the whole generation is swept away. What of that? They were the depositories of God's purposes for a little while. Are God's purposes dead because the instruments that in part wrought them are gone? By no means. If I might use a very vulgar proverb, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' especially if God casts the net. So when the one generation has passed away there is the other to take up the work. Thus the text is a fitting introduction to the continuance of the history of the further unfolding of God's plan which occupies the Book of Exodus.

II. Such being the twofold process suggested by this text, let us next note the lessons which it enforces.

In the first place, let us be quite sure that we give it its due weight in our thoughts and lives. Let us be quite sure that we never give an undue weight to the one half of the whole truth. There are plenty of people who are far too much, constitutionally and (perhaps by reason of a mistaken notion of religion) religiously, inclined to the contemplation of the more melancholy side of these truths; and there are a great many people who are far too exclusively disposed to the contemplation of the other. But the bulk of us never trouble our heads about either the one or the other, but go on, forgetting altogether that swift, sudden, stealthy, skinny hand that, if I might go back to my former metaphor, is put out to lay hold of the swimmer and then pull him underneath the water, and which will clasp us by the ankles one day and drag us down. Do you ever think about it? If not, surely, surely you are leaving out of sight one of what ought to be the formative elements in our lives.

And then, on the other hand, when our hearts are faint, or when the pressure of human mortality—our own, that of our dear ones, or that of others—seems to weigh us down, or when it looks to us as if God's work was failing for want of people to do it, let us remember the other side—'And the children of Israel … increased … and waxed exceeding mighty; … and the land was filled with them.' So we shall keep the middle path, which is the path of safety, and so avoid the folly of extremes.

But then, more particularly, let me say that this double contemplation of the two processes under which we live ought to stimulate us to service. It ought to say to us, 'Do you cast in your lot with that work which is going to be carried on through the ages. Do you see to it that your little task is in the same line of direction as the great purpose which God is working out—the increasing purpose which runs through the ages.' An individual life is a mere little backwater, as it were, in the great ocean. But its minuteness does not matter, if only the great tidal wave which rolls away out there, in the depths and the distance amongst the fathomless abysses, tells also on the tiny pool far inland and yet connected with the sea by some narrow, long fiord.

If my little life is part of that great ocean, then the ebb and flow will alike act on it and make it wholesome. If my work is done in and for God, I shall never have to look back and say, as we certainly shall say one day, either here or yonder, unless our lives be thus part of the

divine plan, ‘What a fool I was! Seventy years of toiling and moiling and effort and sweat, and it has all come to nothing; like a long algebraic sum that covers pages of intricate calculations, and the *pluses* and *minuses* just balance each other; and the net result is a great round nought.’ So let us remember the twofold process, and let it stir us to make sure that ‘in our embers’ shall be ‘something that doth live,’ and that not ‘Nature,’ but something better—God—’remembers what was so fugitive.’ It is not fugitive if it is a part of the mighty whole.

But further, let this double contemplation make us very content with doing insignificant and unfinished work.

Joseph might have said, when he lay dying: ‘Well! perhaps I made a mistake after all. I should not have brought this people down here, even if I have been led hither. I do not see that I have helped them one step towards the possession of the land.’ Do you remember the old proverb about certain people who should not see half-finished work? All our work in this world has to be only what the physiologists call functional. God has a great scheme running on through ages. Joseph gives it a helping hand for a time, and then somebody else takes up the running, and carries the purpose forward a little further. A great many hands are placed on the ropes that draw the car of the Ruler of the world. And one after another they get stiffened in death; but the car goes on. We should be contented to do our little bit of the work. Never mind whether it is complete and smooth and rounded or not. Never mind whether it can be isolated from the rest and held up, and people can say, ‘He did that entire thing unaided.’ That is not the way for most of us. A great many threads go to make the piece of cloth, and a great many throws of the shuttle to weave the web. A great many bits of glass make up the mosaic pattern; and there is no reason for the red bit to pride itself on its fiery glow, or the grey bit to boast of its silvery coolness. They are all parts of the pattern, and as long as they keep their right places they complete the artist’s design. Thus, if we think of how ‘one soweth and another reapeth,’ we may be content to receive half-done works from our fathers, and to hand on unfinished tasks to them that come after us. It is not a great trial of a man’s modesty, if he lives near Jesus Christ, to be content to do but a very small bit of the Master’s work.

And the last thing that I would say is, let this double process going on all round us lift our thoughts to Him who lives for ever. Moses dies; Joshua catches the torch from his hand. And the reason why he catches the torch from his hand is because God said, ‘As I was with Moses so I will be with thee.’ Therefore we have to turn away in our contemplations from the mortality that has swallowed up so much wisdom and strength, eloquence and power, which the Church or our own hearts seem so sorely to want: and, whilst we do, we have to look up to Jesus Christ and say, ‘He lives! He lives! No man is indispensable for public work or for private affection and solace so long at there is a living Christ for us to hold by.’

Dear brethren, we need that conviction for ourselves often. When life seems empty and hope dead, and nothing is able to fill the vacuity or still the pain, we have to look to the vision of the Lord sitting on the empty throne, high and lifted up, and yet very near the aching and void heart. Christ lives, and that is enough.

So the separated workers in all the generations, who did their little bit of service, like the many generations of builders who laboured through centuries upon the completion of some great cathedral, will be united at the last; ‘and he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together’ in the harvest which was produced by neither the sower nor the reaper, but by Him who blessed the toils of both.

‘Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation’; but Jesus lives, and therefore His people ‘grow and multiply,’ and His servants’ work is blessed; and at the end they shall be

knit together in the common joy of the great harvest, and of the day when the headstone is brought forth with shoutings of ‘Grace! grace unto it.’

The Ark Among The Flags

'And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. 2. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. 3. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. 4. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. 5. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. 6. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. 7. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? 8. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. 9. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. 10. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.'—EXODUS ii. 1-10.

I. It is remarkable that all the persons in this narrative are anonymous. We know that the names of 'the man of the house of Levi' and his wife were Amram and Jochebed. Miriam was probably the anxious sister who watched what became of the little coffer. The daughter of Pharaoh has two names in Jewish tradition, one of which corresponds to that which Brugsch has found to have been borne by one of Rameses' very numerous daughters. One likes to think that the name of the gentle-hearted woman has come down to us; but, whether she was called 'Meri' or not, she and the others have no name here. The reason can scarcely have been ignorance. But they are, as it were, kept in shadow, because the historian saw, and wished us to see, that a higher Hand was at work, and that over all the events recorded in these verses there brooded the informing, guiding Spirit of God Himself, the sole actor.

'Each only as God wills Can work—God's puppets, best and worst, Are we: there is no last nor first.'

II. The mother's motive in braving the danger to herself involved in keeping the child is remarkably put. 'When she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him.' It was not only a mother's love that emboldened her, as it does all weak creatures, to shelter her offspring at her own peril, but something in the look of the infant, as it lay on her bosom, touched her with a dim hope. According to the Septuagint translation, both parents shared in this. And so the Epistle to the Hebrews unites them in that which is here attributed to the mother only. Stephen, too, speaks of Moses as 'fair in God's sight.' As if the prescient eyes of the parents were not blinded by love, but rather cleared to see some token of divine benediction resting on him. The writer of the *Hebrews* lifts the deed out of the category of instinctive maternal affection up to the higher level of faith. So we may believe that the aspect of her child woke some prophetic vision in the mother's soul, and that she and her husband were of those who cherished the hopes naturally born from the promise to Abraham, nurtured by Jacob's and Joseph's dying wish to be buried in Canaan, and matured by the tyranny of Pharaoh. Their faith, at all events, grasped the unseen God as their helper, and made Jochebed bold to break the terrible law, as a hen will fly in the face of a mastiff to shield her brood. Their faith perhaps also grasped the future deliverance, and linked it in some way with their child. We may learn how transfiguring and ennobling to the gentlest and weakest is faith in God,

especially when it is allied with unselfish human love. These two are the strongest powers. If they are at war, the struggle is terrible: if they are united, ‘the weakest is as David, and David as an angel of God.’ Let us seek ever to blend their united strength in our own lives.

Will it be thought too fanciful if we suggest that we are taught another lesson,—namely, that the faith which surrenders its earthly treasures to God, in confidence of His care, is generally rewarded and vindicated by receiving them back again, glorified and sanctified by the altar on which they have been laid? Jochebed clasped her recovered darling to her bosom with a deeper gladness, and held him by a surer title, when Miriam brought him back as the princess’s charge, than ever before. We never feel the preciousness of dear ones so much, nor are so calm in the joy of possession, as when we have laid them in God’s hands, and have learned how wise and wonderful His care is.

III. How much of the world’s history that tiny coffer among the reeds held! How different that history would have been if, as might easily have happened, it had floated away, or if the feeble life within it had wailed itself dead unheard! The solemn possibilities folded and slumbering in an infant are always awful to a thoughtful mind. But, except the manger at Bethlehem, did ever cradle hold the seed of so much as did that papyrus chest? The set of opinion at present minimises the importance of the individual, and exalts the spirit of the period, as a factor in history. Standing beside Miriam, we may learn a truer view, and see that great epochs require great men, and that, without such for leaders, no solid advance in the world’s progress is achieved. Think of the strange cradle floating on the Nile; then think of the strange grave among the mountains of Moab, and of all between, and ponder the same lesson as is taught in yet higher fashion by Bethlehem and Calvary, that God’s way of blessing the world is to fill men with His message, and let others draw from them. Whether it be ‘law,’ or ‘grace and truth,’ a man is needed through whom it may fructify to all.

IV. The sweet picture of womanly compassion in Pharaoh’s daughter is full of suggestions. We have already noticed that her name is handed down by one tradition as ‘Merris,’ and that ‘Meri’ has been found as the appellation of a princess of the period. A rabbinical authority calls her ‘Bithiah,’ that is, ‘Daughter of Jehovah’; by which was, no doubt, intended to imply that she became in some sense a proselyte. This may have been only an inference from her protection of Moses. There is a singular and very obscure passage in I Chronicles iv. 17, 18, relating the genealogy of a certain Mered, who seems to have had two wives, one ‘the Jewess,’ the other ‘Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh.’ We know no more about him or her, but Keil thinks that Mered probably ‘lived before the exodus’; but it can scarcely be that the ‘daughter of Pharaoh,’ his wife, is our princess, and that she actually became a ‘daughter of Jehovah,’ and, like her adopted child, refused royal dignity and preferred reproach. In any case, the legend of her name is a tender and beautiful way of putting the belief that in her ‘there was some good thing towards the God of Israel.’

But, passing from that, how the true woman’s heart changes languid curiosity into tenderness, and how compassion conquers pride of race and station, as well as regard for her father’s edict, as soon as the infant’s cry, which touches every good woman’s feelings, falls on her ear! ‘One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.’ All the centuries are as nothing; the strange garb and the stranger mental and spiritual dress fade, and we have here a mere woman, affected, as every true sister of hers to-day would be, by the helpless wailing. God has put that instinct there. Alas that it ever should be choked by frivolity or pride, and frozen by indifference and self-indulgence! Gentle souls spring up in unfavourable soil. Rameses was a strange father for such a daughter. How came this dove in the vulture’s cage? Her sweet pity beside his cold craft and cruelty is like the lamb couching by the lion. Note, too, that gentlest pity makes the gentlest brave. She sees the child is a Hebrew. Her quick wit

understands why it has been exposed, and she takes its part, and the part of the poor weeping parents, whom she can fancy, against the savage law. No doubt, as Egyptologists tell us, the princesses of the royal house had separate households and abundant liberty of action. Still, it was bold to override the strict commands of such a monarch. But it was not a self-willed sense of power, but the beautiful daring of a compassionate woman, to which God committed the execution of His purposes.

And that is a force which has much like work trusted to it in modern society too. Our great cities swarm with children exposed to a worse fate than the baby among the flags. Legislation and official charity have far too rough hands and too clumsy ways to lift the little life out of the coffer, and to dry the tears. We must look to Christian women to take a leaf out of 'Bithiah's' book. First, they should use their eyes to see the facts, and not be so busy about their own luxury and comfort that they pass the poor pitch-covered box unnoticed. Then they should let the pitiful call touch their heart, and not steel themselves in indifference or ease. Then they should conquer prejudices of race, pride of station, fear of lowering themselves, loathing, or contempt. And then they should yield to the impulses of their compassion, and never mind what difficulties or opponents may stand in the way of their saving the children. If Christian women knew their obligations and their power, and lived up to them as bravely as this Egyptian princess, there would be fewer little ones flung out to be eaten by crocodiles, and many a poor child, who is now abandoned from infancy to the Devil, would be rescued to grow up a servant of God. She, there by the Nile waters, in her gracious pity and prompt wisdom, is the type of what Christian womanhood, and, indeed, the whole Christian community, should be in relation to child life.

V. The great lesson of this incident, as of so much before, is the presence of God's wonderful providence, working out its designs by all the play of human motives. In accordance with a law, often seen in His dealings, it was needful that the deliverer should come from the heart of the system from which he was to set his brethren free. The same principle which sent Saul of Tarsus to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and made Luther a monk in the Augustinian convent at Erfurt, planted Moses in Pharaoh's palace and taught him the wisdom of Egypt, against which he was to contend. It was a strange irony of Providence that put him so close to the throne which he was to shake. For his future work he needed to be lifted above his people, and to be familiar with the Egyptian court as well as with Egyptian learning. If he was to hate and to war against idolatry, and to rescue an unwilling people from it, he must know the rottenness of the system, and must have lived close enough to it to know what went on behind the scenes, and how foully it smelled when near. He would gain influence over his countrymen by his connection with Pharaoh, whilst his very separation from them would at once prevent his spirit from being broken by oppression, and would give him a keener sympathy with his people than if he had himself been crushed by slavery. His culture, heathen as it was, supplied the material on which the divine Spirit worked. God fashioned the vessel, and then filled it. Education is not the antagonist of inspiration. For the most part, the men whom God has used for His highest service have been trained in all the wisdom of their age. When it has been piled up into an altar, then 'the fire of the Lord' falls.

Our story teaches us that God's chosen instruments are immortal till their work is done. No matter how forlorn may seem their outlook, how small the probabilities in their favour, how divergent from the goal may seem the road He leads them, He watches them. Around that frail ark, half lost among the reeds, is cast the impregnable shield of His purpose. All things serve that Will. The current in the full river, the lie of the flags that stop it from being borne down, the hour of the princess's bath, the direction of her idle glance, the cry of the child at the right moment, the impulse welling up in her heart, the swift resolve, the innocent diplomacy of the sister, the shelter of the happy mother's breast, the safety of the palace,—all

these and a hundred more trivial and unrelated things are spun into the strong cable wherewith God draws slowly but surely His secret purpose into act. So ever His children are secure as long as He has work for them, and His mighty plan strides on to its accomplishment over all the barriers that men can raise.

How deeply this story had impressed on devout minds the truth of the divine protection for all who serve Him, is shown by the fact that the word employed in the last verse of our lesson, and there translated ‘drawn,’ of which the name ‘Moses’ is a form, is used on the only occasion of its occurrence in the Old Testament (namely Psalm xviii. 16, and in the duplicate in 2 Sam. xxii. 17) with plain reference to our narrative. The Psalmist describes his own deliverance, in answer to his cry, by a grand manifestation of God’s majesty; and this is the climax and the purpose of the earthquake and the lightning, the darkness and the storm: ‘He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.’ So that scene by the margin of the Nile, so many years ago, is but one transient instance of the working of the power which secures deliverance from encompassing perils, and for strenuous, though it may be undistinguished, service to all who call upon Him. God, who put the compassion into the heart of Pharaoh’s dusky daughter, is not less tender of heart than she, and when He hears us, though our cry be but as of an infant, ‘with no language but a cry,’ He will come in His majesty and draw us from encompassing dangers and impending death. We cannot all be lawgivers and deliverers; but we may all appeal to His great pity, and partake of deliverance like that of Moses and of David.

The Bush That Burned, And Did Not Burn Out

'And, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.' EXODUS iii. 1

It was a very sharp descent from Pharaoh's palace to the wilderness, and forty years of a shepherd's life were a strange contrast to the brilliant future that once seemed likely for Moses. But God tests His weapons before He uses them, and great men are generally prepared for great deeds by great sorrows. Solitude is 'the mother-country of the strong,' and the wilderness, with its savage crags, its awful silence, and the unbroken round of its blue heaven, was a better place to meet God than in the heavy air of a palace, or the profitless splendours of a court.

So as this lonely shepherd is passing slowly in front of his flock, he sees a strange light that asserted itself, even in the brightness of the desert sunshine. 'The bush' does not mean one single shrub. Rather, it implies some little group, or cluster, or copse, of the dry thorny acacias, which are characteristic of the country, and over which any ordinary fire would have passed like a flash, leaving them all in grey ashes. But this steady light persists long enough to draw the attention of the shepherd, and to admit of his travelling some distance to reach it. And then—and then—the Lord speaks.

The significance of this bush, burning but not consumed, is my main subject now, for I think it carries great and blessed lessons for us.

Now, first, I do not think that the bush burning but not consumed, stands as it is ordinarily understood to stand, for the symbolical representation of the preservation of Israel, even in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution and sorrow.

Beautiful as that idea is, I do not think it is the true explanation; because if so, this symbol is altogether out of keeping with the law that applies to all the rest of the symbolical accompaniments of divine appearances, all of which, without exception, set forth in symbol some truth about God, and not about His Church; and all of which, without exception, are a representation in visible and symbolical form of the same truth which was proclaimed in articulate words along with them. The symbol and the accompanying voice of God in all other cases have one and the same meaning.

That, I think, is the case here also; and we learn from the Bush, not something about God's Church, however precious that may be, but what is a great deal more important, something about God Himself; namely, the same thing that immediately afterwards was spoken in articulate words.

In the next place, let me observe that the fire is distinctly a divine symbol, a symbol of God not of affliction, as the ordinary explanation implies. I need not do more than remind you of the stream of emblem which runs all through Scripture, as confirming this point. There are the smoking lamp and the blazing furnace in the early vision granted to Abraham. There is the pillar of fire by night, that lay over the desert camp of the wandering Israelites. There is Isaiah's word, 'The light of Israel shall be a flaming fire.' There is the whole of the New Testament teaching, turning on the manifestation of God through His Spirit. There are John the Baptist's words, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' There is the day of Pentecost, when the 'tongues of fire sat upon each of them.' And what is meant by the great word of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Our God is a consuming fire'?

Not Israel only, but many other lands—it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say, all other lands—have used the same emblem with the same meaning. In almost every religion on the

face of the earth, you will find a sacred significance attached to fire. That significance is not primarily destruction, as we sometimes suppose, an error which has led to ghastly misunderstandings of some Scriptures, and of the God whom they reveal. When, for instance, Isaiah (xxxiii. 14) asks, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' he has been supposed to be asking what human soul is there that can endure the terrors of God's consuming and unending wrath. But a little attention to the words would have shown that 'the devouring fire' and the 'everlasting burnings' mean God and not hell, and that the divine nature is by them not represented as too fierce to be approached, but as the true dwelling-place of men, which indeed only the holy can inhabit, but which for them is life. Precisely parallel is the Psalmist's question, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?'

Fire is the source of warmth, and so, in a sense, of life. It is full of quick energy, it transmutes all kinds of dead matter into its own ruddy likeness, sending up the fat of the sacrifices in wreathes of smoke that aspire heavenward; and changing all the gross, heavy, earthly dullness into flame, more akin to the heaven into which it rises.

Therefore, as cleansing, as the source of life, light, warmth, change, as glorifying, transmuting, purifying, refining, fire is the fitting symbol of the mightiest of all creative energy. And the Bible has consecrated the symbolism, and bade us think of the Lord Himself as the central fiery Spirit of the whole universe, a spark from whom irradiates and vitalises everything that lives.

Nor should we forget, on the other side, that the very felicity of this emblem is, that along with all these blessed thoughts of life-giving and purifying, there does come likewise the more solemn teaching of God's destructive power. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell'; and the same God is the fire to quicken, to sanctify, to bless; and resisted, rejected, neglected, is the fire that consumes; the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.

And then, still further, notice that this flame is undying—steady, unflickering. What does that mean? Adopting the principle which I have already taken as our guide, that the symbol and the following oral revelation teach the same truth, there can be no question as to that answer. 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. 'I AM THAT I AM.'

That is to say, the fire that burns and does not burn out, which has no tendency to destruction in its very energy, and is not consumed by its own activity, is surely a symbol of the one Being whose being derives its law and its source from Himself, who only can say—'I AM THAT I AM'—the law of His nature, the foundation of His being, the only conditions of His existence being, as it were, enclosed within the limits of His own nature. You and I have to say, 'I am that which I have become,' or 'I am that which I was born,' or 'I am that which circumstances have made me.' He says, 'I AM THAT I AM.' All other creatures are links; this is the staple from which they all hang. All other being is derived, and therefore limited and changeful; this Being is underived, absolute, self-dependent, and therefore unalterable for evermore. Because we live we die. In living the process is going on of which death is the end. But God lives for evermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore His resources are inexhaustible, His power unwearied. He needs no rest for recuperation of wasted energy. His gifts diminish not the store which He has to bestow. He gives, and is none the poorer; He works, and is never weary; He operates unspent; He loves, and He loves for ever; and through the ages the fire burns on, unconsumed and undecayed.

O brethren! is not that a revelation—familiar as it sounds to our ears now, blessed be God!—is not that a revelation of which, when we apprehend the depth and the preciousness, we may

well fix an unalterable faith upon it, and feel that for us, in our fleeting days and shadowy moments, the one means to secure blessedness, rest, strength, life, is to grasp and knit ourselves to Him who lives for ever, and whose love is lasting as His life? 'The eternal God, the Lord … fainteth not, neither is weary. They that wait upon Him shall renew their strength.'

The last thought suggested to me by this symbol is this. Regarding the lowly thorn-bush as an emblem of Israel—which unquestionably it is, though the fire be the symbol of God—in the fact that the symbolical manifestation of the divine energy lived in so lowly a shrine, and flamed in it, and preserved it by its burning, there is a great and blessed truth.

It is the same truth which Jesus Christ, with a depth of interpretation that put to shame the cavilling listeners, found in the words that accompanied this vision: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He said to the sneering Sadducees, who, like all other sneerers, saw only the surface of what they were sarcastic about, 'Did not Moses teach you,' in the section about the bush, 'that the dead rise, when he said: I AM the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' A man, about whom it can once be said that God is his God, cannot die. Such a bond can never be broken. The communion of earth, imperfect as it is, is the prophecy of Heaven and the pledge of immortality. And so from that relationship which subsisted between the fathers and God, Christ infers the certainty of their resurrection. It seems a great leap, but there are intervening steps not stated by our Lord, which securely bridge the gulf between the premises and the conclusion. Such communion is, in its very nature, unaffected by the accident of death, for it cannot be supposed that a man who can say that God is *His* God can be reduced to nothingness, and such a bond be snapped by such a cause. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living, 'for all' those whom we call dead, as well as those whom we call living, 'live unto Him,' and though so many centuries have passed, God still *is*, not *was*, their God. The relation between them is eternal and guarantees their immortal life. But immortality without corporeity is not conceivable as the perfect state, and if the dead live still, there must come a time when the whole man shall partake of redemption; and in body, soul, and spirit the glorified and risen saints shall be 'for ever with the Lord.'

That is but the fuller working out of the same truth that is taught us in the symbol 'the bush burned and was not consumed.' God dwelt in it, therefore it flamed; God dwelt in it, therefore though it flamed it never flamed out. Or in other words, the Church, the individual in whom He dwells, partakes of the immortality of the indwelling God. 'Every one shall be salted with fire,' which shall be preservative and not destructive; or, as Christ has said, 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

Humble as was the little, ragged, sapless thorn-bush, springing up and living its solitary life amidst the sands of the desert, it was not too humble to hold God; it was not too gross to burst into flame when He came; it was not too fragile to be gifted with undying being; like His that abode in it. And for us each the emblem may be true. If He dwell in us we shall live as long as He lives, and the fire that He puts in our heart shall be a fountain of fire springing up into life everlasting.

The Call Of Moses

'Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel, out of Egypt. 11. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? 12. And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. 13. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? 14. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. 15. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. 16. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: 17. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. 18. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech Thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. 19. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. 20. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.' —EXODUS iii 10-20.

The 'son of Pharaoh's daughter' had been transformed, by nearly forty years of desert life, into an Arab shepherd. The influences of the Egyptian court had faded from him, like colour from cloth exposed to the weather; nor is it probable that, after the failure of his early attempt to play the deliverer to Israel, he nourished further designs of that sort. He appears to have settled down quietly to be Jethro's son-in-law, and to have lived a modest, still life of humble toil. He had flung away fair prospects,—and what had he made of it? The world would say 'Nothing,' as it ever does about those who despise material advantages and covet higher good. Looking after sheep in the desert was a sad downcome from the possibility of sitting on the throne of Egypt. Yes, but it was in the desert that the vision of the bush burning, and not burning out, came; and it would not have come if Moses had been in a palace.

This passage begins in the midst of the divine communication which followed and interpreted the vision. We note, first, the divine charge and the human shrinking from the task. It was a startling transition from verse 9, which declares God's pitying knowledge of Israel's oppression, to verse 10, which thrusts Moses forward into the thick of dangers and difficulties, as God's instrument. 'I will send thee' must have come like a thunder-clap. The commander's summons which brings a man from the rear rank and sets him in the van of a storming-party may well make its receiver shrink. It was not cowardice which prompted Moses' answer, but lowliness. His former impetuous confidence had all been beaten out of him. Time was when he was ready to take up the *rôle* of deliverer at his own hand; but these hot days were past, and age and solitude and communion with God had mellowed him into humility. His recoil was but one instance of the shrinking which all true, devout men feel

when designated for tasks which may probably make life short, and will certainly make it hard. All prophets and reformers till to-day have had the same feeling. Men who can do such work as the Jeremiahs, Pauls, Luthers, Cromwells, can do, are never forward to begin it.

Self-confidence is not the temper which God uses for His instruments. He works with 'bruised reeds,' and breathes His strength into them. It is when a man says 'I can do nothing,' that he is fit for God to employ. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' Moses remembered enough of Egypt to know that it was no slight peril to front Pharaoh, and enough of Israel not to be particularly eager to have the task of leading them. But mark that there is no refusal of the charge, though there is profound consciousness of inadequacy. If we have reason to believe that any duty, great or small, is laid on us by God, it is wholesome that we should drive home to ourselves our own weakness, but not that we should try to shuffle out of the duty because we are weak. Moses' answer was more of a prayer for help than of a remonstrance, and it was answered accordingly.

God deals very gently with conscious weakness. 'Certainly I will be with thee.' Moses' estimate of himself is quite correct, and it is the condition of his obtaining God's help. If he had been self-confident, he would have had no longing for, and no promise of, God's presence. In all our little tasks we may have the same assurance, and, whenever we feel that they are too great for us, the strength of that promise may be ours. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. So Moses had not to calculate the difference between his feebleness and the strength of a kingdom. Such arithmetic left out one element, which made all the difference in the sum total. 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses' did not look a very hopeful cause, but 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses and Another'—that other being God—was a very different matter. God and I are always stronger than any antagonists. It was needless to discuss whether Moses was able to cope with the king. That was not the right way of putting the problem. The right way was, Is God able to do it?

The sign given to Moses is at first sight singular, inasmuch as it requires faith, and can only be a confirmation of his mission when that mission is well accomplished. But there was a help to present faith even in it, for the very sacredness of the spot hallowed now by the burning bush was a kind of external sign of the promise.

One difficulty being solved, Moses raised another, but not in the spirit of captiousness or reluctance. God is very patient with us when we tell Him the obstacles which we seem to see to our doing His work. As long as these are presented in good faith, and with the wish to have them cleared up, He listens and answers. The second question asked by Moses was eminently reasonable. He pictures to himself his addressing the Israelites, and their question, What is the name of this God who has sent you? Apparently the children of Israel had lost much of their ancestral faith, and probably had in many instances fallen into idolatry. We do not know enough to pronounce with confidence on that point, nor how far the great name of Jehovah had been used before the time of Moses, or had been forgotten in Egypt.

The questions connected with these points and with the history of the name do not enter into our present purpose. My task is rather to point out the religious significance of the self-revelation of God contained in the name, and how it becomes the foundation of Israel's deliverance, existence, and prerogatives. Whatever opinions are adopted as to the correct form of the name and other grammatical and philological questions, there is no doubt that it mainly reveals God as self-existent and unchangeable. He draws His being from no external source, nor 'borrows leave to be.' Creatures are what they are made or grow to be; they are what they were not; they are what they will some time not any more be. But He is what He is. Lifted above time and change, self-existing and self-determined, He is the fountain of life, the same for ever.

This underived, independent, immutable being is a Person who can speak to men, and can say 'I am.' Being such, He has entered into close covenant relations with men, and has permitted Himself to be called 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' The name Jehovah lifts Him high above all creatures; the name 'the God of your fathers' brings Him into tender proximity with men, and, in combination with the former designation, guarantees that He will forever be what He has been, even to all generations of children's children. That mighty name is, indeed, His 'memorial to all generations,' and is as fresh and full of blessedness to us as to the patriarchs. Christ has made us understand more of the treasures for heart and mind and life which are stored in it. 'Our Father which art in heaven' is the unfolding of its inmost meaning.

We may note that the bush burning but not consumed expressed in symbol the same truth which the name reveals. It seems a mistake to take the bush as the emblem of Israel surviving persecution. Rather the revelation to the eye says the same thing as that to the ear, as is generally the case. As the desert shrub flamed, and yet did not burn away, so that divine nature is not wearied by action nor exhausted by bestowing, nor has its life any tendency towards ending or extinction, as all creatural life has.

The closing verses of this passage (vs. 16-20) are a programme of Moses' mission, in which one or two points deserve notice. First, the general course of it is made known from the beginning. Therein Moses was blessed beyond most of God's servants, who have to risk much and to labour on, not knowing which shall prosper. If we could see, as he did, the lie of the country beforehand, our journeys would be easier. So we often think, but we know enough of what shall be to enable us to have quiet hearts; and it is best for us not to see what is to fail and what to succeed. Our ignorance stimulates effort, and drives to clinging to God's hand.

Then we may note the full assurances to be given to the 'elders of Israel.' Apparently some kind of civic organisation had been kept up, and there were principal people among the slaves who had to be galvanised first into enthusiasm. So they are to be told two things,—that Jehovah has appeared to Moses, and that He, not Moses only, will deliver them and plant them in the land. The enumeration of the many tribes (v. 17) might discourage, but it is intended to fire by the thought of the breadth of the land, which is further described as fertile. The more exalted our conceptions of the inheritance, the more willing shall we be to enter on the pilgrimage towards it. The more we realise that Jehovah has promised to lead us thither, the more willing shall we be to face difficulties and dangers.

The directions as to the opening of communications with Pharaoh have often been made a difficulty, as if there was trickery in the modest request for permission to go three days' journey into the wilderness. But that request was to be made, knowing that it would not be granted. It was to be a test of Pharaoh's willingness to submit to Jehovah. Its very smallness made it so more effectually. If he had any disposition to listen to the voice speaking through Moses, he would yield that small point. It is useless to speculate on what would have happened if he had done so. But probably the Israelites would have come back from their sacrificing.

Of more importance is it to note that the failure of the request was foreseen, and yet the effort was to be made. Is not that the same paradox which meets us in all the divine efforts to win over hard-hearted men to His service? Is it not exactly what our Lord did when He appealed to Judas, while knowing that all would be vain?

The expression in verse 19, 'not by a mighty hand,' is very obscure. It may possibly mean that Pharaoh was so obstinate that no human power was strong enough to bend his will.

Therefore, in contrast to the ‘mighty hand’ of man, which was not mighty enough for this work, God will stretch out His hand, and that will suffice to compel obedience from the proudest. God can force men by His might to comply with His will, so far as external acts go; but He does not regard that as obedience, nor delight in it. We can steel ourselves against men’s power, but God’s hand can crush and break the strongest will. ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’ It is a blessed thing to put ourselves into them, in order to be moulded by their loving touch. The alternative is laid before every soul of man.

A Last Merciful Warning

'And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. 2. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. 3. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. 4. And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; 5. And all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. 6. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. 7. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. 8. And all these thy servants shall come down unto Me, and bow themselves unto Me, saying, Get Thee out, and all the people that follow Thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. 9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. 10. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.'—EXODUS xi. 1-10.

The first point to be noted in this passage is that it interposes a solemn pause between the preceding ineffectual plagues and the last effectual one. There is an awful lull in the storm before the last crashing hurricane which lays every obstacle flat. 'There is silence in heaven' before the final peal of thunder. Verses 1 to 3 seem, at first sight, out of place, as interrupting the narrative, since Moses' denunciation and prophecy in verses 4 to 8 must have been spoken at the interview with Pharaoh which we find going on at the end of the preceding chapter. But it is legitimate to suppose that, at the very moment when Pharaoh was blustering and threatening, and Moses was bearding him, giving back scorn for scorn, the latter heard with the inward ear the voice which made Pharaoh's words empty wind, and gave him the assurances and commands contained in verses 1 to 3, and that thus it was given him in that hour what he should speak; namely, the prediction that follows in verses 4 to 8. Such a view of the sequence of the passage makes it much more vivid, dramatic, and natural, than to suppose that the first verses are either interpolation or an awkward break referring to a revelation at some indefinite previous moment. When a Pharaoh or a Herod or an Agrippa threatens, God speaks to the heart of a Moses or a Paul, and makes His servant's face 'strong against their faces.'

The same purpose of parting off the preceding plagues from the past ones explains the introduction of verses 9 and 10, which stand as a summary of the whole account of these, and, as it were, draw a line across the page, before beginning the story of that eventful day and night of Israel's deliverance.

Moses' conviction, which he knew to be not his own thought but God's revelation of His purpose, pointed first to the final blow which was to finish Pharaoh's resistance. He had been vacillating between compliance and refusal, like an elastic ball which yields to compression and starts back to its swelling rotundity as soon as the pressure is taken off. But at last he will collapse altogether, like the same ball when a slit is cut in it, and it shrivels into a shapeless lump. Weak people's obstinate fits end like that. He will be as extreme in his eagerness to get

rid of the Israelites as he had been in his determination to keep them. The sail that is filled one moment tumbles in a heap the next, when the halyards are cut. It is a poor affair when a man's actions are shaped mainly by fear of consequences. Fright always drives to extremes. 'When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.' Many a stout, God-opposing will collapses altogether when God's finger touches it. 'Can thy heart endure in the days that I shall deal with thee?'

Verses 2 and 3 appear irrelevant here, but the command to collect from the Egyptians jewels, which might be bartered for necessaries, may well have been given to Moses simultaneously with the assurance that he would lead forth the people after the next plague, and the particulars of the people's favour and of Moses' influence in the eyes of the native inhabitants, come in anticipatively to explain why the request for such contributions was granted when made.

With the new divine command swelling in his heart, Moses speaks his last word to Pharaoh, towering above him in righteous wrath, and dwindling his empty threats into nothingness. What a contrast between the impotent rage of the despot, with his vain threat, 'Thou shalt die,' and the unblenching boldness of the man with God at his back! One cannot but note in Moses' prediction of the last plague the solemn enlargement on the details of the widespread calamity, which is not unfeeling gloating over an oppressor's misery, but a yearning to save from hideous misery by timely and plain depicting of it. There is a flash of national triumph in the further contrast between the universal wailing in Egypt and the untouched security of the children of Israel, but that feeling merges at once into the higher one of 'the Lord's' gracious action in establishing the 'difference' between them and their oppressors. It is not safe to dwell on superiority over others, either as to condition or character, unless we print in very large letters that it is 'the Lord' who has made it. There is a flash, too, of natural triumph in the picture of the proud courtiers brought down to prostrate themselves before the shepherd from Horeb, and to pray him to do what their master and they had so long fought against his doing. And there is a most natural assertion of non-dependence on their leave in that emphatic 'After that *I will* go out.' He is not asserting himself against God, but against the cowering courtiers. 'Hot anger' was excusable, but it was not the best mood in which to leave Pharaoh. Better if he had gone out unmoved, or moved only to 'great heaviness and sorrow of heart' at the sight of men setting themselves against God, and rushing on the 'thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' to their own ruin. Moses' anger we naturally sympathise with, Christ's meekness we should try to copy.

The closing verses, as we have already noticed, are a kind of summing-up of the whole narrative of the plagues and their effects on Pharaoh. They open two difficult questions, as to how and why it was that the effect of the successive strokes was so slight and transient. They give the 'how' very emphatically as being that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart.' Does that not free Pharaoh from guilt? And does it not suggest an unworthy conception of God? It must be remembered that the preceding narrative employs not only the phrase that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart,' but also the expression that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. And it is further to be noted that the latter expression is employed in the accounts of the earlier plagues, and that the former one appears only towards the close of the series. So then, even if we are to suppose that it means that there was a direct hardening action by God on the man's heart, such action was not first, but subsequent to obstinate hardening by himself. God hardens no man's heart who has not first hardened it himself. But we do not need to conclude that any inward action on the will is meant. Was not the accumulation of plagues, intended, as they were, to soften, a cause of hardening? Does not the Gospel, if rejected, harden, making consciences and wills less susceptible? Is it not a 'savour of death unto death,' as our fathers recognised in speaking of 'gospel-hardened sinners'? The same fire softens wax and

hardens clay. Whosoever is not brought near is driven farther off, by the influences which God brings to bear on us.

The ‘why’ is stated in terms which may suggest difficulties,—’that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.’ But we have to remember that the Old Testament writers are not wont to distinguish so sharply as more logical Westerns do between the actual result of an event and its purpose. With their deep faith in the all-ruling power of God, whatever had come to pass was what He had meant to come to pass. In fact, Pharaoh’s obstinacy had not thwarted the divine purpose, but had been the dark background against which the blaze of God’s irresistible might had shone the brighter. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and turns opposition into the occasion of more conspicuously putting forth His omnipotence.

The Passover: An Expiation And A Feast, A Memorial And A Prophecy

'And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2. This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: 4. And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 6. And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. 7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. 8. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. 10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. 11. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover. 12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. 13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. 14. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.'—EXODUS xii. 1-14.

The Passover ritual, as appointed here, divides itself into two main parts—the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the door-posts and lintels, and the feast on the sacrifice. These can best be dealt with separately. They were separated in the later form of the ritual; for, when there was a central sanctuary, the lambs were slain there, and the blood sprinkled, as in other expiatory sacrifices, on the altar, while the domestic feast remained unaltered. The former was more especially meant to preserve the Israelites from the destruction of their first-born; the latter as a permanent memorial of their deliverance. But both have perpetual fitness as prophetic of varying aspects of the Christian redemption.

I. The ritual of the protecting blood.

In the hurry and agitation of that eventful day, it must have seemed strange to the excited people that they should be called upon to observe such a service. But its institution at that crisis is in accordance with the whole tone of the story of the Exodus, in which man is nothing and God all. Surely, never was national deliverance effected so absolutely without effort or blow struck. If we try to realise the state of mind of the Israelites on that night, we shall feel how significant of the true nature of their deliverance this summons to an act of worship, in the midst of their hurry, must have been.

The domestic character of the rite is its first marked feature. Of course, there were neither temple nor priests then; but that does not wholly account for the provision that every household, unless too few in number to consume a whole lamb, should have its own sacrifice, slain by its head. The first purpose of the rite, to provide for the safety of each house by the

sprinkled blood, partly explains it; but the deepest reason is, no doubt, the witness which was thereby borne to the universal priesthood of the nation. The patriarchal order made each man the priest of his house. This rite, which lay at the foundation of Israel's nationality, proclaimed that a restricted priestly class was a later expedient. The primitive formation crops out here, as witness that, even where hid beneath later deposits, it underlies them all.

We have called the Passover a sacrifice. That has been disputed, but unreasonably. No doubt, it was a peculiar kind of sacrifice, unlike those of the later ritual in many respects, and scarcely capable of being classified among them. But it is important to keep its strictly sacrificial character in view; for it is essential to its meaning and to its typical aspect. The proofs of its sacrificial nature are abundant. The instructions as to the selection of the lamb; the method of disposing of the blood, which was sprinkled with hyssop—a peculiarly sacrificial usage; the treatment of the remainder after the feast; the very feast itself,—all testify that it was a sacrifice in the most accurate use of the word. The designation of it as 'a passover to the Lord,' and in set terms as a 'sacrifice,' in verse 27 and elsewhere, to say nothing of its later form when it became a regular Temple sacrifice, or of Paul's distinct language in 1 Corinthians v. 7, or of Peter's quotation of the very words of verse 5, applied to Christ, 'a lamb without blemish,' all point in the same direction.

But if a sacrifice, what kind of sacrifice was it? Clearly, the first purpose was that the blood might be sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, and so the house be safe when the destroying angel passed through the land. Such is the explanation given in verse 13, which is the divine declaration of its meaning. This is the centre of the rite; from it the name was derived. Whether readers accept the doctrines of substitution and expiation or not, it ought to be impossible for an honest reader of these verses to deny that these doctrines or thoughts are there. They may be only the barbarous notions of a half-savage age and people. But, whatever they are, there they are. The lamb without blemish carefully chosen and kept for four days, till it had become as it were part of the household, and then solemnly slain by the head of the family, was their representative. When they sprinkled its blood on the posts, they confessed that they stood in peril of the destroying angel by reason of their impurity, and they presented the blood as their expiation. In so far, their act was an act of confession, deprecation, and faith. It accepted the divinely appointed means of safety. The consequence was exemption from the fatal stroke, which fell on all homes from the palace to the slaves' hovel, where that red streak was not found. If any son of Abraham had despised the provision for safety, he would have been partaker of the plague.

All this refers only to exemption from outward punishment, and we are not obliged to attribute to these terrified bondmen any higher thoughts. But clearly their obedience to the command implied a measure of belief in the divine voice; and the command embodied, though in application to a transient judgment, the broad principles of sacrificial substitution, of expiation by blood, and of safety by the individual application of that shed blood.

In other words, the Passover is a Gospel before the Gospel. We are sometimes told that in its sacrificial ideas Christianity is still dressing itself in 'Hebrew old clothes.' We believe, on the contrary, that the whole sacrificial system of Judaism had for its highest purpose to shadow forth the coming redemption. Christ is not spoken of as 'our Passover,' because the Mosaic ritual had happened to have that ceremonial; but the Mosaic ritual had that ceremonial mainly because Christ is our Passover, and, by His blood shed on the Cross and sprinkled on our consciences, does in spiritual reality that which the Jewish Passover only did in outward form. All other questions about the Old Testament, however interesting and hotly contested, are of secondary importance compared with this. Is its chief purpose to prophesy of Christ, His atoning death, His kingdom and church, or is it not? The New Testament has no doubt of

the answer. The Evangelist John finds in the singular swiftness of our Lord's death, which secured the exemption of His sacred body from the violence inflicted on His fellow-sufferers, a fulfilment of the paschal injunction that not a bone should be broken; and so, by one passing allusion, shows that he recognised Christ as the true Passover. John the Baptist's rapturous exclamation, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' blends allusions to the Passover, the daily sacrifice, and Isaiah's great prophecy. The day of the Crucifixion, regarded as fixed by divine Providence, may be taken as God's own finger pointing to the Lamb whom He has provided. Paul's language already referred to attests the same truth. And even the last lofty visions of the Apocalypse, where the old man in Patmos so touchingly recurs to the earliest words which brought him to Jesus, echo the same conviction, and disclose, amidst the glories of the throne, 'a Lamb as it had been slain.'

II. The festal meal on the sacrifice.

After the sprinkling of the blood came the feast. Only when the house was secure from the destruction which walked in the darkness of that fateful night, could a delivered household gather round the board. That which had become their safety now became their food. Other sacrifices were, at a later period, modelled on the same type; and in all cases the symbolism is the same, namely, joyful participation in the sacrifice, and communion with God based upon expiation. In the Passover, this second stage received for future ages the further meaning of a memorial. But on that first night it was only such by anticipation, seeing that it preceded the deliverance which it was afterwards to commemorate.

The manner of preparing the feast and the manner of partaking of it are both significant. The former provided that the lamb should be roasted, not boiled, apparently in order to secure its being kept whole; and the same purpose suggested the other prescriptions that it was to be served up entire, and with bones unbroken. The reason for this seems to be that thus the unity of the partakers was more plainly shown. All ate of one undivided whole, and were thus, in a real sense, one. So the Apostle deduces the unity of the Church from the oneness of the bread of which they in the Christian Passover partake.

It was to be eaten with the accompaniments of bitter herbs, usually explained as memorials of the bondage, which had made the lives bitter, and the remembrance of which would sweeten their deliverance, even as the pungent condiments brought out the savour of the food. The further accompaniment of unleavened bread seems to have the same signification as the appointment that they were to eat with their garments gathered round their loins, their feet shod, and staves in hand. All these were partly necessities in their urgent hurry, and partly a dramatic representation for later days of the very scene of the first Passover. A strange feast indeed, held while the beat of the pinions of the destroying angel could almost be heard, devoured in hot haste by anxious men standing ready for a perilous journey, the end whereof none knew! The gladness would be strangely dashed with terror and foreboding. Truly, though they feasted on a sacrifice, they had bitter herbs with it, and, standing, swallowed their portions, expecting every moment to be summoned to the march.

The Passover as a feast is a prophecy of the great Sacrifice, by virtue of whose sprinkled blood we all may be sheltered from the sweep of the divine judgment, and on which we all have to feed if there is to be any life in us. Our propitiation is our food. 'Christ for us' must become 'Christ in us,' received and appropriated by our faith as the strength of our lives. The Christian life is meant to be a joyful feast on the Sacrifice, and communion with God based upon it. We feast on Christ when the mind feeds on Him as truth, when the heart is filled and satisfied with His love, when the conscience clings to Him as its peace, when the will esteems the 'words of His mouth more than' its 'necessary food,' when all desires, hopes, and inward powers draw their supplies from Him, and find their object in His sweet sufficiency.

Nor will the accompaniments of the first Passover be wanting. Here we feast in the night; the dawn will bring freedom and escape. Here we eat the glad Bread of God, not unseasoned with bitter herbs of sorrow and memories of the bondage, whose chains are dropping from our uplifted hands. Here we should partake of that hidden nourishment, in such manner that it hinders not our readiness for outward service. It is not yet time to sit at His table, but to stand with loins girt, and feet shod, and hands grasping the pilgrim staff. Here we are to eat for strength, and to blend with our secret hours of meditation the holy activities of the pilgrim life.

That feast was, further, appointed with a view to its future use as a memorial. It was held before the deliverance which it commemorated had been accomplished. A new era was to be reckoned from it. The month of the Exodus was thenceforward to be the first of the year. The memorial purpose of the rite has been accomplished. All over the world it is still observed, so many hundred years after its institution, being thus, probably, the oldest religious ceremonial in existence. Once more aliens in many lands, the Jewish race still, year by year, celebrate that deliverance, so tragically unlike their homeless present, and with indomitable hope, at each successive celebration, repeat the expectation, so long cherished in vain, ‘This year, here; next year, in the land of Israel. This year, slaves; next year, freemen.’ There can be few stronger attestations of historical events than the keeping of days commemorating them, if traced back to the event they commemorate. So this Passover, like Guy Fawkes’ Day in England, or Thanksgiving Day in America, remains for a witness even now.

What an incomprehensible stretch of authority Christ put forth, if He were no more than a teacher, when He brushed aside the Passover, and put in its place the Lord’s Supper, as commemorating His own death! Thereby He said, ‘Forget that past deliverance; instead, remember Me.’ Surely this was either audacity approaching insanity, or divine consciousness that He Himself was the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood shields the world from judgment, and on whom the world may feast and be satisfied. Christ’s deliberate intention to represent His death as expiation, and to fix the reverential, grateful gaze of all future ages on His Cross, cannot be eliminated from His founding of that memorial rite in substitution for the God-appointed ceremonial, so hoary with age and sacred in its significance. Like the Passover, the Lord’s Supper was established before the deliverance was accomplished. It remains a witness at once of the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and of the meaning and power which Jesus Himself bade us to see in that death. For us, redeemed by His blood, the past should be filled with His sacrifice. For us, fed on Himself, all the present should be communion with Him, based upon His death for us. For us, freed bondmen, the memorial of deliverance begun by His Cross should be the prophecy of deliverance to be completed at the side of His throne, and the hasty meal, eaten with bitter herbs, the adumbration of the feast when all the pilgrims shall sit with Him at His table in His kingdom. Past, present, and future should all be to us saturated with Jesus Christ. Memory should furnish hope with colours, canvas, and subjects for her fair pictures, and both be fixed on ‘Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.’

Thought, Deed, Word

'It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth.'—EXODUS xiii. 9.

The question may be asked, whether this command is to be taken metaphorically or literally. No doubt the remembrance of the great deliverance was intrusted to acts. Besides the annual Passover feasts, inscriptions on the door-posts and fringes on the dress were appointed for this purpose. And the Jews from a very early period, certainly before our Lord's time, wore phylacteries fastened, as this and other places prescribe, on the left arm and on the forehead, and alleged these words as the commandment which they therein obeyed. But it seems more probable that the meaning is metaphorical, and that what is enjoined is rather a constant remembrance of the great deliverance, and a constant regulation of the practical life by it. For what is it that is to be 'a sign'? It is the Passover feast. And the 'therefore' of the next verse seems to say that keeping this ordinance in its season is the fulfilment of this precept. Besides, the expression 'for a sign,' 'for a memorial,' may just as well mean 'it shall serve as,' or 'it shall be like,' as 'you shall wear.' So I think we must say that this is a figure, not a fact; the enjoining of an object for thought and a motive for life, not of a formal observance. And it is very characteristic of the Jew, and of the universal tendency to harden and lower religion into outward rites, that a command so wide and profound was supposed to be kept by fastening little boxes with four slips of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch on arm and forehead. Jewish rabbis are not the only people who treat God's law like that. Even if literal, the injunction is for the purpose of remembering. Taking that meaning, then, the text sets forth principles that apply quite as much to us. You will observe 'hand,' 'eyes,' 'mouth'; the symbols of practice, knowledge, expression; work, thought, and word. Observe also that there is a slight change in construction in the three clauses; the two former are to be done in order that the latter may come to pass. Then the memorial of the great deliverance is to be 'on the hand' and 'before the eyes,' in order that 'the Lord's law' may be 'in the mouth.' Keeping these points in view—

I. God's great deliverance should be constantly before our thoughts. It is more than an accident that both Judaism and Christianity should begin with a great act of deliverance; that that act of deliverance should constitute a community, and that a memorial rite should be the centre of the ritual of both. The Lord's Supper historically took the place of the Passover. It was instituted at the Passover and instead of it. It is precisely the same in design, a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced; and not only to keep up its remembrance, but to proclaim the importance of extending that remembrance through all life.

Notice the peculiarity of both the Jewish and the Christian rite, that the centre point of both is a historical fact, a redeeming act. Judaism and Christianity are the only religions in regard to which this is true to anything like the same extent or in the same way. Christianity as a revelation is not so much the utterance in words of great religious thoughts as the history of a life and a death, a fact wrought upon the earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption. This is a feature unshared by other religions.

This characteristic determines the principal object of our religious thought. The true object for religious thought is Christ, and His life and death.

All religious truth flows from and is wrapped up in that: *e.g.* theology, or the nature of God; anthropology, or the nature of man; soteriology, morality, etc. All truth for the individual and

for the race has its source in God's great redeeming act. Religious emotion is best fed at this source, *e.g.* thankfulness, wonder, love: all these transcendent feelings which are melted together in adoration. Here is where they are kindled. You cannot pump them up, or bring them into existence by willing, or scourge yourself into them, any more than you can make a seed grow by pulling at the germ with a pair of pincers, but this gives the warmth and moisture which make it germinate.

The clear perception of this truth is valuable, as correcting false tendencies in religion, *e.g.* the tendency to be much occupied with the derived truths, and to think of them almost to the exclusion of the great fact from which they come; the tendency to substitute melancholy self-inspection for objective facts; the tendency to run out into mere feeling.

The command requires of us a habitual occupation of mind with the great deliverance.

And the habitual presence of this thought will be best secured by specific times of occupation with it. Let every Christian practise the habit of meditation, which in an age of so many books, newspapers, and the distractions of our busy modern life, is apt to become obsolete.

II. The great deliverance is to be ever present in practical life.

The 'hand' is clearly the seat and home of power and practical effort. So the remembrance is to be present and to preside over our practical work.

How it is fitted to do so.

(a) It gives the law for all our activity.

The pattern. The death as well as the life of Christ teaches us what we ought to be.

The motive. He died for me! Shall I not serve Him who redeemed me?

(b) That remembered deliverance arms us against temptations, and lifts us above sinking into sin.

How blessed such a life would be! How victorious over the small motives that rule one's life, the deadening influence of routine, the duties that are felt to be overwhelmingly great and those that are felt to be wearisomely and monotonously small! How this unity of motive would give unity to life and simplify its problems! How it would free us from many a perplexity! There are so many things that seem doubtful because we do not bring the test of the highest motive to bear on them. Complications would fall away when we only wished to know and be like Christ. Many a tempting amusement, or occupation, or speculation would start up in its own shape when this Ithuriel spear touched it. How it would save from distractions! How strong it would make us, like a belt round the waist bracing the muscles tighter! 'This one thing I do' is always a strengthening principle.

How far is this possible? Not absolutely, but we may approximate very closely and indefinitely towards it. For there is the possibility of such thought blending with common motives, like a finer perfume in the scentless air, or some richer elixir in a cup. There is the possibility of its doing to other motives what light does to landscape when a sudden sunbeam gleams across the plain, and everything leaps into increased depth of colour. Let us try more and more to rescue life from the slavery of habit and the distractions of all these smaller forces, and to bring it into the greatness and power of submission to the dominion of this sovereign, unifying motive. Our lives would thus be greatened and strengthened, even as Germany and Italy have been, by being delivered from a rabble of petty dukes and brought under the sway of one emperor or king. Let us try to approach nearer and nearer to the fusion of action and contemplation, and to the blending with all other motives of this supreme one.

This command supplies us with an easily applied and effective test. Is there any place where you cannot take it, any act which you feel it would be impossible to do for His sake? Avoid such. Where the safety-lamp burns blue and goes out, is no place for you.

It is a beautiful thought that Jesus does for us what we are thus commanded to do for Him. The high priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders and in his heart. ‘I have graven thee on the palms of my hands.’ We bear Him in our hands and in our hearts. ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.’

III. The great deliverance is to be ever on our lips.

The three regions here named are the inward thought, the outward practice, and the testimony of the lips. Note that that testimony is a consequence of thought and practice.

1. The purpose of the deliverance is to make ‘prophets of His law.’ Such was the divine intention as to Israel. Such is God’s purpose as to all Christians. The very meaning of redemption is there. He has ‘opened our lips’ that we ‘should show forth His praise.’ He has regard to ‘His own name.’ He desires to make us vocal, for the same purpose for which a man strings a harp, to bring sweet music out of it. Words of testimony are a form of love.

2. The other two are incomplete without this vocal testimony.

3. The utterance of the lips, to be worth anything, must rest on and follow the other two. How noble, then, and blessed, how strong and calm and simple our lives would be, if we had this for the one great object of our thoughts, of our practical endeavour, of our words, if all our being was sustained, impelled, made vocal, by one thought, one love!

O my brother, see to it that you give yourself to Him. That great Light will gladden your eyes, will guide your activity, and, like the sunrise striking Memnon’s voiceless, stony lips, will bring music. Thought will have one boundless home of ‘many mansions.’ Work will have one law, one motive, its consecration and strength; and as in some solemn procession, all our steps and all our movements will keep time to the music of our praise to ‘Him who loved us.’

A Path In The Sea

'And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. 21. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, 25. And took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. 26. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. 29. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 30. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. 31. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses.'—EXODUS xiv. 19-31.

This passage begins at the point where the fierce charge of the Egyptian chariots and cavalry on the straggling masses of the fugitives is inexplicably arrested. The weary day's march, which must have seemed as suicidal to the Israelites as it did to their pursuers, had ended in bringing them into a position where, as Luther puts it, they were like a mouse in a trap or a partridge in a snare. The desert, the sea, the enemy, were their alternatives. And, as they camped, they saw in the distance the rapid advance of the dreaded force of chariots, probably the vanguard of an army. No wonder that they lost heart. Moses alone keeps his head and his faith. He is rewarded with the fuller promise of deliverance, and receives the power accompanying the command, to stretch forth his hand, and part the sea. Then begins the marvellous series of incidents here recorded.

I. The first step in the leisurely march of the divine deliverance is the provision for checking the Egyptian advance and securing the safe breaking up of the Israelitish camp. The pursuers had been coming whirling along at full speed, and would soon have been amongst the disorderly mass, dealing destruction. There was no possibility of getting the crossing effected unless they were held at bay. When an army has to ford a river in the face of hostile forces, the hazardous operation is possible only if a strong rearguard is left on the enemy's side, to cover the passage. This is exactly what is done here. The pillar of fire and cloud, the symbol of the divine presence, passed from the van to the rear. Its guidance was not needed, when but one path through the sea was possible. Its defence was needed when the foe was pressing eagerly on the heels of the host. His people's needs determined then, as they ever do, the

form of the divine presence and help. Long after, the prophet seized the great lesson of this event, when he broke into the triumphant anticipation of a yet future deliverance,—which should repeat in fresh experience the ancient victory, 'The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward,' In the place where the need is sorest, and in the form most required, there and that will God ever be to those who trust Him.

We can see here, too, a frequent characteristic of the miraculous element in Scripture, namely, its reaching its end not by a leap, but by a process. Once admit miracle, and it appears as if adaptation of means to ends was unnecessary. It would have been as easy to have transported the Israelites bodily and instantaneously to the other side of the sea, as to have taken these precautions and then cleft the ocean, and made them march through it. Legendary miracle would have preferred the former way. The Bible miracle usually adapts methods to aims, and is content to travel to its goal step by step.

Nor can we omit to notice the double effect of the one manifestation of the divine presence. The same pillar was light and darkness. The side which was cloud was turned to the pursuers; that which was light, to Israel. The former were paralysed, and hindered from advancing a step, or from seeing what the latter were doing; these, on the other hand, had light thrown on their strange path, and were encouraged and helped to plunge into the mysterious road, by the ruddy gleam which disclosed it. So every revelation is either light or darkness to men, according to the use they make of it. The ark, which slew Philistines, and flung Dagon prone on his own threshold, brought blessing to the house of Obededom. The Child who was to be 'set for the fall,' was also for 'the rising of many.' The stone laid in Zion is 'a sure foundation,' and 'a stone of stumbling.' The Gospel is the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. The same Christ is salvation and destruction. God is to each of us either our joy or our dread.

II. The sudden march of the Egyptians having thus been arrested, there is leisure, behind the shelter of the fiery barrier, to take the next step in the deliverance. The sea is not divided in a moment. Again, we have a process to note, and that brought about by two things,—Moses' outstretched rod, and the strong wind which blew all night. The chronology of that fateful night is difficult to adjust from our narrative. It would appear, from verse 20, that the Egyptians were barred advancing until morning; and, from verse 21, that the wind which ploughed with its strong ploughshare a furrow through the sea, took all night for its work. But, on the other hand, the Israelites must have been well across, and the Egyptians in the very midst of the passage, 'in the morning watch,' and all was over soon after 'the morning appeared.' Probably the wind continued all the night, so as to keep up the pressure which dammed back the waters, but the path was passable some hours before the gale abated. It must have been a broad way to admit of some two million frightened people with wives and children effecting a crossing in the short hours of part of one night.

But though God used the wind as His besom to sweep a road clear for His people, the effect produced by ordinary means was extraordinary. No wind that ever blew would blow water in two opposite directions at once, as a man might shovel snow to right and left, and heap it in mounds by the sides of the path that he dug. That was what the text tells us was done. The miracle is none the less a miracle because God employed physical agents, just as Christ's miracles were no less miraculous when He anointed blind eyes with moistened clay, or sent men to wash in Siloam, than when His bare word raised the dead or stilled the ocean. Wind or no wind, Moses' rod or no rod, the true explanation of that broad path cleared through the sea is—'the waters saw Thee, O God.' The use of natural means may have been an aid to feeble faith, encouraging it to step down on to the untrodden and slippery road. The employment of Moses and his rod was to attest his commission to act as God's mouthpiece.

III. Then comes the safe passage. It is hard to imagine the scene. The vivid impression made by our story is all the more remarkable when we notice how wanting in detail it is. We do not know the time nor the place. We have no information about how the fugitives got across, the breadth of the path, or its length. Characteristically enough, Jewish legends know all about both, and assure us that the waters were parted into twelve ways, one for each tribe, and that the length of the road was three hundred miles! But Scripture, with characteristic reticence, is silent about all but the fact. That is enough. We gather, from the much later and poetical picture of it in Psalm lxxvii., that the passage was accomplished in the midst of crashing thunder and flashing lightnings; though it may be doubted whether these are meant to be taken as real or ideal. At all events, we have to think of these two millions of people—women, children, and followers—plunging into the depths in the night.

What a scene! The awestruck crowds, the howling wind, perhaps the thunderstorm, the glow of the pillar glistening on the wet and slimy way, the full paschal moon shining on the heaped waters! How the awe and the hope must both have increased with each step deeper in the abyss, and nearer to safety! The Epistle to the Hebrews takes this as an instance of 'faith' on the part of the Israelites; and truly we can feel that it must have taken some trust in God's protecting hand to venture on such a road, where, at any moment, the walls might collapse and drown them all. They were driven to venture by their fear of Pharaoh; but faith, as well as fear, wrought in them. Our faith, too, is often called upon to venture upon perilous paths. We may trust Him to hold back the watery walls from falling. The picture of the crossing carries eternal truth for us all. The way of safety does not open till we are hemmed in, and Pharaoh's chariots are almost come up. It often leads into the very thick of what we deem perils. It often has to be ventured on in the dark, and with the wind in our faces. But if we tread it in faith, the fluid will be made solid, and the pathless passable, or any other apparent impossibility be realised, before our confidence shall be put to shame, or one real evil reach us.

IV. The next stage is the hot pursuit and the panic of the Egyptians. The narrative does not mark the point at which the pillar lifted and disclosed the escape of the prey. It must have been in the night. The baffled pursuers dash after them, either not seeing, or too excited and furious to heed where they were going. The rough sea bottom was no place for chariots, and they would be hopelessly distanced by the fugitives on foot. How long they stumbled and weltered we are not told, but 'in the morning watch,' that is, while it was yet dark, some awful movement in the fiery pillar awed even their anger into stillness, and drove home the conviction that they were fighting against God. There is something very terrible in the vagueness, if we may call it so, of that phrase 'the Lord looked … through the pillar.' It curdles the blood as no minuteness of narrative would do. And what a thought that His look should be a trouble! 'The steady whole of the judge's face' is awful, and some creeping terror laid hold on that host of mad pursuers floundering in the dark, as that more than natural light flared on their path. The panic to which all bodies of soldiers in strange circumstances are exposed, was increased by the growing difficulty of advance, as the chariot wheels became clogged or the ground more of quicksand. At last it culminates in a shout of '*Sauve qui peut!*' We may learn how close together lie daring rebellion against God and abject terror of Him; and how in a moment, a glance of His face, a turn of His hand, bring the wildest blasphemer to cower in fear. We may learn, too, to keep clear of courses which cannot be followed a moment longer, if once a thought that God sees us comes in. And we may learn the miserable result of all departure from Him, in making what ought to be our peace and blessing, our misery and terror, and turning the brightness of His face into a consuming fire.

V. Then comes, at last, the awful act of destruction, of which a man is the agent and an army the victim. We must suppose the Israelites all safe on the Arabian coast, when the level sunlight streams from the east on the wild hurry of the fleeing crowd making for the Egyptian

shore. What a solemn sight that young morning looked on! The wind had dropped, the rod is stretched out, the sea returns to its strength; and after a few moments' despairing struggle all is over, and the sun, as it climbs, looks down upon the unbroken stretch of quiet sea, bearing no trace of the awful work which it had done, or of the quenched hatred and fury which slept beneath.

We can understand the stern joy which throbs so vehemently in every pulse of that great song, the first blossom of Hebrew poetry, which the ransomed people sang that day. We can sympathise with the many echoes in psalm and prophecy, which repeated the lessons of faith and gratitude. But some will be ready to ask, Was that triumphant song anything more than narrow national feeling, and has Christianity not taught us another and tenderer thought of God than that which this lesson carries? We may ask in return, Was it divine providence that swept the Spanish Armada from the sea, fulfilling, as the medal struck to commemorate it bore, the very words of Moses' song, 'Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them'? Was it God who overwhelmed Napoleon's army in the Russian snows? Were these, and many like acts in the world's history, causes for thankfulness to God? Is it not true that, as has been well said, 'The history of the world is the judgment of the world'? And does Christianity forbid us to rejoice when some mighty and ancient system of wrong and oppression, with its tools and accomplices, is cleared from off the face of the earth? 'When the wicked perish, there is shouting.' Let us not forget that the love and gentleness of the Gospel are accompanied by the revelation of divine judgment and righteous retribution. This very incident has for its last echo in Scripture that wonderful scene in the Apocalypse, where, in the pause before the seven angels bearing the seven plagues go forth, the seer beholds a company of choristers, like those who on that morning stood on the Red Sea shore, standing on the bank of the 'sea of glass mingled with fire,'—which symbolises the clear and crystalline depth of the stable divine judgments, shot with fiery retribution,—and lifting up by anticipation a song of thanksgiving for the judgments about to be wrought. That song is expressly called 'the song of Moses' and 'of the Lamb,' in token of the essential unity of the two dispensations, and especially of the harmony of both in their view of the divine judgments. Its ringing praises are modelled on the ancient lyric. It, too, triumphs in God's judgments, regards them as means of making known His name, as done not for destruction, but that His character may be known and honoured by men, to whom it is life and peace to know and love Him for what He is.

That final victory over 'the beast,' whether he be a person or a tendency, is to reproduce in higher fashion that old conquest by the Red Sea. There is hope for the world that its oppressors shall not always tyrannise; there is hope for each soul that, if we take Christ for our deliverer and our guide, He will break the chains from off our wrists, and bring us at last to the eternal shore, where we may stand, like the ransomed people, and, as the unsetting morning dawns, see its beams touching with golden light the calm ocean, beneath which our oppressors lie buried for ever, and lift up glad thanksgivings to Him who has 'led us through fire and through water, and brought us out into a wealthy place.'

‘My Strength And Song’

‘The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation….’ EXODUS xv. 2.

These words occur three times in the Bible: here, in Isaiah xii. 2, and in Psalm cxviii. 14.

I. The lessons from the various instances of their occurrence. The first and second teach that the Mosaic deliverance is a picture-prophecy of the redemption in Christ. The third (Psalm cxviii. 14), long after, and the utterance of some private person, teaches that each age and each soul has the same mighty Hand working for it. ‘As we have heard, so have we seen.’

II. The lessons from the words themselves.

(a) True faith appropriates God’s universal mercy as a personal possession. ‘*My* Lord and *my* God!’ ‘He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.’

(b) Each single act of mercy should reveal God more clearly as ‘My strength.’ The ‘and’ in the second clause is substantially equivalent to ‘for.’ It assigns the reason for the assurance expressed in the first. Because of the experienced deliverance and God’s manifestation of Himself in it as the author of ‘salvation,’ my faith wins happy increase of confidence that He ‘is the strength of my heart.’ Blessed they who bring that treasure out of all the sorrows of life!

(c) The end of His deliverances is ‘praise.’ ‘He is my song.’ This is true for earth and for heaven. The ‘Song of Moses and the Lamb.’

The Shepherd And The Fold

'... Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.' EXODUS XV. 13.

What a grand triumphal ode! The picture of Moses and the children of Israel singing, and Miriam and the women answering: a gush of national pride and of worship! We belong to a better time, but still we can feel its grandeur. The deliverance has made the singer look forward to the end, and his confidence in the issue is confirmed.

I. The guiding God: or the picture of the leading. The original is 'lead gently.' *Cf.* Isaiah xl. 11, Psalm xxiii. 2. The emblem of a flock underlies the word. There is not only guidance, but gentle guidance. The guidance was gentle, though accompanied with so tremendous and heart-curdling a judgment. The drowned Egyptians were strange examples of gentle leading. But God's redemptive acts are like the guiding pillar of fire, in that they have a side that reveals wrath and evokes terror, and a side that radiates lambent love and kindles happy trust.

'In Thy strength.' *Cf.* Isaiah xl. 10, 'with strong hand.' 'He shall gently lead.' Note the combination with gentleness. That divine strength is the only power which is able to guide. We are so weak that it takes all His might to hold us up. It is His strength, not ours. 'My strength is made perfect in (thy) weakness.'

'To the resting-place of Thy holiness.' The word is used for pasture, or resting-places for cattle. Here it meant Canaan; for us it means Heaven—'the green pastures' of real participation in His holiness.

II. The triumphant confidence as to the future based upon the deliverance of the past. *'Hast,'* a past tense. It is as good as done. The believing use of God's great past, and initial mercy, to make us sure of His future.

(a) In that He will certainly accomplish it.

(b) In that even now there is a foretaste—rest in toil. He guides to the 'waters of resting.' A rest now (Heb. iv. 3); a rest 'that remaineth' (Heb. iv. 3, 9).

III. The warning against confidence in self. These people who sang thus perished in the wilderness! They let go hold of God's hand, so they 'sank like lead.' So He will fulfil begun work (Philippians i. 6). Let us cleave to Him. In Hebrews iii. and iv. lessons are drawn from the Israelites not 'entering in.' See also Psalm xcv.

The Ultimate Hope

'Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance…. '— EXODUS xv. 17.

I. The lesson taught by each present deliverance and kindness is that we shall be brought to His rest at last.

(a) Daily mercies are a pledge and a pattern of His continuous acts. The confidence that we shall be kept is based upon no hard doctrine of final perseverance, but on the assurance that God is always the same, like the sunshine which has poured out for all these millenniums and still rushes on with the same force. Consider—

The inexhaustibleness of the divine resources.

The steadfastness of the divine purposes.

The long-suffering of the divine patience.

(b) Thus daily mercies should lead on our thoughts to heavenly things. They should not prison us in their own sweetness. We should see the great Future shining through them as a transparent, not an opaque medium.

(c) That ultimate future should be the great object of our hope. Surely it is chiefly in order that we may have the light of that great to-morrow brightening and magnifying our dusty to-days, that we are endowed with the faculty of looking forward and 'calling things that are not as though they were.' So we should engage and enlarge our minds with it.

II. The form which that ultimate future assumes.

The Israelites thought of Canaan, and in particular of 'Zion,' its centre-point.

(a) Perpetual rest. 'Bring in and plant'—a contrast to the desert nomad life.

(b) Perpetual safety. 'The sanctuary which Thy hands have established,' *i.e.* made firm.

(c) Perpetual dwelling in God. 'Thy dwelling,' 'Thy mountain,' '*Thy* holy habitation' (ver. 13), rather than '*our* land.' For Israel their communion with Jehovah was perfected on Zion by the Temple and the sacrifices, including the revelation of (priestly) national service.

(d) Perpetual purity. 'Thy sanctuary.' 'Without' holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.'

Marah

'And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25. And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet…. '—EXODUS xv. 23-25.

I. The time of reaching Marah—just after the Red Sea. The Israelites were encamped for a few days on the shore to shake themselves together, and then at this, their very first station, they began to experience the privations which were to be their lot for forty years. Their course was like that of a ship that is in the stormy Channel as soon as it leaves the shelter of the pier at Dover, not like that of one that glides down the Thames for miles.

After great moments and high triumphs in life comes Marah.

Marah was just before Elim—the alternation, how blessed! The shade of palms and cool water of the wells, one for each tribe and one for each 'elder.' So we have alternations in life and experience.

II. The wrong and the right ways of taking the bitter experience. The people grumbled: Moses cried to the Lord. The quick forgetfulness of deliverances. The true use of speech is not complaint, but prayer.

III. The power that changes bitter to sweet. The manner of the miracle is singular. God hides Himself behind Moses, and His miraculous power behind the material agent. Perhaps the manner of the miracle was intended to suggest a parallel with the first plague. There the rod made the Nile water undrinkable. There is a characteristic economy in the miraculous, and outward things are used, as Christ used the pool and the saliva and the touch, to help the weak faith of the deaf and dumb man.

What changes bitter to sweet for us?—the Cross, the remembrance of Christ's death. 'Consider Him that endured.' The Cross is the true tree which, when 'cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

Recognition of and yielding to God's will: that is the one thing which for us changes all. The one secret of peace and of getting sweetness out of bitterness is loving acceptance of the will of God.

Discernment of purpose in God's 'bitter' dealings—'for our profit.' The dry rod 'budded.' The Prophet's roll was first bitter, then sweet. Affliction 'afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruit.'

The Bread Of God

'Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. 5. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. 6. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: 7. And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that He heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? 8. And Moses said, This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against Him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord, 9. And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the Lord: for He hath heard your murmurings. 10. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. 11. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 12. I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God.'—EXODUS xvi. 4-12.

Unbelief has a short memory. The Red Sea is forgotten in a month. The Israelites could strike their timbrels and sing their lyric of praise, but they could not believe that to-day's hunger could be satisfied. Discontent has a slippery memory. They wish to get back to the flesh-pots, of which the savour is in their nostrils, and they have forgotten the bitter sauce of affliction. When they were in Egypt, they shrieked about their oppression, and were ready to give up anything for liberty; when they have got it, they are ready to put their necks in the yoke again, if only they can have their stomachs filled. Men do not know how happy they are till they cease to be so. Our present miseries and our past blessings are the themes on which unbelief harps. Let him that is without similar sin cast the first stone at these grumbling Israelites. Without following closely the text of the narrative, we may throw together the lessons of the manna.

I. Observe God's purpose in the gift, as distinctly expressed in the promise of it.

'That I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or no.' How did the manna become a test of this? By means of the law prescribed for gathering it. There was to be a given quantity daily, and twice as much on the sixth day. If a man trusted God for to-morrow, he would be content to stop collecting when he had filled his omer, tempting as the easily gathered abundance would be. Greed and unbelief would masquerade then as now, under the guise of prudent foresight. The old Egyptian parallels to 'make hay while the sun shines,' and suchlike wise sayings of the philosophy of distrust, would be solemnly spoken, and listened to as pearls of wisdom. When experience had taught that, however much a man gathered, he had no more than his omer full, after all,—and is not that true yet?—then the next temptation would be to practise economy, and have something over for to-morrow. Only he who absolutely trusted God to provide for him would eat up his portion, and lie down at night with a quiet heart, knowing that He who had fed him would feed. When experience had taught that what was saved rotted, then laziness would come in and say, 'What is the use of gathering twice as much on the sixth day? Don't we know that it will not keep?' So the whole of the gift was a continual training of, and therefore a continual test for, faith. God willed to let His

gifts come in this hand-to-mouth fashion, though He could have provided at once what would have obviously lasted them all their wilderness life, in order that they might be habituated to cling to Him, and that their daily bread might be doubly for their nourishment, feeding their bodies and strengthening that faith which, to them as to us, is the condition of all blessedness. God lets our blessings, too, trickle to us drop by drop, instead of pouring them in a flood all at once upon us, for the same reason. He does so, not because of any good to Him from our faith, except that the Infinite love loves infinitely to be loved; but for our sakes, that we may taste the peace and strength of continual dependence, and the joy of continual receiving. He could give us the principal down; but He prefers to pay us the interest, as we need it.

Christianity does not absolutely forbid laying up money or other resources for future wants. But the love of accumulating, which is so strong in many professing Christians, and the habit of amassing beyond all reasonable future wants, is surely scarcely permitted to those who profess to believe that incarnate wisdom forbade taking anxious care for the morrow, and sent its disciples to lilies and birds to learn the happy immunities of faith. We too get our daily mercies to prove us. The letter of the law for the manna is not applicable to us who gain our bread by God's blessing on our labour. But the spirit is, and the members of great commercial nations have surely little need to be reminded that still the portion put away is apt to breed worms. How often it vanishes, or, if it lasts, tortures its owner, who has more trouble keeping it than he had in getting it; or fatally corrupts his own character, or ruins his children! All God's gifts are tests, which—thanks be to Him—is the same as to say that they are means of increasing faith, and so adding to joy.

II. The manna was further a disclosure of the depth of patient long-suffering in God.

Very strikingly the 'murmurings' of the children of Israel are four times referred to in this context, and on each occasion are stated as the reason for the gift of the manna. It was God's answer to the peevish complaints of greedy appetites. When they were summoned to come near to the Lord, with the ominous warning that 'He hath heard your murmurings,' no doubt many a heart began to quake; and when the Glory flashed from the Shechinah cloud, it would burn lurid to their trembling consciences. But the message which comes from it is sweet in its gentleness, as it promises the manna because they have murmured, and in order that they may know the Lord. A mother soothes her crying infant by feeding it from her own bosom. God does not take the rod to His whimpering children, but rather tries to win them by patience, and to shame their unbelief by His swift and over-abundant answers to their complaints. When He must, He punishes; but when He can, He complies. Faith is the condition of our receiving His highest gifts; but even unbelief touches His heart with pity, and what He can give to it, He does, if it may be melted into trust. The farther men stray from Him, the more tender and penetrating His recalling voice. We multiply transgressions, He multiplies mercies.

III. The manna was a revelation in miraculous and transient form of an eternal truth.

The God who sent it sends daily bread. The words which Christ quoted in His wilderness hunger are the explanation of its meaning as a witness to this truth: 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' To a Christian, the divine power is present and operative in all natural processes as really as in those which we call miraculous. God is separable from the universe, but the universe is not separable from God. If it were separated, it would cease. So far as the reality of the divine operation is concerned, it matters not whether He works in the established fashion, through material things, or whether His will acts directly. The chain which binds a phenomenon to the divine will may be long or short; the intervening links may be many, or they may be abolished, and the divine cause and the visible effect may touch without anything between. But in either case

the power is of God. Bread made out of flour grown on the other side of the world, and fashioned by the baker, and bought by the fruits of my industry, is as truly the gift of God as was the manna. For once, He showed these men His hand at work, that we all might know that it was at work, when hidden. The lesson of the 'angel's food' eaten in the wilderness is that men are fed by the power of God's expressed and active will,—for that is the meaning of 'the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,'—in whatever fashion they get their food. The gift of it is from Him; its power to nourish is from Him. It is as true to-day as ever it was: 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' The manna ceased when the people came near cornfields and settled homes. Miracles end when means are possible. But the God of the miracle is the God of the means.

Commentators make much of what is supposed to be a natural substratum for the manna, in a certain vegetable product, found in small quantities in parts of the Arabian peninsula. No doubt, we are to recognise in the plagues of Egypt, and in the dividing of the Red Sea, the extraordinary action of ordinary causes; and there is no objection in principle to doing so here. But that an exudation from the bark of a shrub, which has no nutritive properties at all, is found only in one or two places in Arabia, and that only at certain seasons and in infinitesimal quantity, seems a singularly thin 'substratum' on which to build up the feeding of two millions of people, more or less exclusively and continuously for forty years, by means of a substance which has nothing to do with tamarisk-trees, and is like the natural product in nothing but sweetness and name. Whether we admit connection between the two, or not, the miraculous character of the manna of the Israelites is unaffected. It was miraculous in its origin—'rained from heaven,' in its quantity, in its observance of times and seasons, in its putrefaction and preservation,—as rotting when kept for greed, and remaining sweet when preserved for the Sabbath. It came straight from the creative will of God, and whether its name means 'What is it?' or 'It is a gift,' the designation is equally true and appropriate, pointing, in the one case, to the mystery of its nature; in the other, to the love of the Giver, and in both referring it directly to the hand of God.

IV. The manna was typical of Christ.

Our Lord Himself has laid His hand upon it, and claimed it as a faint foreshadowing of what He is. The Jews, not satisfied with the miracle of the loaves, demand from Him a greater sign, as the condition of what they are pleased to call 'belief'—which is nothing but accepting the testimony of sense. They quote Moses as giving the manna, and imply that Messiah is expected to repeat the miracle. Christ accepts the challenge, and goes on to claim that He not only gives, but Himself is, for all men's souls, all and more than all which the manna had been to the bodies of that dead generation. Like it, He came—but in how much more profound a sense!—from heaven. Like it, He was food. But unlike it, He could still for ever the craving of the else famishing soul; unlike it, He not only nourished a bodily life already possessed, but communicated a spiritual life which never dies; and, unlike it, He was meant to be the food of the whole world. His teaching passed beyond the symbolism of the manna, when He not only declared Himself to be the 'true bread from heaven which gives life to the world,' but opened a glimpse into the solemn mystery of His atoning death by the startling and apparently repulsive paradox that 'His flesh was food indeed and His blood drink indeed.' The manna does not typically teach Christ's atonement, but it does set Him forth as the true sustenance and life-giver, sweet as honey to the soul, sent from heaven for us each, but needing to be made ours by the act of our faith. An Israelite would have starved, though the manna lay all round the camp, if he did not go forth and secure his portion; and he might no less have starved, if he did not eat what Heaven had sent. 'Crede et manducasti,' 'Believe, and thou hast eaten,'—as St. Augustine says. The personal appropriating act of faith is essential to our having Christ for the food of our souls. The bread that nourishes our bodies is

assimilated to their substance, and so becomes sustenance. This bread of God, entering into our souls by faith, transforms them into its substance, and so gives and feeds an immortal life. The manna was for a generation; this bread is ‘the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’ That was for a handful of men; this is for the world. Nor is the prophetic value of the manna exhausted when we recognise its witness to Christ. The food of the wilderness is the food of the city. The bread that is laid on the table, ‘spread in the presence of the enemy,’ is the bread that makes the feast in the king’s palace. The Christ who feeds the pilgrim soldiers is the Christ on whom the conquerors banquet. ‘To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.’

Jehovah Nissi

'And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi [that is, the Lord is my Banner].' —EXODUS xvii. 15.

We are all familiar with that picturesque incident of the conflict between Israel and Amalek, which ended in victory and the erection of this memorial trophy. Moses, as you remember, went up on the mount whilst Joshua and the men of war fought in the plain. But I question whether we usually attach the right meaning to the symbolism of this event. We ordinarily, I suppose, think of Moses as interceding on the mountain with God. But there is no word about prayer in the story, and the attitude of Moses is contrary to the idea that his occupation was intercession. He sat there, with the rod of God in his hand, and the rod of God was the symbol and the vehicle of divine power. When he lifted the rod Amalek fled before Israel; when the rod dropped Israel fled before Amalek. That is to say, the uplifted hand was not the hand of intercession, but the hand which communicated power and victory. And so, when the conflict is over, Moses builds this memorial of thanksgiving to God, and piles together these great stones—which, perhaps, still stand in some of the unexplored valleys of that weird desert land—to teach Israel the laws of conflict and the conditions of victory. These laws and conditions are implied in the name which he gave to the altar that he built—Jehovah Nissi, 'the Lord is my Banner.'

Now, then, what do these stones, with their significant name, teach us, as they taught the ancient Israelites? Let me throw these lessons into three brief exhortations.

I. First, realise for whose cause you fight.

The Banner was the symbol of the cause for which an army fought, or the cognizance of the king or commander whom it followed. So Moses, by that name given to the altar, would impress upon the minds of the cowardly mob that he had brought out of Egypt—and who now had looked into an enemy's eyes for the first time—the elevating and bracing thought that they were God's soldiers, and that the warfare which they waged was not for themselves, nor for the conquest of the country for their own sake, nor for mere outward liberty, but that they were fighting that the will of God might prevail, and that He might be the King now of one land—a mere corner of the earth—and thereby might come to be King of all the earth. That rude altar said to Israel: 'Remember, when you go into the battle, that the battle is the Lord's; and that the standard under which you war is the God for whose cause you contend—none else and none less than Jehovah Himself. You are consecrated soldiers, set apart to fight for God.'

Such is the destination of all Christians. They have a battle to fight, of which they do not think loftily enough, unless they clearly and constantly recognise that they are fighting on God's side.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of this conflict, or run into details of the way in which it is to be waged. Only let us remember that the first field upon which we have to fight for God we carry about within ourselves; and that there will be no victories for us over other enemies until we have, first of all, subdued the foes that are within. And then let us remember that the absorbing importance of inward conflict absolves no Christian man from the duty of strenuously contending for all things that are 'lovely and of good report,' and from waging war against every form of sorrow and sin which his influence can touch. There is no surer way of securing victory in the warfare within and conquering self than to throw myself into

the service of others, and lose myself in their sorrows and needs. There is no possibility of my taking my share in the merciful warfare against sin and sorrow, the tyrants that oppress my fellows, unless I conquer myself. These two fields of the Christian warfare are not two in the sense of being separable from one another, but they are two in the sense of being the inside and the outside of the same fabric. The warfare is one, though the fields are two.

Let us remember, on the other hand, that whilst it is our simple bounden duty, as Christian men and women, to reckon ourselves as anointed and called for the purpose of warring against sin and sorrow, wherever we can assail them, there is nothing more dangerous, and few things more common, than the hasty identification of fighting for some whim, or prejudice, or narrow view, or partial conception of our own, with contending for the establishment of the will of God. How many wicked things have been done in this world for God's glory! How many obstinate men, who were really only forcing their own opinions down people's throats because they were theirs, have fancied themselves to be pure-minded warriors for God! How easy it has been, in all generations, to make the sign of the Cross over what had none of the spirit of the Cross in it; and to say, 'The cause is God's, and therefore I war for it'; when the reality was, 'The cause is mine, and therefore I take it for granted that it is God's.'

Let us beware of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' the pretence of sanctity which is only selfishness with a mask on. And, above all, let us beware of the uncharitableness and narrowness of view, the vehemence of temper, the fighting for our own hands, the enforcing of our own notions and whims and peculiarities, which have often done duty as being true Christian service for the Master's sake. We are God's host, but we are not to suppose that every notion that we take into our heads, and for which we may contend, is part of the cause of God.

And then remember what sort of men the soldiers in such an army ought to be. 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.' These bearers may either be regarded as a solemn procession of priests carrying the sacrificial vessels; or, as is more probable from the context of the original, as the armour-bearers of the great King. They must be pure who bear His weapons, for these are His righteous love, His loving purity. If our camp is the camp of the Lord, no violence should be there. What sanctity, what purity, what patience, what long-suffering, what self-denial, and what enthusiastic confidence of victory there should be in those who can say, 'We are the Lord's host, Jehovah is our Banner!' He always wins who sides with God. And he only worthily takes his place in the ranks of the sacramental host of the Most High who goes into the warfare knowing that, because He is God's soldier, he will come out of it, bringing his victorious shield with him, and ready for the laurels to be twined round his undinted helmet. That is the first of the thoughts, then, that are here.

II. The second of the exhortations which come from the altar and its name is, Remember whose commands you follow.

The banner in ancient warfare, even more than in modern, moved in front of the host, and determined the movements of the army. And so, by the stones that he piled and the name which he gave them, Moses taught Israel and us that they and we are under the command of God, and that it is the movements of His staff that are to be followed. Absolute obedience is the first duty of the Christian soldier, and absolute obedience means the entire suppression of my own will, the holding of it in equilibrium until He puts His finger on the side that He desires to dip and lets the other rise. They only understand their place as Christ's servants and soldiers who have learned to hush their own will until they know their Captain's. In order to be blessed, to be strong, to be victorious, the indispensable condition is that our inmost desire shall be, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

Sometimes, and often, there will be perplexities in our daily lives, and conflicts very hard to unravel. We shall often be brought to a point where we cannot see which way the Banner is leading us. What then? 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait' for the salvation and for the guidance of his God. And we shall generally find that it is when we are looking too far ahead that we do not get guidance. You will not get guidance to-day for this day next week. When this day next week comes, it will bring its own enlightenment with it.

'Lead, kindly Light, … … One step enough for me.'

Let us take short views both of duty and of hope, and we shall not so often have to complain that we are left without knowing what the Commander's orders are. Sometimes we are so left, and that is a lesson in patience, and is generally God's way of telling us that it is not His will that we should do anything at all just yet. Sometimes we are so left in order that we may put our hand out through the darkness, and hold on by Him, and say, 'I know not what to do, but mine eyes are towards Thee.'

And be sure of this, brethren, that He will not desert His own promise, and that they who in their inmost hearts can say, 'The Lord is my Banner,' will never have to complain that He led them into a 'pathless wilderness where there was no way.' It is sometimes a very narrow track, it is often a very rough one, it is sometimes a dreadfully solitary one; but He always goes before us, and they who hold His hand will not hold it in vain. 'The Lord is my Banner'; obey His orders and do not take anybody else's; nor, above all, the suggestions of that impatient, talkative heart of yours, instead of His commandments.

III. Lastly, the third lesson that these grey stones preach to us is, Recognise by whose power you conquer.

The banner, I suppose, to us English people, suggests a false idea. It suggests the notion of a flag, or some bit of flexible drapery which fluttered and flapped in the wind; but the banner of old-world armies was a rigid pole, with some solid ornament of bright metal on the top, so as to catch the light. The banner-staff spoken of in the text links itself with the preceding incident. I said that Moses stood on the mountain-top with the rod in his hand. Now that rod was exactly a miniature banner, and when he lifted it, victory came to Israel; and when it fell, victory deserted their arms. So by the altar's name he would say, Do not suppose that it was Moses that won the battle, nor that it was the rod that Moses carried in his hand that brought you strength. The true Victor was Jehovah, and it was He who was Moses' Banner. It was by Him that the lifted rod brought victory; as for Moses, he had nothing to do with it; and the people had to look higher than the hill-top where he sat.

This thought puts stress on the first word of the phrase instead of on the last, as in my previous remarks. 'The Lord is my Banner,'—no Moses, no outward symbol, no man or thing, but only He Himself. Therefore, in all our duties, and in all our difficulties, and in all our conflicts, and for all our conquests, we are to look away from creatures, self, externals, and to look only to God. We are all too apt to trust in rods instead of in Him, in Moses instead of in Moses' Lord.

We are all too apt to trust in externals, in organisations, sacraments, services, committees, outside aids of all sorts, as our means for doing God's work, and bringing power to us and blessing to the world. Let us get away from them all, dig deeper down than any of these, be sure that these are but surface reservoirs, but that the fountain which fills them with any refreshing liquid which they may bear lies in God Himself. Why should we trouble ourselves about reservoirs when we can go to the Fountain? Why should we put such reliance on churches and services and preaching and sermons and schemes and institutions and organisations when we have the divine Lord Himself for our strength? 'Jehovah is my

Banner,' and Moses' rod is only a symbol. At most it is like a lightning-conductor, but it is not the lightning. The lightning will come without the rod, if our eyes are to the heaven, for the true power that brings God down to men is that forsaking of externals and waiting upon Him which He never refuses to answer.

In like manner we are too apt to put far too much confidence in human teachers and human helpers of various kinds. And when God takes them away we say to ourselves that there is a gap that can never be filled. Ay! but the great sea can come in and fill any gap, and make the deepest and the driest of the excavations in the desert to abound in sweet water.

So let us turn away from everything external, gather in our souls and fix our hopes on Him; let us recognise the imperative duty of the Christian warfare which is laid upon us; let us docilely submit ourselves to His sweet commands, and trust in His sufficient and punctual guidance, and not expect from any outward sources that which no outward sources can ever give, but which He Himself will give—strength to our fingers to fight, and weapons for the warfare, and covering for our heads in the day of battle.

And then, when our lives are done, may the only inscription on the stone that covers us be 'Jehovah Nissi: the Lord is my banner'! The trophy that commemorates the Christian's victory should bear no name but His by whose grace we are more than conquerors. 'Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Gershom And Eliezer

'The name of the one [of Moses' sons] was Gershom ... and the name of the other was Eliezer....'—EXODUS xviii. 3, 4.

In old times parents often used to give expression to their hopes or their emotions in the names of their children. Very clearly that was the case in Moses' naming of his two sons, who seem to have been the whole of his family. The significance of each name is appended to it in the text. The explanation of the first is, 'For he said, I have been an alien in a strange land'; and that of the second, 'For the God of my fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' These two names give us a pathetic glimpse of the feelings with which Moses began his exile, and of the better thoughts into which these gradually cleared. The first child's name expresses his father's discontent, and suggests the bitter contrast between Sinai and Egypt; the court and the sheepfold; the gloomy, verdureless, gaunt peaks of Sinai, blazing in the fierce sunshine, and the cool, luscious vegetation of Goshen, the land for cattle. The exile felt himself all out of joint with his surroundings, and so he called the little child that came to him 'Gershom,' which, according to one explanation, means 'banishment,' and, according to another (a kind of punning etymology), means 'a stranger here'; in the other case expressing the same sense of homelessness and want of harmony with his surroundings. But as the years went on, Moses began to acclimatise himself, and to become more reconciled to his position and to see things more as they really were. So, when the second child is born, all his murmuring has been hushed, and he looks beyond circumstances, and lays his hand upon God. 'And the name of the second was Eliezer, for, he said, the God of my fathers was my help.'

Now, there are the two main streams of thought that filled these forty years; and it was worth while to put Moses into the desert for all that time, and to break off the purposes and hopes of his life sharp and short, and to condemn him to comparative idleness, or work that was all unfitted to bring out his special powers, for that huge scantling out of his life, one-third of the whole of it, in order that there might be burnt into him, not either of these two thoughts separately, but the two of them in their blessed conjunction; 'I am a stranger here'; 'God is my Help.' And so these are the thoughts which, in like juxtaposition, ought to be ours; and in higher fashion with regard to the former of them than was experienced by Moses. Let me say a word or two about each of these two things. Let us think of the strangers, and of the divine helper that is with the strangers.

I. 'A stranger here.'

Now, that is true, in the deepest sense, about all men; for the one thing that makes the difference between the man and the beast is that the beast is perfectly at home in his surroundings, and gets all that he needs out of them, and finds in them a field for all that he can do, and is fully developed to the very highest point of his capacity by what people nowadays call the 'environment' in which he is put. But the very opposite is the case in regard to us men. 'Foxes have holes,' and they are quite comfortable there; 'and the birds of the air have roosting-places,' and tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep without a care and without a consciousness. 'But the Son of man,' the ideal Humanity as well as the realised ideal in the person of Jesus Christ, 'hath not where to lay His head.' No; because He is so 'much better than they.' Their immunity from care is not a prerogative—it is an inferiority. We are plunged into the midst of a scene of things which obviously does not match our capacities. There is a great deal more in every man than can ever find a field of

expression, of work, or of satisfaction in anything beneath the stars. And no man that understands, even superficially, his own character, his own requirements, can fail to feel in his sane and quiet moments, when the rush of temptation and the illusions of this fleeting life have lost their grip upon him: 'This is not the place that can bring out all that is in me, or that can yield me all that I desire.' Our capacities transcend the present, and the experiences of the present are all unintelligible, unless the true end of every human life is not here at all, but in another region, for which these experiences are fitting us.

But, then, the temptations of life, the strong appeals of flesh and sense, the duties which in their proper place are lofty and elevating and refining, and put out of their place, are contemptible and degrading, all come in to make it hard for any of us to keep clearly before us what our consciousness tells us when it is strongly appealed to, that we are strangers and sojourners here and that this is not 'our rest, because it is polluted.' Therefore it comes to be the great glory and blessedness of the Christian Revelation that it obviously shifts the centre for us, and makes that future, and not this present, the aim for which, and in the pursuit of which, we are to live. So, Christian people, in a far higher sense than Moses, who only felt himself 'a stranger there,' because he did not like Midian as well as Egypt, have to say, 'We are strangers here'; and the very aim, in one aspect, of our Christian discipline of ourselves is that we shall keep vivid, in the face of all the temptations to forget it, this consciousness of being away from our true home.

One means of doing that is to think rather oftener than the most of us do, about our true home. You have heard, I dare say, of half-reclaimed gipsies, who for a while have been coaxed out of the free life of the woods and the moors, and have gone into settled homes. After a while there has come over them a rush of feeling, a remembrance of how blessed it used to be out in the open and away from the squalor and filth where men 'sit and hear each other groan' and they have flung off 'as if they were fetters' the trappings of 'civilisation,' and gone back to liberty. That is what we ought to do—not going back from the higher to the lower, but smitten with what the Germans call the *heimweh*, the home-sickness, that makes us feel that we must get clearer sight of that land to which we truly belong.

Do you think about it, do you feel that where Jesus Christ is, is your home? I have no doubt that most of you have, or have had, dear ones here on earth about whom you could say that, 'Where my husband, my wife is; where my beloved is, or my children are, that is my home, wherever my abode may be.' Are you, Christian people, saying the same thing about heaven and Jesus Christ? Do you feel that you are strangers here, not only because you, reflecting upon your character and capacities and on human life, see that all these require another life for their explanation and development, but because your hearts are knit to Him, and 'where your treasure is there your heart is also'; and where your heart is there you are? We go home when we come into communion with Jesus Christ. Do you ever, in the course of the rush of your daily work, think about the calm city beyond the sea, and about its King, and that you belong to it? 'Our citizenship is in heaven' and here we are strangers.

II. Now let me say a word about the other child's name.

'God is Helper.' We do not know what interval of time elapsed between the birth of these two children. There are some indications that the second of them was in years very much the junior. Perhaps the transition from the mood represented in the one name to that represented in the other, was a long and slow process. But be that as it may, note the connection between these two names. You can never say 'We are strangers here' without feeling a little prick of pain, unless you say too 'God is my Helper.' There is a beautiful variation of the former word which will occur to many of you, I have no doubt, in one of the old psalms: 'I am a stranger *with Thee*, and a sojourner, as were all my fathers.' There is the secret that takes

away all the mourning, all the possible discomfort and pain, out of the thought: ‘Here we have no continuing city,’ and makes it all blessed. It does not matter whether we are in a foreign land or no, if we have that Companion with us. His presence will make blessedness in Midian, or in Thebes. It does not matter whether it is Goshen or the wilderness, if the Lord is by our side. So sweetness is breathed into the thought, and bitterness is sucked out of it, when the name of the second child is braided into the name of the first; and we can contemplate quietly all else of tragic and limiting and sad that is involved in the thought that we are sojourners and pilgrims, when we say ‘Yes! we are; but the Lord is my Helper.’

Then, on the other hand, we shall never say and feel ‘the Lord is my Helper,’ as we ought to do, until we have got deep in our hearts, and settled in our consciousness, the other conviction that we are strangers here. It is only when we realise that there is no other permanence for us that we put out our hands and grasp at the Eternal, in order not to be swept away upon the dark waves of the rushing stream of Time. It is only when all other props are stricken from us that we rest our whole weight upon that one strong central pillar, which can never be moved. Learn that God helps, for that makes it possible to say ‘I am a stranger,’ and not to weep. Learn that you are strangers, for that stimulates to take God for out help. Just as when the floods are out, men are driven to the highest ground to save their lives; so when the billows of the waters of time are seen to be rolling over all creatural things, we take our flight to the Rock of Ages. Put the two together, and they fit one another and strengthen us.

This second conviction was the illuminating light upon a perplexed and problematic past. Moses, when he fled from Egypt, thought that his life’s work was rent in twain. He had believed that his brethren would have seen that it was God’s purpose to use him as the deliverer. For the sake of being such, he had surrendered the court and its delights. But on his young ambition and innocent enthusiasm there came this *douche* of cold water, which lasted for forty years, and sent him away into the wilderness, to be a shepherd under an Arab sheikh, with nothing to look forward to. At first he said, ‘This is not what I was meant for; I am out of my element here.’ But before the forty years were over he said, ‘The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.’ What had looked a disaster turned out to be a deliverance, a manifestation of divine help, and not a hindrance. He had got far enough away from that past to look at it sanely, that is to say gratefully. So we, when we get far enough away from our sorrows, can look back at them, sometimes even here on earth, and say, ‘The mercy of the Lord compassed me about.’ Here is the key that unlocks all the perplexities of providence, ‘The Lord was my Helper.’

And that conviction will steady and uphold a man in a present, however dark. It was no small exercise of his faith and patience that the great lawgiver should for so many years have such unworthy work to do as he had in Midian. But even then he gathered into his heart this confidence, and brought summer about him into the mid-winter of his life, and light into the midst of darkness; ‘for he said’—even then, when there was no work for him to do that seemed much to need a divine help—’the Lord is my Helper.’

And so, however dark may be our present moment, and however obscure or repulsive our own tasks, let us fall back upon that old word, ‘Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.’

When Moses named his boy, his gratitude was allied with faith in favours to come; and when he said ‘was,’ he meant also ‘will be.’ And he was right. He dreamt very little of what was coming, but this confidence that was expressed in his second child’s name was warranted by that great future that lay before him, though he did not know it. When the pinch came his confidence faltered. It was easy to say ‘The Lord is my Helper,’ when there was nothing very special for which God’s help was needed, and nothing harder to do than to look after a few

sheep in the wilderness. But when God said to him, ‘Go and stand before Pharaoh,’ Moses for the moment forgot all about God’s being his helper, and was full of all manner of cowardly excuses, which, like the excuses of a great many more of us for not doing our plain duty, took the shape of a very engaging modesty and diffidence as to his capacities. But God said to him, ‘Surely I will be with thee.’ He gave him back ‘Eliezer’ in a little different form. ‘You used to say that I was your helper. What has become of your faith now? Has it all evaporated when the trial comes? Surely I will be with thee.’ If we will set ourselves to our tasks, not doubting God’s help, we shall have occasion in the event to be sure that God did help us.

So, brethren, let us cherish these two thoughts, and never keep them apart, and God will be, as our good old hymn has it—

‘Our help while troubles last, And our eternal home.’

The Ideal Statesman

Note: Preached on occasion of Mr. Gladstone's death.

'Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them.'—EXODUS xviii. 21.

You will have anticipated my purpose in selecting this text. I should be doing violence to your feelings and mine if I made no reference to the event which has united the Empire and the world in one sentiment. The great tree has fallen, and the crash has for the moment silenced all the sounds of the forest. Wars abroad and controversies at home are hushed. All men, of all schools of opinion, creeds, and parties, see now, in the calm face of the dead, 'the likeness to the great of old'; and it says something, with all our faults, for the soundness of the heart of English opinion, that all sorts and conditions of men have brought their sad wreaths to lay them on that coffin.

But, whilst much has been said, far more eloquently and authoritatively than I can say it, about the many aspects of that many-sided life, surely it becomes us, as Christian people, to look at it from the distinctively Christian point of view, and to gather some of the lessons which, so regarded, it teaches us.

My text is part of the sagacious advice which Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, gave him about the sort of men that he should pick out to be his lieutenants in civic government. Its old-fashioned, simple phraseology may hide from some of us the elevation and comprehensiveness of the ideal that it sets forth. But it is a grand ideal; and amongst the great names of Englishmen who have guided the destinies of this land, none have approached more nearly to it than he whose death has taken away the most striking personality from our public life.

So let me ask you to look with me, first, at the ideal of a politician that is set forth here.

The free life of the desert, far away from the oppressions of surrounding military despotisms, that remarkable and antique constitution of the clan, with all its beautiful loyalty, had given this Arab sheikh a far loftier conception of what a ruler of men was than he could have found exemplified at Pharaoh's court; or than, alas! has been common in many so-called Christian countries. The field upon which he intended that these great qualities should be exercised was a very limited one, to manage the little affairs of a handful of fugitives in the desert. But the scale on which we work has nothing to do with the principles by which we work, and the laws of perspective and colouring are the same, whether you paint the minutest miniature or a gigantic fresco. So what was needed for managing the little concerns of Moses' wanderers in the wilderness is the ideal of what is needed for the men who direct the public affairs of world-wide empires.

Let me run over the details. They must be 'able men,' or, as the original has it, 'men of strength.' There is the intellectual basis, and especially the basis of firm, brave, strongly-set will which will grasp convictions, and, whatever comes, will follow them to their conclusions. The statesman is not one that puts his ear down to the ground to hear the tramp of some advancing host, and then makes up his mind to follow in their paths; he is not sensitive to the varying winds of public opinion, nor does he trim his sails to suit them, but he comes to his convictions by first-hand approach to, and meditation on, the great principles that are to guide, and then holds to them with a strength that nothing can weaken, and a courage that nothing can daunt. 'Men of strength' is what democracies like ours do most need

in their leaders; a ‘strong man, in a blatant land,’ who knows his own mind, and is faithful to it for ever. That is a great demand.

‘Such as fear God’—there is the secret of strength, not merely in reference to the intellectual powers which are not dependent for their origin, though they may be for the health and vigour of their work, upon any religious sentiment, but in regard to all true power. He that would govern others must first be lord of himself, and he only is lord of himself who is consciously and habitually the servant of God. So that whatever natural endowment we start with, it must be heightened, purified, deepened, enlarged, by the presence in our lives of a deep and vital religious conviction. That is true about all men, leaders and led, large and small. That is the bottom-heat in the greenhouse, as it were, that will make riper and sweeter all the fruits which are the natural result of natural capacities. That is the amulet and the charm which will keep a man from the temptations incident to his position and the weaknesses incident to his character. The fear of God underlies the noblest lives. That is not to-day’s theory. We are familiar with the fact, and familiar with the doctrine formulated out of it, that there may be men of strong and noble lives and great leaders in many a department of human activity without any reference to the Unseen. Yes, there may be, but they are all fragments, and the complete man comes only when the fear of the Lord is guide, leader, impulse, polestar, regulator, corrector, and inspirer of all that he is and all that he does.

‘Men of truth’—that, of course, glances at the crooked ways which belong not only to Eastern statesmanship, but it does more than that. He that is to lead men must himself be led by an eager haste to follow after, and to apprehend, the very truth of things. And there must be in him clear transparent willingness to render his utmost allegiance, at any sacrifice, to the dawning convictions that may grow upon him. It is only fools that do not change. Freshness of enthusiasm, and fidelity to new convictions opening upon a man, to the end of his life, are not the least important of the requirements in him who would persuade and guide individuals or a nation.

‘Hating covetousness’; or, as it might be rendered, ‘unjust gain.’ That reference to the ‘oiling of the palms’ of Eastern judges may be taken in a loftier signification. If a man is to stand forth as the leader of a people, he must be clear, as old Samuel said that he was, from all suspicion of having been following out his career for any form of personal advantage. ‘Clean hands,’ and that not only from the vulgar filth of wealth, but from the more subtle advantages which may accrue from a lofty position, are demanded of the leader of men.

Such is the ideal. The requirements are stern and high, and they exclude the vermin that infest ‘politics,’ as they are called, and cause them to stink in many nostrils. The self-seeking schemer, the one-eyed partisan, the cynic who disbelieves in ideals of any sort, the charlatan who assumes virtues that he does not possess, and mouths noble sentiments that go no deeper than his teeth, are all shut out by them. The doctrine that a man may do in his public capacity things which would be disgraceful in private life, and yet retain his personal honour untarnished, is blown to atoms by this ideal. It is much to be regretted, and in some senses to be censured, that so many of our wisest, best, and most influential men stand apart from public life. Much of that is due to personal bias, much more of it is due to the pressure of more congenial duties, and not a little of it is due to the disregard of Jethro’s ideal, and to the degradation of public life which has ensued thereby. But there have been great men in our history whose lives have helped to lift up the ideal of a statesman, who have made such a sketch as Jethro outlined, though they may not have used his words, their polestar; and amongst the highest of these has been the man whose loss we to-day lament.

Let me try to vindicate that expression of opinion in a word or two. I cannot hope to vie in literary grace, or in completeness, with the eulogies that have been abundantly poured out;

and I should not have thought it right to divert this hour of worship from its ordinary themes, if I had had no more to say than has been far better said a thousand times in these last days. But I cannot help noticing that, though there has been a consensus of admiration of, and a practically unanimous pointing to, character as after all the secret of the spell which Mr. Gladstone has exercised for two generations, there has not been, as it seems to me, equal and due prominence given to what was, and what he himself would have said was, the real root of his character and the productive cause of his achievements.

And so I venture now to say a word or two about the religion of the man that to his own consciousness underlay all the rest of him. It is not for me to speak, and there is no need to speak, about the marvellous natural endowments and the equally marvellous, many-sided equipment of attainment which enriched the rich, natural soil. Intermeddling as he did with all knowledge, he must necessarily have been but an amateur in many of the subjects into which he rushed with such generous eagerness. But none the less is the example of all but omnivorous acquisitiveness of everything that was to be known, a protest, very needful in these days, against the possible evils of an excessive specialising which the very progress of knowledge in all departments seems to make inevitable. I do not need to speak, either, of the flow, and sometimes the torrent, of eloquence ever at his command, nor of the lithe and sinewy force of his extraordinarily nimble, as well as massive, mind; nor need I say more than one word about the remarkable combination of qualities so generally held and seen to be incompatible, which put into one personality a genius for dry arithmetical figures and a genius for enthusiasm and sympathy with all the oppressed. All these things have been said far better than I can say them, and I do not repeat them.

But I desire to hammer this one conviction into your hearts and my own, that the inmost secret of that noble life, of all that wealth of capacity, all that load of learning, which he bore lightly like a flower, was the fact that the man was, to the very depths of his nature, a devout Christian. He would have been as capable, as eloquent, and all the rest of it, if he had been an unbeliever. But he would never have been nor done what he was and did, and he would never have left the dint of an impressive and lofty personality upon a whole nation and a world, if beneath the intellect there had not been character, and beneath character Christianity.

He was far removed, in ecclesiastical connections, from us Nonconformists, and he held opinions in regard to some very important ecclesiastical questions which cut straight across some of our deepest convictions. We never had to look for much favour from his hands, because his intellectual atmosphere removed him far from sympathy with many of the truths which are dearest to the members of the Free Evangelical Churches. But none the less we recognise in him a brother in Jesus Christ, and rejoice that there, on the high places of a careless and sceptical generation, there stood a Christian man.

In this connection I cannot but, though I have no right to do so, express how profoundly thankful I, for one, was to the present Prime Minister of England that in his brief eulogium on, I was going to say, his great rival, he ended all by the emphatic declaration that Mr. Gladstone was, first and foremost, a great Christian man. Yes; and there was the secret, as I have already said, not of his merely political eminence, but of the universal reverence which a nation expresses to-day. All detraction is silenced, and all calumnies have dropped away, as filth from the white wings of a swan as it soars, and with one voice the Empire and the world confess that he was a great and a good man.

I need not dwell in detail on the thoughts of how, by reason of this deep underlying fear of God, the other qualifications which are sketched in our ideal found their realisation in him; how those who, all through his career, smiled most at the successive enthusiasms which monopolised his mind, and sometimes at the contrasts between these, are now ready to admit

that, whether the enthusiasms were right or wrong, there is something noble in the spectacle of a man ever keeping his mind, even when its windows were beginning to be dimmed by the frosts of age, open to the beams of new truth. And the greatest, as some people think, of his political blunders, as we are beginning, all of us, to recognise, now that party strife is hushed, was the direct consequence of that ever fresh and youthful enthusiasm for new thoughts and new lines of action. Innovators aged eighty are not too numerous.

Nor need I say more than one word about the other part of the ideal, 'hating covetousness.' The giver of peerages by the bushel died a commoner. The man that had everything at his command made no money, nor anything else, out of his long years of office, except the satisfaction of having been permitted to render what he believed to be the highest of service to the nation that he loved so well. Like our whilom neighbour, the other great commoner, John Bright, he lived among his own people; and like Samuel, of whom I have already spoken, he could stretch out his old hands and say, 'They are clean.' One scarcely feels as if, to such a life, a State funeral in Westminster Abbey was congruous. One had rather have seen him laid among the humble villagers who were his friends and companions, and in the quiet churchyard which his steps had so often traversed. But at all events the ideal was realised, and we all know what it was.

Might I say one word more? As this great figure passes out of men's sight to nobler work, be sure, on widened horizons corresponding to his tutored and exercised powers, does he leave no lessons behind for us? He leaves one very plain, homely one, and that is, 'Work while it is called to-day.' No opulence of endowment tempted this man to indolence, and no poverty of endowment will excuse us for sloth. Work is the law of our lives; and the more highly we are gifted, the more are we bound to serve.

He leaves us another lesson. Follow convictions as they open before you, and never think that you have done growing, or have reached your final stage.

He leaves another lesson. Do not suppose that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot satisfy the keenest intellect, nor dominate the strongest will. It has come to be a mark of narrowness and fossilhood to be a devout believer in Christ and His Cross. Some of you young men make an easy reputation for cleverness and advanced thought by the short and simple process of disbelieving what your mother taught you. Here is a man, probably as great as you are, with as keen an intellect, and he clung to the Cross of Christ, and had for his favourite hymn—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.'

He leaves another lesson. If you desire to make your characters all that it is in them to be made, you must, like him, go to Jesus Christ, and get your teaching and your inspiration from that great Lord. We cannot all be great men. Never mind. It is character that tells; we can all be good men, and we can all be Christian men. And whether we build cottages or palaces, if we build on one foundation, and only if we do, they will stand.

Moses leaves another lesson, as he glides into the past. 'This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption'; but He 'whom God hath raised up saw no corruption.' The lamps are quenched, the sun shines. Moses dies, 'The prophets, do they live for ever?' but when Moses and Elias faded from the Mount of Transfiguration 'the apostles saw no man any more, save Jesus only,' and the voice said, 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.'

The Decalogue: I—Man And God

'And God spake all these words, saying, 2. I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8. Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. 9. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.' —EXODUS xx. 1-11.

An obscure tribe of Egyptian slaves plunges into the desert to hide from pursuit, and emerges, after forty years, with a code gathered into 'ten words,' so brief, so complete, so intertwining morality and religion, so free from local or national peculiarities, so close fitting to fundamental duties, that it is to-day, after more than three thousand years, authoritative in the most enlightened peoples. The voice that spoke from Sinai reverberates in all lands. The Old World had other lawgivers who professed to formulate their precepts by divine inspiration: they are all fallen silent. But this voice, like the trumpet on that day, waxes louder and louder as the years roll. Whose voice was it? The only answer explaining the supreme purity of the commandments, and their immortal freshness, is found in the first sentence of this paragraph, 'God spake all these words.'

I. We have first the revelation, which precedes and lays the foundation for the commandments; 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.' God speaks to the nation as a whole, establishing a special relation between Himself and them, which is founded on His redeeming act, and is reciprocal, requiring that they should be His people, as He is their God. The manifestation in act of His power and of His love precedes the claim for reverence and obedience. This is a universal truth. God gives before He asks us to give. He is not a hard taskmaster, 'gathering where He has not strawn.' Even in that system which is eminently 'the law,' the foundation is a divine act of deliverance, and only when He has won the people for Himself by redeeming them from bondage does He call on them for obedience. His rule is built on benefits. He urges no mere right of the mightier, nor cares for service which is not the glad answer of gratitude. The flashing flames which ran as swift heralds before His descending chariot wheels, the quaking mountain, the long-drawn blasts of the trumpet, awed the gathered crowd. But the first articulate words made a tenderer appeal, and sought to found His right to command on His love, and their duty to obey on their gratitude. The great gospel principle, that the Redeemer is the lawgiver, and the redeemed are joyful subjects because their hearts are touched with love, underlies the apparently sterner system of the Old Testament. God opens His heart first, and then asks for men's.

This prelude certainly confines the Decalogue to the people of Israel. Their deliverance is the ground on which the law is rested, therefore, plainly, the obligation can be no wider than the benefit. But though we are not bound to obey any of the Ten Commandments, because they

were given to Israel, they are all, with one exception, demonstrably, a transcript of laws written on the heart of mankind; and this fact carries with it a strong presumption that the law of the Sabbath, which is the exception referred to, should be regarded as not an exception, but as a statute of the primeval law, witnessed to by conscience, republished in wondrous precision and completeness in these venerable precepts. The Ten Commandments are binding on us; but they are not binding as part, though the fundamental part, of the Jewish law.

Two general observations may be made. One is on the negative character of the commandments as a whole. Law prohibits because men are sinful. But prohibitions pre-suppose as their foundation positive commands. We are forbidden to do something because we are inclined to do it, and because we ought to do the opposite. Every 'thou shalt not' implies a deeper 'thou shalt.' The cold negation really rests on the converse affirmative command.

The second remark on the law as a whole is as to the relation which it establishes between religion and morality, making the latter a part of the former, but regarding it as secured only by the prior discharge of the obligations of the former. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. The attempts to build up a theory of ethics without reference to our relations to God, or to secure the practice of righteousness without such reference, or to substitute, with a late champion of unbelief, 'the service of man' for the worship of God, are all condemned by the deeper and simpler wisdom of this law. Christians should learn the lesson, which the most Jewish of the New Testament writers had drawn from it, that, 'pure and undefiled service' of God is the service of man, and should beware of putting asunder what God has joined so closely.

II. The first commandment bears in its negative form marks of the condition of the world when it was spoken, and of the strong temptation to polytheism which the Israelites were to resist. Everywhere but in that corner among the wild rocks of Sinai, men believed in 'gods many.' Egypt swarmed with them; and, no doubt, the purity of Abraham's faith had been sadly tarnished in his sons. We cannot understand the strange fascination of polytheism. It is a disease of humanity in an earlier stage than ours. But how strong it was and is, all history shows. All these many gods were on amicable terms with one another, and ready to welcome newcomers. But the monotheism, which was here laid at the very foundation of Israel's national life, parted it by a deep gulf from all the world, and determined its history.

The prohibition has little force for us; but the positive command which underlies it is of eternal force. We should rather think of it as a revelation and an invitation than as a mere command. For what is it but the declaration that at the centre of things is throned, not a rabble of godlings, nor a stony impersonal somewhat, nor a hypothetical unknowable entity, nor a shadowy abstraction, but a living Person, who can say 'Me,' and whom we can call on as 'Thou,' and be sure that He hears? No accumulation of finite excellences, however fair, can satisfy the imagination, which feels after one Being, the personal ideal of all perfectness. The understanding needs one ultimate Cause on which it can rest amid the dance of fleeting phenomena; the heart cannot pour out its love to be shared among many. No string of goodly pearls will ever give the merchantman assurance that his quest is complete. Only when human nature finds all in One, and that One a living Person, the Lover and Friend of all souls, does it fold its wings and rest as a bird after long flight.

The first commandment enjoins, or rather blesses us by showing us that we may cherish, supreme affection, worship, trust, self-surrender, aspiration, towards one God. After all, our God is that which we think most precious, for which we are ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which draws our warmest love; which, lost, would leave us desolate; which, possessed, makes us blessed. If we search our hearts with this 'candle of the Lord,' we shall

find many an idol set up in their dark corners, and be startled to discover how much we need to bring ourselves to be judged and condemned by this commandment It is the foundation of all human duty. Obedience to it is the condition of peace and blessedness, light and leading for mind, heart, will, affections, desires, hopes, fears, and all the world within, that longs for one living Person even when it least knows the meaning of its longings and the reason of its unrest.

III. The second commandment forbids all representations, whether of the one God or of false deities. The golden calf, which was a symbol of Jehovah, is condemned equally with the fair forms that haunted the Greek Olympus, or the half-bestial shapes of Egyptian mythology. The reasons for the prohibition may be considered as two,—the impossibility of setting forth the glory of the Infinite Spirit in any form, and the certainty that the attempt will sink the worshipper deeper in the mire of sense. An image degrades God and damages men. By it religion reverses its nature, and becomes another clog to keep the soul among the things seen, and an ally of all fleshly inclinations. We know how idolatry seemed to cast a spell over the Israelites from Egypt to Babylon, and how their first relapse into it took place almost before the voice which 'spake all these words' had ceased.

In its grosser form, we have no temptation to it. But there are other ways of breaking the commandment than setting up an image. All sensuous worship in which the treacherous aid of art is called in to elevate the soul, comes perilously near to contradicting its spirit, if not its letter. The attempt to make of the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to God by, is a great deal more likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder than up it. The history of public worship in the Christian Church teaches that the less it has to do with such slippery help the better. There is a strong current running in England, at all events, in the direction of bringing in a more artistic, or, as it is called, a 'less bare,' form of service. We need to remember that the God who is a Spirit is worshipped 'in spirit,' and that outward forms may easily choke, and outward aids hinder, that worship.

The especial difficulty of obedience to this commandment is marked by the reason or sanction annexed. That opens a wide field, on which it would be folly to venture here. There is a glimpse of God's character, and a statement of a law of His working. He is a 'jealous' God, We need not be afraid of the word. It means nothing but what is congruous with the loftiest conception of a loving God. It means that He allows of no rival in our hearts' affection, or in our submission for love's sake to Him. A half trust in God is no trust. How can worship be shared, or love be parted out, among a pantheon? Our poor hearts ask of one another and get from one another, wherever a man and a woman truly love, just what God asks,—'All in all, or not at all.' His jealousy is but infinite love seeking to be known as such, and asking for a whole heart.

The law of His providence sounds hard, but it is nothing more than stating in plain words the course of the world's history, which cannot be otherwise if there is to be any bond of human society at all. We hear a great deal in modern language about solidarity (and sometimes it is spelled with a final 'e,' to look more philosophical) and heredity. The teaching of this commandment is simply a statement of the same facts, with the addition that the Lawgiver is visible behind the law. The consequences of conduct do not die with the doers. 'The evil that men do, lives after them.' The generations are so knit together, and the full results of deeds are often so slow-growing, that one generation sows and another reaps. Who sowed the seed that fruited in misery, and was gathered in a bitter harvest of horrors and crimes in the French Revolution? Who planted the tree under which the citizens of the United States sit? Did not the seedling go over in the *Mayflower*? As long as the generations of men are more closely connected than those of sheep or birds, this solemn word must be true. Let us see that we sow

no tares to poison our children when we are in our graves. The saying had immediate application to the consequences of idolatry in the history of Israel, and was a forecast of their future. But it is true evermore and everywhere.

IV. The third commandment must be so understood as to bring it into line with the two preceding, as of equal breadth and equally fundamental. It cannot, therefore, be confined to the use of the name of God in oaths, whether false or trivial. No doubt, perjury and profane swearing are included in the sweep of the prohibition; but it reaches far beyond them. The name of God is the declaration of His being and character. We take His name 'in vain' when we speak of Him unworthily. Many a glib and formal prayer, many a mechanical or self-glorifying sermon, many an erudite controversy, comes under the lash of this prohibition. Professions of devotion far more fervid than real, confessions in which the conscience is not stricken, orthodox teachings with no throb of life in them, unconscious hypocrisies of worship, and much besides, are gibbeted here. The most vain of all words are those which have become traditional stock in trade for religious people, which once expressed deep convictions, and are now a world too wide for the shrunk faith which wears them.

The positive side underlying the negative is the requirement that our speech of God shall fit our thought of God, and our thought of Him shall fit His Name; that our words shall mirror our affections, and our affection be a true reflection of His beauty and sweetness; that cleansed lips shall reverently utter the Name above every name, which, after all speech, must remain unspoken; and that we shall feel it to be not the least wonderful or merciful of His condescensions that He 'is extolled with our tongues.'

V. The series of commandments referring to Israel's relations with God is distinctly progressive from the first to the fourth, which deals with the Sabbath. The fact that it appears here, side by side with these absolutely universal and first principles of religion and worship, clearly shows that the giver of the code regarded it as of equal comprehensiveness. If we believe that the giver of the code was God, we seem shut up to the conclusion that, though the Sabbath is a positive institution, and in so far unlike the preceding commandments, it is to be taken as not merely a temporary or Jewish ordinance. The ground on which it is rested here points to the same conclusion. The version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy bases it on the Egyptian deliverance, but this, on the divine rest after creation. As we have already said, we do not regard the Decalogue as binding on us because given to Israel; but we do regard it as containing laws universally binding, which are written by God's finger, not on tables of stone, but on 'the fleshly tables of the heart.' All the others are admittedly of this nature. Is not the Sabbath law likewise? It is not, indeed, inscribed on the conscience, but is the need for it not stamped on the physical nature? The human organism requires the seventh-day rest, whether men toil with hand or brain. Historically, it is not true that the Sabbath was founded by this legislation. The traces of its observance in Genesis are few and doubtful; but we know from the inscriptions that the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the moon were set apart by the Assyrians, and scholars can supply other instances. The 'Remember' of this commandment can scarcely be urged as establishing this, for it may quite as naturally be explained to mean 'Remember, as each successive seventh day comes round, to consecrate it.' But apart from that, the law written on body, mind, and soul says plainly to all men, 'Rest on the seventh day.' Body and mind need repose; the soul needs quiet communion with God. No vigorous physical, intellectual, or religious life will long be kept up, if that need be disregarded. The week was meant to be given to work, which is blessed and right if done after the pattern of God's. The Sabbath was meant to lift to a share in His rest, to bring eternity into time, to renew wasted strength 'by a wise passiveness,' and to draw hearts dissipated by contact with fleeting tasks back into the stillness where they can find themselves in fellowship with God.

We have not the Jewish Sabbath, nor is it binding on us. But as men we ought to rest, and resting, to worship, on one day in the week. The unwritten law of Christianity, moulding all outward forms by its own free spirit, gradually, and without premeditation, slid from the seventh to the first day, as it had clear right to do. It was the day of Christ's resurrection, probably of His ascension, and of Pentecost. It is 'the Lord's Day.' In observing it, we unite both the reasons for the Sabbath given in Exodus and Deuteronomy,—the completion of a higher creation in the resurrection rest of the Son of God, and the deliverance from a sorer bondage by a better Moses. The Christian Sunday and its religious observance are indispensable to the religious life of individuals and nations. The day of rest is indispensable to their well-being. Our hard-working millions will bitterly rue their folly, if they are tempted to cast it away on the plea of obtaining opportunities for intellectual culture and enjoyment. It is

'The couch of time, care's balm and bay,'

and we shall be wise if we hold fast by it; not because the Jews were bid to hallow the seventh day, but because we need it for repose, and we need it for religion.

The Decalogue: II.—Man And Man

'Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. 13. Thou shalt not kill. 14. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15. Thou shalt not steal. 16. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. 18. And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and, when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. 19. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. 21. And the people stood afar off: and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.' —EXODUS xx. 12-21.

I. The broad distinction between the two halves of the Decalogue is that the former deals with man's relations to God, and the latter with His relations to men. This double division is recognised in the New Testament summary of 'all the law,' as found in two commandments, and is probably implied in the two tables on which it was inscribed. Commentators have been much exercised, however, about how to divide the commandments between these two parts. The fifth, which is the first in this division, belongs in substance to the second half, but its form connects it with the first table. It is like the preceding ones in having a reason appended, and in naming 'the Lord thy God'; while the following are all bare, curt prohibitions. The fact seems to be that it is a transition commandment, and meant to cast special sacredness round the parental relationship, by paralleling it, in some sense, with that to God, of which it is a reflection. Other duties to other men stand on a different level from duties to parents. 'Honour,' which is to be theirs, is not remote from the reverence due to God. They are, as it were, His shadows to the child. The fatherhood of God is dimly revealed in that parting off the commandment from the second table, and assimilating it in form to the laws of the first.

II. The connection of the two halves of the Decalogue teaches some important truth. Josephus said a wise thing when he remarked that, 'whereas other legislators had made religion a department of virtue, Moses made virtue a department of religion.' No theory of morals is built upon the deepest foundation which does not recognise the final ground of the obligation of duty in the voice of God. Duty is *debitum*-debt. Who is the creditor? Myself? An impersonal law? Society? No, God. The practice of morality depends, like its theory, on religion. In the long-run, and on the wide scale, nations and periods which have lost the latter will not long keep the former in any vigour or purity. He who begins by erasing the first commandment will sooner or later make a clean sweep of all the ten. And, on the other hand, wherever there is true worship of the one God, there all fair charities between man and man will flourish and fruit. The two tables are one law. Duties to God come first, and those to man, who is made in the image of God, flow from these.

III. The order of these human duties is significant. We have, next after the law of parental reverence, three commandments, which, in a descending series of importance, forbid crimes against life, marriage, and property. Then the law passes from deeds to the more subtle, and, as men think, less grave, offences of the tongue. Next it crosses the boundary which divides human from divine law, and crimes from sins, to take cognisance of unspoken and unacted desires. So the order of progress in the first table is exactly the reverse of that in the second. There we begin with inward devotion, and travel outwards by deed and word to the sabbatical institution; here we begin with overt acts, and travel inwards, through words, to the hidden

desire. The end touches the beginning. For that which we ‘covet’ is our God; and the first commandment is only obeyed when our hearts hunger after Him, and not after earth. The sequence here corresponds to the order of progress in our knowledge and practice of our human duties. The first thing that the rudest state of society has to do is to establish some kind of security for life and property and woman’s honour. The worst men know that much as their duty, however foul may be their lips, and hot their passions. Then the recognition of the sanctity of the great gift of speech, and the supreme obligations of veracity, grow upon men as they get above the earlier stage. Most children pass through a phase when they tell lies as pastime, and most rude societies and half-moralised men have a similar epoch. Last of all, when actions have been bridled and the tongue taught the law of truth, comes the full recognition that the work is not done till the silent longing of a hungry heart is stilled, and that unselfish love of our neighbour is only perfect when we can rejoice in his good and wish none of it for ourselves. The second table is a chart of moral progress.

IV. The scope of these laws has often been violently stretched so as to include all human duty; but without tugging at them so as to make them cover everything, we may note briefly how far they extend. We are scarcely warranted in taking any of them but the last, as going deeper than overt acts, for, though our Lord has taught in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred is murder, and impure desire adultery, that is His deepening of the commandment. But it is quite fair to bring out the positive precept which, in each case, underlies the stern, short prohibition.

The fifth commandment shares with the fourth the distinction of being a positive command. It enjoins ‘honour,’ not ‘love,’ partly because, in olden times, the father was a prince in his house in a sense that has long since ceased to be true, partly because there was less need to enjoin the affection which is in some degree instinctive, than the submission and respect which the children are tempted to withhold, partly in order to suggest the analogy with reverence to God. A strange change has passed over the relations of parents and children, even within a generation. There is more, perhaps, of frank familiar intercourse, which, no doubt, is an improvement on the old style. But there is a great deal less of what the commandment enjoins. City life, education, the general impairing of the idea of authority, which we see everywhere, have told upon many families; and many a father who, by indulgence or by too much engrossment in business, lets the children twitch the reins out of his hands, might lament, as his grown-up children spurn control, ‘If then I be a father, where is mine honour?’ There is no one of the commandments which it is more needful to preach in England than this.

The promise attached to it has another side of threatening. It is a plain fact that when the paternal relation is corrupted, a powerful solvent has been introduced which rapidly tends to disintegrate society. The most ancient empire in the world today, China, has, amid many vices and follies, been preserved mainly by the profound reverence to ancestors which is largely its real working religion. The most vigorous power in the old world, Rome, owed its iron might not only to its early simplicity of life and its iron tenacity, but to the strength of paternal authority and the willingness of filial obedience. No more serious damage can be inflicted on society or on individuals than the weakening of the honour paid to fathers and mothers.

‘Thou shalt not kill’ forbids not only the act of murder, but all that endangers life. It enjoins all care, diligence, and effort to preserve it. A man who looks on while another drowns, or who sends a ship out half manned and overloaded, breaks it as really as a red-handed murderer. But the commandment was not intended to touch the questions of capital punishment or of war. These were allowed under the Jewish code, and cannot therefore be

supposed to be prohibited here. How far either is consistent with the deepest meaning of the law, as expanded and reconsecrated in Christianity, is another question. Their defenders have to execute some startling feats of gymnastics to harmonise either with the New Testament.

'Curus kind o' Christian dooty, This 'ere cuttin' folks's throats.'

The ground of the commandment is not given, seeing that conscience is expected to admit its force as soon as stated. But its place at the head of the second table brings it into connection with the first commandment, and suggests that man's life is sacred because he is the image of God. As Christians, we are bound to interpret it on the lines which Christ has laid down; according to which, hatred is murder, and love is the fulfilling of this as of all other laws. So Luther's comprehensive summing up of the duties enjoined may be accepted: 'Patience, gentleness, kindliness, peaceableness, pity, and, of all things, a sweet, friendly heart, without any hate, anger, bitterness, toward any, even enemies.'

In like manner, the seventh commandment sanctifies wedded life, and is the first step in that true reverence of woman which marked the Jewish people through all their history, and was in such contrast to her position in all other ancient societies. Purity in all the relations of the sexes, the control of passion, the reverence for marriage, are subjects difficult to speak of in public. But modern society sorely needs some plain speaking on these subjects—abundance of bread and idleness, facilities for divorce, the filth which newspapers lay down on every breakfast-table, the insidious sensuality of much fiction and art, the licence of the stage. The opportunities for secret profligacy in great cities conspire to loosen the bonds of morality. I would venture to ask public teachers seriously to consider their duty in this matter, and to seek for opportunities wisely to warn budding youth of the pitfalls in its path.

What is 'stealing'? As Luther says, 'It is the smallest part of the thieves that are hung. If we are to hang them all, where shall we get rope enough? We must make all our belts and straps into halters.'

Theft is the taking or keeping what is not 'mine.' But what do we mean by 'mine'? Communists tell us that 'property is theft.' But that is the exaggeration of the scriptural teaching that all property is trust property, that possessions are 'mine' on conditions and for purposes, that I cannot 'do what I will with mine own,' but am a steward, set to dispense it to those who want. The Christian doctrine of stewardship extends this commandment over much ground which we seldom think of as affected by it. All sharp practice in business, the shopkeeper's false weights and the merchant's equivalents of these, adulterations, pirating trademarks, imitating a rival's goods, infringing patents, and the like, however disguised by fine names, are neither more nor less than stealing. Many a prosperous gentleman says solemnly every Sunday of his life, 'Incline our hearts to keep this law,' who would have to live in a much more modest fashion if his prayer were, by any unfortunate accident, answered.

False witness is not only given in court. The sins of the tongue against the law of love are more subtle and common than those of act. 'Come, let us enjoy ourselves, and abuse our neighbours,' is the real meaning of many an invitation to social intercourse. If some fairy could treat our newspapers as the Russian censors do, and erase all the lies about the opposite side, which they report and coin, how many blank columns there would be! If all the words of ill-natured calumny, of uncharitable construction of their friends which people speak, could be made inaudible, what stretches of silence would open out in much animated talk! 'A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.'

But deed and word will not be right unless the heart be right; and the heart will be wrong unless it be purged of the bitter black drop of covetousness. The desire to make my

neighbour's goods mine is the parent of all breaches of neighbourly duty, even as its converse 'love' is the fulfilling of it all; for such desire implies that I am ruled by selfishness, and that I would willingly deprive another of goods, for my own gratification. Such a temper, like a wild boar among vineyards, will trample down all the rich clusters in order to slake its own thirst. Find a man who yields to his desires after his neighbour's goods, and you find a man who will break all commandments like a hornet in a spider's web. Be he a Napoleon, and glorified as a conqueror and hero, or be he some poor thief in a jail, he has let his covetousness get the upper hand, and so all wrong-doing is possible. Nor is it only the second table which covetousness dashes to fragments. It serves the first in the same fashion; for, as St. Paul puts it, the covetous man 'is an idolater,' and is as incapable of loving God as of loving his neighbour. This final commandment, overleaping the boundary between conduct and character, and carrying the light of duty into the dark places of the heart, where deeds are fashioned, sets the whole flock of bats and twilight-loving creatures in agitation. It does what is the main work of the law, in compelling us to search our hearts, and in convincing of sin. It is the converse of the thought that all the law is contained in love; for it closes the list of sins with one which begets them all, and points us away from actions and words which are its children to selfish desire as in itself the transgression of all the law, whether it be that which prescribes our relations to God or that which enjoins our duties to man,

The Feast Of Ingathering In The End Of The Year

'And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which them hast sown In thy field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.' —EXODUS xxiii. 16.

The Israelites seem to have had a double beginning of the year—one in spring, one at the close of harvest; or it may only be that here the year is regarded from the natural point of view—a farmer's year. This feast was at the gathering in of the fruits, which was the natural close of the agricultural year.

This festival of ingathering was the Feast of Tabernacles. It is remarkable that the three great sacred festivals, the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, had all a reference to agriculture, though two of them also received a reference to national deliverances. This fact may show that they were in existence before Moses, and that he simply imposed a new meaning on them.

Be that as it may, I take these words now simply as a starting-point for some thoughts naturally suggested by the period at which we stand. We have come to the end of another year—looked for so long, passed so swiftly, and now seeming to have so utterly departed!

I desire to recall to you and to myself the solemn real sense in which for us too the end of the year is a 'time of ingathering' and 'harvest.' We too begin the new year with the accumulated consequences of these past days in our 'barns and garners.'

Now, in dealing with this thought, let me put it in two or three forms.

I. Think of the past as still living in and shaping the present.

It is a mere illusion of sense that the past is gone utterly. 'Thou carriest them away, as with a flood.' We speak of it as irrevocable, unalterable, that dreadful past. It is solemnly true that 'ye shall no more return that way.'

But there is a deeper truth in the converse thought that the apparently transient is permanent, that nothing human ever dies, that the past is present. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth,'—yes, but only its petals drop, and as they fall, the fruit which they sheltered swells and matures.

The thought of the present as the harvest from the past brings out in vivid and picturesque form two solemn truths.

The first is the passing away of all the external, but of it only. It has all gone where the winter's cold, the spring rains, the summer's heats have gone. But just as these live in the fruitful results that have accrued from them, just as the glowing sunshine of the departed ardent summer is in the yellow, bending wheat-ear or glows in the cluster, so, in a very solemn sense, 'that which hath been is now' in regard to every life. The great law of continuity makes the present the inheritor of the past. That law operates in national life, in which national characteristics are largely precipitates, so to speak, from national history. But it works even more energetically, and with yet graver consequences, in our individual lives. 'The child is father of the man.' What we are depends largely on what we have been, and what we have been powerfully acts in determining what we shall be. Life is a mystic chain, not a heap of unconnected links.

And there is another very solemn way in which the past lives on in each of us. For not only is our present self the direct descendant of our past selves, but that past still subsists in that we are responsible for it, and shall one day have to answer for it. The writer of Ecclesiastes followed the statement just now quoted as to the survival of the past, with another, which is impressive in its very vagueness: ‘God seeketh again that which is passed away.’

So the undying past lives in its results in ourselves, and in our being answerable for it to God.

This metaphor is insufficient in one respect. There is not one epoch for sowing and another for reaping, but the two processes are simultaneous, and every moment is at once a harvest and a seed-time.

This fact masks the reality of the reaping here, but it points on to the great harvest when God shall say, ‘Gather the wheat into My barns!’

II. Notice some specific forms of this reaping and ingathering.

(1) Memory.

It is quite possible that in the future it may embrace all the life.

‘Chambers of imagery.’

(2) Habits and character. Like the deposit of a flood. ‘Habitus’ means clothing, and cloth is woven from single threads.

(3) Outward consequences, position, reputation, etc.

III. Make a personal reference to ourselves.

What sort of harvest are we carrying over from this year? Lay this to heart as certain, that we enter on no new year—or new day—empty-handed, but always ‘bearing our sheaves with us.’ ‘Be not deceived! God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’

But remember, that while this law remains, there is also the law of forgiveness, ‘Go in peace!’ and there may be a new beginning, ‘Sin no more!’

‘The Love Of Thine Espousals’

‘And He said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. 2. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him. 3. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. 4. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. 6. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. 9. Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; 10. And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a pared work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. 11. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. 12. And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them,’—EXODUS xxiv. 1-12.

An effort is needed to feel what a tremendous and unique fact is narrated in these words. Next to the incarnation, it is the most wonderful and far-reaching moment in history. It is the birthday of a nation, which is God’s son. It is the foundation stone of all subsequent revelation. Its issues oppress that ancient people to-day, and its promises are not yet exhausted. It is history, not legend, nor the product of later national vanity. Whatever may come of analysing ‘sources’ and of discovering ‘redactors,’ Israel held a relation to God all its own; and that relation was constituted thus.

I. Note the preliminaries of the covenant. The chapter begins with the command to Moses to come up to the mount, with Aaron and other representatives of the people. But he was already there when the command was given, and a difficulty has been found (or, shall we say, made) out of this. The explanation seems reasonable and plain enough, that the long section extending from Exodus xx. 22, and containing the fundamental laws as spoken by God, is closed by our verses 1 and 2, which imply, in the very order to Moses to come up with his companions, that he must first go down to bring them. God dismisses him as a king might end an audience with his minister, by bidding him return with attendants. The singular use of the third person in reference to Moses in the third verse is not explained by supposing another writer; for, whoever wrote it, it would be equally anomalous.

So he comes down from the stern cloud-encircled peak to that great plain where the encampment lay, and all eyes watch his descent. The people gather round him, eager and curious. He recounts ‘all the judgments,’ the series of laws, which had been lodged in his mind by God, and is answered by the many-voiced shout of too swiftly promised obedience. Glance over the preceding chapters, and you will see how much was covered by ‘all that the Lord hath spoken.’ Remember that every lip which united in that lightly made vow drew its last breath in the wilderness, because of disobedience, and the burst of homage becomes a sad witness to human weakness and changefulness. The glory of God flashed above them on the

barren granite, the awful voice had scarcely died into desert silence, nerves still tingled with excitement, and wills were bowed before Jehovah, manifestly so near. For a moment, the people were ennobled, and obedience seemed easy. They little knew what they were saying in that brief spasm of devotion. It was high-water then, but the tide soon turned, and all the ooze and ugliness, covered now, lay bare and rotting. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' We may take the lesson to ourselves, and see to it that emotion consolidates into strenuous persistency, and does not die in the very excitement of the vow.

The pledge of obedience was needed before the Covenant could be made, and, as we shall find, was reiterated in the very centre of the ceremonial ratification. For the present, it warranted Moses in preparing for the morrow's ritual. His first step was to prepare a written copy of the laws to which the people had sworn. Here we come across an old, silenced battery from which a heavy fire used to be directed against the historical accuracy of the Pentateuch. Alphabetic writing was of a later date. There could not have been a written code. The statement was a mere attempt of a later age to claim antiquity for comparatively modern legislation. It was no more historical than similar traditions in other countries, Sibylline books, etc. All that is out of court now. Perhaps some other guns will be spiked in due time, that make a great noise just at present. Then comes the erection of a rude altar, surrounded by twelve standing stones, just as on the east of Jordan we may yet see dolmens and menhirs. The altar represents the divine presence; and the encircling stones, Israel gathered around its God. The group is a memorial and a witness to the people,—and a witness against them, if disobedient. Thus two permanent records were prepared, the book and the monument. The one which seemed the more lasting has perished; the more fragile has endured, and will last to the world's end.

II. Note the rite of ratification of the covenant. The ceremonial is complex and significant. We need not stay on the mere picture, impressive and, to our eyes, strange as it is, but rather seek to bring out the meaning of these smoking offerings, and that blood flung on the altar and on the crowd. First came two sorts of sacrifices, offered not by priests, but by selected young men, probably one for each tribe, whose employment in sacrificial functions shows the priestly character of the whole nation, according to the great words of Exodus xix. 6. Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings differed mainly in the use made of the sacrifice, which was wholly consumed by fire in the former, while it was in part eaten by the offerer in the latter. The one symbolised entire consecration; the other, communion with God on the basis of sacrifice. The sin-offering does not appear here, as being of later origin, and the product of the law, which deepened the consciousness of transgression. But these sacrifices, at the threshold of the covenant, receive an expiatory character by the use made of the blood, and witness to the separation between God and man, which renders amity and covenant friendship impossible, without a sacrifice.

They must have yielded much blood. It is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two parties to the covenant, like the cloven animals in Abraham's covenant. One half is 'sprinkled' on the altar, or, as the word means, 'swung,'—which suggests a larger quantity and a more vehement action than 'sprinkling' does. That drenching of the altar with gore is either a piece of barbarism or a solemn symbol of the central fact of Christianity no less than of Judaism, and a token that the only footing on which man can be received into fellowship with God is through the offering of a pure life, instead of the sinner, which, accepted by God, covers or expiates sin. There can be no question that the idea of expiation is at the very foundation of the Old Testament ritual. It is fashionable to regard the expiatory element of Christianity as 'Hebrew old clothes,' but the fact is the other way about. It is not that Christianity has not been able to rid itself of a rude and false conception, but that 'Judaism'

had its sacrifices appointed by God, in order to prepare the way for the true offering, which takes away sin.

The expiation by blood having been thus made, the hindrances to the nation's entering into covenant are removed. Therefore follows in logical order the next step, their formal (alas! how purely formal it proved to be) taking on themselves its obligations. The freshly written 'book' is produced, and read there, to the silent people, before the bloody altar, beneath the peak of Sinai. Again the chorus of assent from a thousand throats echoes among the rocks. They accept the conditions. They had done so last night; but this is the actual contract on their part, and its place in the whole order of the ceremony is significant. It follows expiation, without which man cannot enter into friendship with God, without the acceptance of which man will not yield himself in obedience. The vows which God approves are those of men whose sins are covered.

The final step was the sprinkling of the people with the blood. The division of the blood into two portions signifies that it had an office in regard to each party to the covenant. If it had been possible to pour it all on the altar, and then all on the people, that would have been done. The separation into two portions was inevitable; but in reality it is the same blood which, sprinkled on the altar, expiates, and on the worshipper, consecrates, cleanses, unites to God, and brings into covenant with Him. Hence Moses accompanies the sprinkling of the people with the explanation, 'This is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you, upon all these conditions' (Rev. Ver. margin). It ratifies the compact on both sides. God 'hath made' it, in accepting the sprinkled blood; they have made it, in being sprinkled therewith. But while the rite sets forth the great gospel truth of expiation, the Covenant moves within the region of law. It is made 'on the basis of all these words,' and is voidable by disobedience. It is the *Magna Charta* of the nation, and its summing up is 'this do, and thou shalt live.' Its promises are mainly of outward guardianship and national blessings. And these are suspended by it, as they were in fact contingent, on the national observance of the national vow. The general idea of a covenant is that of a compact between two parties, each of whom comes under obligations contingent on the other's discharge of his. Theologians have raised the question whether God's covenant is of this kind. Surely it is. His promises to Israel had an 'if,' and the fulfilment of the conditions necessarily secured the accomplishment of the promises. The ritual of the first covenant transcends the strictly retributive compact which it ratified, and shadows a gospel beyond law, even the new covenant which brings better gifts, and does not turn on 'do,' but simply on the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus. The words of Moses were widened to carry a blessing beyond his thoughts, which was disclosed when, in an upper chamber, a dying man said to the twelve representatives of the true Israel, 'This is the new covenant in My blood, drink ye all of it.' The blood which Moses sprinkled gave ritual cleansing, but it remained outside the man. The blood of Jesus gives true purification, and passes into our veins to become our life. The covenant by Moses was 'do and live'; that in Christ is 'believe and live.' Moses brought commandments, and on them his covenant was built; Christ brings gifts, and His covenant is all promises, which are ours on the simple condition of taking them.

III. Note the vision and feast on the basis of the covenant. The little company that climbed the mountain, venturing within the fence, represented the whole people. Aaron and his sons were the destined priests. The elders were probably seventy, because that number is the product of the two perfect numbers, and perhaps with allusion to the seventy souls who went down into Egypt with Jacob. It is emphatically said that they saw 'the God of Israel,' for that day's covenant had made him so in a new closeness of relationship. In token of that new access to and possession in Him, which was henceforth to be the prerogative of the obedient people, some manifestation of His immediate presence was poured on their astonished eyes. It is

needless to inquire its nature, or to ask how such a statement is consistent with the spirituality of the divine nature, or with what this same book of Exodus says, ‘There shall no man see Me, and live.’ The plain intention is to assert that there was a visible manifestation of the divine presence, but no attempt is made to describe it. Our eyes are stayed at the pavement beneath His feet, which was blue as sapphire, and bright as the cloudless sky gleaming above Sinai. It is enough to learn that ‘the secret of the Lord is with them’ to whom He shows ‘His covenant’; that, by the power of sacrifice, a true vision of God may be ours, which is ‘in a mirror, darkly,’ indeed, but yet is real and all sufficing. Before the covenant was made, Israel had been warned to keep afar lest He should break through on them, but now ‘He laid not His hand’ upon them; for only blessing can stream from His presence now, and His hand does not crush, but uphold.

Nor is this all which we learn of the intercourse with God which is possible on the ground of His covenant. They ‘did eat and drink.’ That may suggest that the common enjoyments of the natural life are in no way inconsistent with the vision of God; but more probably it is meant to teach a deeper lesson. We have remarked that the ritual of the peace-offering included a feast on the sacrifice ‘before the Lord,’ by which was signified communion with Him, as at His table, and this meal has the same meaning. They who stand in covenant relations with God, feed and feast on a sacrifice, and thereby hold fellowship with Him, since He too has accepted the sacrifice which nourishes them. So that strange banquet on Sinai taught a fact which is ever true, prophesied the deepest joys of Christian experience, which are realised in the soul that eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, and dimly shadowed the yet future festival, when, cleansed and consecrated by His blood, they who have made a covenant with Him by His sacrifice, shall be gathered unto Him in the heavenly mount, where He makes a ‘feast of fat things and wines on the lees well refined,’ and there shall sit, for ever beholding His glory, and satisfied with the provisions of His house.

The Bread Of The Presence

'Thou shalt set upon the table shew-bread before Me alway.'—EXODUS xxv. 30.

I suspect that to many readers the term 'shew-bread' conveys little more meaning than if the Hebrew words had been lifted over into our version. The original expression, literally rendered, is 'bread of the face'; or, as the Revised Version has it in the margin, 'presence bread,' and the meaning of that singular designation is paraphrased and explained in my text: 'Thou shalt set upon the table, bread of the presence before Me always.' It was bread, then, which was laid in the presence of God. The directions with regard to it may be very briefly stated. Every Sabbath the priests laid upon the table which stood on one side of the Altar of Incense, in the Inner Court, two piles of loaves, on each of which piles was placed a pan of incense. They lay there for a week, being replaced by fresh ones on the coming Sabbath.

The Altar of Incense in the middle symbolised the thought that the priestly life, which was the life of the nation, and is the life of the Christian both individually and collectively, is to be centrally and essentially a life of prayer. On one side of it stood the great golden lamp which, in like manner, declared that the activities of the priestly life, which was the life of Israel, and is the life of the Christian individually and collectively, is to be, in its manward aspect, a light for the world. On the other side of the Altar of Incense stood this table with its loaves. What does it say about the life of the priest, the Church, and the individual Christian? That is the question that I wish to try to answer here; and in doing so let me first ask you to look at the thing itself, and then to consider its connection with the other two articles in connection with which it made a threefold oneness.

I. Let me deal with this singular provision of the ancient ritual by itself alone.

Bread is a product at once of God's gift and of man's work. In the former aspect, He 'leaves not Himself without witness, in that,' in the yearly miracle of the harvest, 'He gives us bread from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness'; in the latter, considered as a product of man's activity, agriculture is, if not the first, at all events in settled communities the prime, form of human industry. The farmer and the baker begin the series of man's industries. So that these loaves were fitly taken as representatives of all kinds of human industry and their products, and as such were consecrated to God. That is the broad significance of this institution, which, as we shall have to see, links itself with the other two conceptions of the priestly life in its Godward and in its manward aspect. Now the first thing that is suggested, therefore, is the plain obligation, which is also a blessed privilege, for all men who are priests of God by faith in, and union with, the great High Priest, that they lay all their activities as an offering before God. The loaves in their very place on that table, right in front of the veil that parted the Inner Court from the inmost of all, where the Shekinah shone, and the Cherubim bowed in worship, tell us that in some sense they, too, were an offering, and that the table was an altar. Their sacrificial character is emphasised by the fact that upon the top of each of the piles there was laid a pan of incense.

So, then, the whole was an offering of Israel's activities and its results to God. And we, Christian men and women, have to make an offering of all our active life, and all its products. That thought opens up many considerations, one or two of which I ask leave to touch briefly. First, then, if my active life is to be an offering to God, that means that I am to surrender myself. And that surrender means three things: first that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my end; second, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my law; third, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my power. As for the first,

whatever a man does for any motive other, and with any end less, than God and His Glory, that act, beautiful as it may be in other respects, loses its supreme beauty, and falls short of perfect nobleness, just in the measure in which other motives, or other ends, than this supreme one, are permitted to dominate it. I do not contend for such an impossible suppression of myself as that my own blessedness and the like shall be in no manner my end, but I do maintain this, that in good old language, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God,' and that anything which I do, unless it is motived by this regard to Him as its 'chief end,' loses its noblest consecration, and is degraded from its loftiest beauty. The Altar sanctifies, and not only sanctifies but ennobles, the gift. That which has in it the taint of self-regard so pronouncedly and dominantly as that God is shut out, is like some vegetation down in low levels at the bottom of a vale, which never has the sun to shine upon it. But let it rise as some tree above the brushwood until its topmost branches are in the light, and then it is glorified. To live to self is ignoble and mean; to live for others is higher and nobler. But highest and noblest of all is to offer the loaves to God, and to make Him the end of all our activities.

Again, there is another consideration, bearing on another region in which the assertive self is only too apt to spoil all work. And that is, that if our activities are offerings to God, this means that His supreme Will is to be our law, and that we obey His commands and accept His appointments in quiet submission. The tranquillity of heart, the accumulation of power, which come to men when they, from the depths, say, 'Not my will but Thine be done'; 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth,' cannot be too highly stated. There is no such charm to make life quiet and strong as the submission of the will to God's providences, and the swift obedience of the will to God's commandments. And whilst to make self my end mars what else is beautiful, making self my law mars it even more.

Further, we offer our activities to God when we fall back upon Him as our one power, and say, 'Perfect Thy strength in my weakness.' He that goes out into the world to do his daily work, of whatsoever sort it is—you in your little sphere, or I in mine—in dependence upon himself, is sure to be defeated. He that says 'we have no strength against this great multitude that cometh against us, but our eyes are unto Thee,' will, sooner or later, be able to go back with joy, and say, 'the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.' The man that goes into the fight like that foolish prime minister of France under the Empire, 'with a light heart.' will very soon find his Sedan, and have shamefully to surrender. Brethren, these three things, making God the end of my work; making God's will the law of my work; making God's strength the power of my work; these are the ways by which we, too, can bring our little pile of barley bread, and lay it upon that table.

Again, this consecration of life's activities is to be carried out by treating their products, as well as themselves, as offerings to God. The loaves were the results of human activity. They were also the products of divine gifts elaborated by human effort. And both things are true about all the bread that you and I have been able to make for the satisfaction of our desires, or the sustenance of our strength—it comes ultimately from the gift of God. In regard to this consecration of the product of our activities, as well as of our activities themselves, I have but two words to offer, and the one is, let us see to it that we consecrate our enjoyment of God's gifts by bringing that enjoyment, as well as the activities which He has blessed to produce it, into His presence. That table bore the symbols of the grateful recognition of God's mercies by the people. And when our hearts are glad, and our 'bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne,' we have special need to take care that our joy be not godless, nor our enjoyment of His gifts be without reference to Himself. 'Ah,' you say, 'that is a threadbare commonplace.' Yes, it is, dear friends; it is a commonplace just because it is needful at every turn, if we are to make our lives what they ought to be.

May I say another thing? and that is, that the loaves that were laid within the Sanctuary were not intended to be separated from the others that were eaten in the tents, nor were they meant to be a kind of purchasing of an indulgence, or of a right, by surrendering a little, to the godless and selfish enjoyment of the rest of the batch, or of the rest of the harvest. Let us apply that to our money, which is one of the products of our activities; and not fancy, as a great many people do, that what we give as a subscription to some benevolent or religious institution buys for us the right to spend all the rest selfishly. That is another commonplace, very threadbare and very feeble, when we speak it, but with claws and teeth in it that will lay hold of us, when we try to put it in practice. The enjoyments and the products of our daily activities are to be offered to God.

Still further, this table with its burden has suggestions that as Christians we are bound to bring all our work to Him for His judgment upon it. The loaves were laid right in front of the veil, behind which blazed the light of His presence. And that meant that they were laid before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment of all-judging' God. Whether we bring our activities there or no, of course in a very real and solemn sense they are there. But what I desire to insist upon now is how important, for the nobleness and purity of our daily lives, it is that we should be in the continual habit of realising to ourselves the thought that whatever we do, we do before His Face. The Roman Catholics talk about 'the practice of the presence of God.' One does not like the phrase, but all true religion will practise what is meant by it. And for us it should be as joyous to think, 'Thou God seest me,' as it is for a child to play or work with a quiet heart, because it knows that its mother is sitting somewhere not very far off and watching that no harm comes to it. That thought of being in His presence would be for us a tonic, and a test. How it would pull us up in many a meanness, and keep our feet from wandering into many forbidden ways, if there came like a blaze of light into our hearts the thought: 'Thou God seest me!' There are many of our activities, I am afraid, which we should not like to put down on that table. Can *you* think of any in *your* lives that you would be rather ashamed to lay there, and say to Him, 'Judge Thou this'? Then do not do it. That is a brief, but a very stringent, easily applied, and satisfactory test of a great many doubtful things. If you cannot take them into the Inner Court, and lay them down there, and say, 'Look, Lord! this is my baking,' be sure that they are made, not of wholesome flour, but of poisoned grain, and that there is death in them.

Further, this table, with its homely burden of twelve poor loaves, may suggest to us how the simplest, smallest, most secular of our activities is a fit offering to Him. The loaves were not out of place amidst the sanctities of the spot, nor did they seem to be incongruous with the golden altar and the golden lamp-stand, and yet they were but twelve loaves. The poorest of our works is fit to be carried within the shrine, and laid upon His altar. We may be sure that He delights even in the meanest and humblest of them, if only we take them to Him and say: 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' Ah! there are a great many strange things in Christ's treasury. Mothers will hoard up trifles that belonged to their children, which everybody else thinks worthless. Jesus Christ has in His storehouse a 'cup of cold water,' the widows' mites, and many another thing that the world counts of no value, and He recognises as precious. There is an old story about some great emperor making a progress through his dominions, where he had been receiving precious gifts from cities and nobles, and as the gay cortège was passing a poor cottage, the peasant-owner came out with a coarse earthenware cup filled with spring water in his hand, and offered it to his overlord as the only gift that he could give. The king accepted it, and ennobled him on the spot. Take your barley loaves to Christ, and He will lay them up in His storehouse.

II. Now I need only say a word or two about the other aspect of this table of shew-bread, taken with the other two articles in conjunction with which it formed a unity.

The lamp and the table go together. They are both offshoots from the altar in the middle. That is to say, your lives will not shine before men unless your activities are offered to God. The smallest taint of making self your end, your law, or your strength, mingling with your lives, and manifest in their actions, will dim the light which shines from them, and men will be very quick to find out and say, 'He calls himself a Christian; but he lives for himself.' Neither the light, which is the radiance of a Christian life manwards, can be sustained without the offering of the life in its depths to God, nor can the activities of the life be acceptably offered to Him, unless the man that offers them 'lets his light shine before men.' The lamp and the table must go together.

The lamp and the table must together be offshoots from the altar. If there be not in the centre of the life aspiration after Him in the depths of the heart, communion with Him in the silent places of the soul, then there will be little brightness in the life to ray out amongst men, and there will be little consecration of the activities to be laid before God. The reason why the manifold bustle and busy-ness of the Christian Church today sows so much and reaps so little, lies mainly here, that they have forgotten to a large extent how the altar in the centre must give the oil for the lamp to shine, and the grain to be made into the loaves. And, on the other hand, the altar in the middle needs both its flanking accompaniments. For the Christian life is to be no life of cloistered devotion and heavenward aspiration only or mainly, but is to manifest its still devotion and its heavenward aspiration by the consecration of its activities to God, and the raying of them out into a darkened world. The service of man is the service of God, for lamp and table are offshoots of the altar. But the service of God is the basis of the best service of man, for the altar stands between the lamp and the table.

So, brethren, let us blend these three aspects into a unity, the Altar, the Lamp, the Table, and so shall we minister aright, and men will call us the 'priests of the Most High God,' till we pass within the veil where, better than the best of us here can do, we shall be able to unite still communion and active service, and shine as the sun in the Kingdom of our Father. 'His servants shall serve Him' with priestly ministrations, 'and shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.'

The Golden Lampstand

'Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold….' —EXODUS xxv. 31.

If we could have followed the Jewish priest as he passed in his daily ministrations into the Inner Court, we should have seen that he first piled the incense on the altar which stood in its centre, and then turned to trim the lamps of the golden candlestick which flanked it on one side. Of course it was not a candlestick, as our versions misleadingly render the word. That was an article of furniture unknown in those days. It was a lampstand; from a central upright stem branched off on either side three arms decorated with what the Book calls 'beaten work,' and what we in modern jewellers' technicality call *répoussé* work, each of which bore on its top, like a flower on its stalk, a shallow cup filled with oil, in which a wick floated. There were thus seven lamps in all, including that on the central stem. The material was costly, the work adorning it was artistic, the oil with which it was fed was carefully prepared, the number of its lamps expressed perfection, it was daily trimmed by the priest, and there, all through the night, it burned, the one spot of light in a dark desert.

Now, this Inner Court of the Tabernacle or Temple was intended, with its furniture, to be symbolical of the life of Israel, the priestly nation. The Altar of Incense, which was the main article of ecclesiastical equipment there, and stood in the central place, represented the life of Israel in its Godward aspect, as being a life of continual devotion. The Candlestick on the one hand, and the Table of Shew-bread on the other, were likewise symbolical of other aspects of that same life. I have to deal now with the meaning and lessons of this golden lampstand, and it teaches us—

I. The office manwards of the Church and of the individual Christian.

Let me just for a moment recall the various instances in which this symbol reappears in Scripture. We have, in the vision of the prophet who sustained and animated the spirits of Israel in their Restoration, the repetition of the emblem, in the great golden candlestick which Zechariah saw, fed by two 'olive trees,' one on either side of it; and in the last book of Scripture we have that most significant and lovely variation of it, the reappearance, not of the *one* golden candlestick or lampstand, but of *seven*. The formal unity is at an end, but the seven constitute a better, more vital unity, because Christ is in the midst. We may learn the lesson that the Christian conception of the oneness of the Church towers above the Jewish conception of the oneness of Israel by all the difference that there is between a mere mechanical, external unity, and a vital oneness—because all are partakers of the one Christ. I may recall, also, how our Lord, in that great programme of the Kingdom which Matthew has gathered together in what we call 'the Sermon on the Mount,' immediately after the Beatitudes, goes on to speak of the office of His people under the two metaphors of 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world,' and immediately connects with the latter of the two a reference to a lamp lit and set upon its stand; and clinches the whole by the exhortation, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.'

A remarkable and beautiful variation of that exhortation is found in one of the Apostolic writings when Paul, instead of saying, 'Ye are the light of the world,' says, 'Shine as lights in the world,' and so gives us the individual, as well as the collective and ecclesiastical, aspect of these great functions. That is a hint that is very much needed. Christian people are quite willing to admit that the Church, the abstraction, the generalisation, is 'the light of the world.' But they are wofully apt to slip their own necks out from under the yoke of the obligation,

and to forget that the collective light is only the product of the millions of individual lights rushing together—just as in some gas-lights you have a whole series of minute punctures, each of which gives out its own little jet of radiance, and all run together into one brilliant circle. So do not let us escape the personal pressure of this office, or lay it all on the broad shoulders of that generalised abstraction 'the Church.' But, since the collective light is but the product of the individual small shinings, let us take the two lessons: first, contribute our part to the general lustre; second, be content with having our part lost in the general light.

But now let me turn for a little while to the more specific meaning of this symbol. The life which, by the central position of the Altar of Incense, was symbolised as being centrally, essentially in its depths and primarily, a life of habitual devotion and communion with God, in its manward aspect is a life that shines 'to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' That is the solemn obligation, the ideal function, of the Christian Church and of each individual who professes to belong to it. Now, if you recur to our Lord's own application of this metaphor, to which I have already referred, you will see that the first and foremost way by which Christian communities and individuals discharge this function is by conduct. 'Let your light so shine before men'—that they may hear your eloquent proclamation of the Gospel? No! 'Let your light so shine before men'—that you may convince the gainsayers by argument, or move the hard-hearted by appeals and exhortations; that you may preach and talk? No! 'That *they may see your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.' We may say of the Christian community, and of the Christian individual, with all reverence, what the Scripture in an infinitely deeper and more sacred sense says of Jesus Christ Himself, 'the life was the light.' It is conduct, whereby most effectually, most universally, and with the least risk of rousing antagonism and hostile feelings, Christian people may 'shine as lights in the world.' For we all know how the inconsistencies of a Christian man block the path of the Gospel far more than a hundred sermons or talks further it. We all know how there are people, plenty of them, who, however illogically yet most naturally, compare our lives in their daily action with oar professed beliefs, and, saying to themselves, 'I do not see that there is much difference between them and me,' draw the conclusion that it matters very little whether a man is a Christian or not, seeing that the conduct of the men who profess to be so is little more radiant, bright with purity and knowledge and joy, than is the conduct of others. Dear brethren, you can do far more to help or hinder the spread of Christ's Kingdom by the way in which you do common things, side by side with men who are not partakers of the 'like precious faith' with yourselves, than I or my fellow-preachers can do by all our words. It is all very well to lecture about the efficiency of a machine; let us see it at work, and that will convince people. We preach; but you preach far more eloquently, and far more effectively, by your lives. 'In all labour,' says the Book of Proverbs, 'there is profit'—which we may divert from its original meaning to signify that in all Christian living there is force to attract—'but the talk of the lips tendeth only to poverty.' Oh! if the Christian men and women of England would live their Christianity, they would do more to convert the unconverted, and to draw in the outcasts, than all of us preachers can do. 'From you,' said the Apostle once to a church very young, and just rescued from the evils of heathenism—'from you sounded out,' as if blown from a trumpet, 'the Word of the Lord, so that we need not to speak anything.' Live the life, and thereby you diffuse the light.

Nor need we forget that this most potent of all weapons is one that can be wielded by all Christian people. Our gifts differ. Some of us cannot speak for Jesus; some of us who think we can had often better hold our tongues. But we can all live like and for Him. And this most potent and universally diffused possibility is also the weapon that can be wielded with least risk of failure. There is a certain assumption, which it is often difficult to swallow, in a

Christian man's addressing another on the understanding that he, the speaker, possesses something which the other lacks. By words we may often repel, and often find that the ears that we seek to enter with our message close themselves against us and are unwilling to hear. But there is no chance of offending anybody, or of repelling anybody, by living Christlike. We can all do that, and it is the largest contribution that any of us can make to the collective light which shines out from the Christian Church.

But, brethren, we have to remember that there are dangers attending the life that reveals its hidden principles as being faith in Christ and obedience to Him. Did you ever notice how, in the Sermon on the Mount, there are two sets of precepts which seem diametrically opposite to one another? There is a whole series of illustrations of the one commandment, 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them,' and then there Is the precept, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.' So that whilst, on the one hand, there is to be the manifestation in daily conduct of the inner principles that animate us, on the other hand, if there comes in the least taint or trace of ostentation, everything is spoiled, and the light is darkness. The light of the sun makes all things visible and hides itself. We do not see the sunbeams, but we see what the sunbeams illuminate. It is the coarser kinds of light which are themselves separately visible, and they are so only because they have not power enough to make everything around them as brilliant as they themselves are. So our light is to be silent, our light is—if I might use such a phrase—to hide itself in 'a glorious privacy,' whilst it enables men to see, even through our imperfect ministration, the face of our Father in Heaven.

But let me remind you that the same variation by Paul of our Lord's words to which I have already referred as bringing out the difference between the collective and the individual function, also brings out another difference; for Paul says, 'Ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.' He slightly varies the metaphor. We are no longer regarded as being ourselves illuminants, but simply as being the stands on which the light is placed. And that means that whilst the witness by life is the mightiest, the most universally possible, and the least likely to offend, there must also be, as occasion shall serve, without cowardice, without shamefaced reticence, the proclamation of the great Gospel which has made us 'lights in the world.' And that is a function which every Christian man can discharge too, though I have just been saying that they cannot all preach and speak; for every Christian soul has some other soul to whom its word comes with a force that none other can have.

So the one office that is set forth here is the old familiar one, the obligation of which is fully recognised by us all, and pitifully ill-discharged by any of us, to shine by our daily life, and to shine by the actual communication by speech of 'the Name that is above every name.' That is the ideal; alas for the reality! 'Ye are the light of the world.' What kind of light do we—the Church of Christ that gathers here—ray out into the darkness of Manchester? Socially, intellectually, morally, in the civic life, in the national life, are Christian people in the van? They ought to be. There is a church clock in our city which has a glass dial that professes to be illuminated at night, so that the passer-by may tell the hour; but it is generally burning so dimly that nobody can see on its grimy face what o'clock it is. That is like a great many of our churches, and I ask you to ask yourselves whether it is like you or not—a dark lantern, a most imperfectly illuminated dial, which gives no guidance and no information to anybody.

This golden lampstand teaches us—

II. How this office is to be discharged.

Remember simply these two points. It stood, as I have already said, on one side of the Altar of Incense which was central to everything. It was daily tended by the priests, and fed with fresh oil. Hence we may derive some important practical lessons.

To begin with, we note that our light is a derived light, and therefore can only be kept bright when we keep close to the source from whence it is derived.

'That was the true Light, which coming into the world lighteth every man'—there is the source of all illumination, in Jesus Christ Himself. He alone is *the* Light, and as for all others we must say of them what was said of His great forerunner, 'Not that light, but sent to bear witness of that light'; and again, 'he was a light kindled,' and therefore 'shining,' and so his shining was but 'for a season.' But Jesus is for ever the light of the world, and all our illumination comes from Him. As Paul says, 'Now are ye light in the Lord,' therefore only in the measure in which we are 'in the Lord,' shall we be light. Keep near to Him and you will shine; break the connection with Him, and you are darkness, darkness for yourselves, and darkness for the world. Switch off, and the light is darkness.

Change the metaphor, and instead of saying 'derived light' say 'reflected light.' *There* is a pane of glass in a cottage, miles away across the moor. It was invisible a moment ago, and suddenly it gleams like a diamond. Why? The sun has struck it; and in a moment after it will be invisible again. As long as Jesus Christ is shining on my heart, so long, and not a moment longer, shall I give forth the light that will illumine the world. Astronomers have a contrivance by which they can keep a photographic film on which they are seeking to get the image of a star, moving along with the movement of the heavens, so that on the same spot the star shall always shine. We have to keep ourselves steady beneath the white beam from Jesus, and then we, too, shall be 'light in the Lord.'

Our light is fed light. Daily came the priest, daily the oil that had been exhausted by shining was replenished. We all know what that oil means and is; the Divine Spirit which comes into every heart which is open by faith in Christ, and which abides in every heart where there are desire, obedience, and the following of Him; which can be quenched by my sin, by my negligence, by my ceasing to wish it, by my not using its gifts when I have them; which can be grieved by my inconsistencies, and by the spots of darkness that so often take up more of the sphere of my life than the spots of illumination. But we can have as much of that oil of the Divine Spirit, the 'unction from the Holy One,' as we desire, and expect, and use. And unless we have, dear brethren, there is no shining for us. This generation in its abundant activities tends to a Christianity which has more spindles than power, which is more surface than depth, which is so anxious to do service that it forgets the preliminary of all right service, patient, solitary, silent communion with God. Suffer the word of exhortation—let shining be second, let replenishing with the oil be first. First the Altar of Incense, then the Candlestick.

III. This golden lampstand tells us of the fatal effect of neglecting the Church's and the individual's duty.

Where is the seven-branched candlestick of the second Temple? No one knows. Possibly, according to one statement, it lies at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Certainly we know that it is pictured on that sad panel in the conqueror's arch at Rome, and that it became a trophy of the insolent victor. It disappeared, and the Israel whom it vainly endeavoured through the centuries to stir to a consciousness of its vocation, has never since had a gleam of light to ray out into the world. Where are the seven candlesticks, which made a blessed unity because Christ walked in their midst? Where are the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Thyatira, and the rest? Where they stood the mosque is reared, and from its minaret day by

day rings out—not the proclamation of the Name, but—'There is no God but God, and Mahomet is His Prophet.' The Pharos that ought to have shone out over stormy seas has been seized by wreckers, and its light is blinded, and false lights lure the mariner to the shoals and to shipwreck.

'Take heed lest He also spare not thee.' O brethren! is it not a bitter irony to call *us* 'lights of the world'? Let us penitently recognise the inconsistencies of our lives, and the reticence of our speech. Let us not lose sight of the high ideal, that we may the more penitently recognise the miserable falling short of our reality. And let us be thankful that *the* Priest is tending the lamps. 'He will not quench the smoking wick,' but will replenish it with oil, and fan the dying flame. Only let us not resist His ministrations, which are always gentle, even when He removes the charred blacknesses that hinder our being what we should be, and may be, if we will—lights of the world. 'Arise! shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

The Names On Aaron's Breastplate

Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord, upon his two shoulders, for a memorial…. And Aaron shall bear the names of the Children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the Holy Place.'—EXODUS xxviii. 12,29.

Every part of the elaborately prescribed dress of the high priest was significant. But the significance of the whole was concentrated in the inscription upon his mitre, 'Holiness to the Lord,' and in those others upon his breastplate and his shoulder.

The breastplate was composed of folded cloth, in which were lodged twelve precious stones, in four rows of three, each stone containing the name of one of the tribes. It was held in position by the ephod, which consisted of another piece of cloth, with a back and front part, which were united into one on the shoulders. On each shoulder it was clasped by an onyx stone bearing the names of six of the tribes. Thus twice, on the shoulders, the seat of power, and on the heart, the organ of thought and of love, Aaron, entering into the presence of the Most High, bore 'the names of the tribes for a memorial continually.'

Now, I think we shall not be indulging in the very dangerous amusement of unduly spiritualising the externalities of that old law if we see here, in these two things, some very important lessons.

I. The first one that I would suggest to you is—here we have the expression of the great truth of representation of the people by the priest.

The names of the tribes laid upon Aaron's heart and on his shoulders indicated the significance of his office—that he represented Israel before God, as truly as he represented God to Israel. For the moment the personality of the official was altogether melted away and absorbed in the sanctity of his function, and he stood before God as the individualised nation. Aaron was Israel, and Israel was Aaron, for the purposes of worship. And that was indicated by the fact that here, on the shoulders from which, according to an obvious symbol, all acts of power emanate, and on the heart from which, according to most natural metaphor, all the outgoings of the personal life proceed, were written the names of the tribes. That meant, 'This man standing here is the Israel of God, the concentrated nation.'

The same thought works the other way. The nation is the diffused priest, and all its individual components are consecrated to God. All this was external ceremonial, with no real spiritual fact at the back of it. But it pointed onwards to something that is not ceremonial. It pointed to this, that the true priest must, in like manner, gather up into himself, and in a very profound sense be, the people for whom he is the priest; and that they, in their turn, by the action of their own minds and hearts and wills, must consent to and recognise that representative relation, which comes to the solemn height of identification in Christ's relation to His people. 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches,' says He, and also, 'That they all may be one in us as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.' So Paul says, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' 'The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God,'

So Christ gathers us all, if we will let Him, into Himself; and our lives may be hid with Him—in a fashion that is more than mere external and formal representation, or as people have a member of Parliament to represent them in the councils of the nation—even in a true union with Him in whom is the life of all of us, if we live in any real sense. Aaron bore the names of the tribes on shoulder and heart, and Israel was Aaron, and Aaron was Israel.

II. Further, we see here, in these eloquent symbols, the true significance of intercession.

Now, that is a word and a thought which has been wofully limited and made shallow and superficial by the unfortunate confining of the expression, in our ordinary language, to a mere action by speech. Intercession is supposed to be verbal asking for some good to be bestowed on, or some evil to be averted from, some one in whom we are interested. But the Old Testament notion of the priest's intercession, and the New Testament use of the word which we so render, go far beyond any verbal utterances, and reach to the very heart of things. Intercession, in the true sense of the word, means the doing of any act whatsoever before God for His people by Jesus Christ. Whensoever, as in the presence of God, He brings to God anything which is His, that is intercession. He undertakes for them, not by words only, though His mighty word is, 'I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am,' but by acts which are more than even the words of the Incarnate Word.

If we take these two inscriptions upon which I am now commenting, we shall get, I think, what covers the whole ground of the intercession on which Christians are to repose their souls. For, with regard to the one of them, we read that the high priest's breastplate was named 'the breastplate of judgment'; and what that means is explained by the last words of the verse following that from which my text is taken: 'Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord.' Judgment means a judicial sentence; in this case a judicial sentence of acquittal. And that Aaron stood before God in the Holy Place, ministering with this breastplate upon his heart, is explained by the writer of these regulations to mean that he carried there the visible manifestation of Israel's acquittal, based upon his own sacrificial function. Now, put that into plain English, and it is just this—Jesus Christ's sacrifice ensures, for all those whose names are written on these gems on His heart, their acquittal in the judgment of Heaven. Or, in other words, the first step in the intercession of our great High Priest is the presenting before God for ever and ever that great fact that He, the Sinless, has died for the love of sinful men, and thereby has secured that the judgment of Heaven on them shall now be 'no condemnation.' Brethren, there is the root of all our hope in Christ, and of all that Christ is to individuals and to society—the assurance that the breastplate of judgment is on His heart, as a sign that all who trust Him are acquitted by the tribunal of Heaven.

The other side of this great continual act of intercession is set forth by the other symbol—the names written on the shoulders, the seat of power. There is a beautiful parallel, which yet at first sight does not seem to be one, to the thought that lies here, in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, where, addressing the restored and perfected Israel, he says, speaking in the person of Jehovah: 'I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.' That has precisely the same meaning that I take to be conveyed by this symbol in the text. The names of the tribes are written on His shoulders; and not until that arm is wearied or palsied, not till that strong hand forgets its cunning, will our defence fail. If our names are thus written on the seat of power, that means that all the divine authority and omnipotence which Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of the Father, wields in His state of royal glory, are exercised on behalf of, or at all events on the side of, those whose names He thus bears upon His shoulders. That is the guarantee for each of us that our hands shall be made strong, according to the ancient prophetic blessing, 'by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' Just as a father or a mother will take their child's little tremulous hand in theirs and hold it, that it may be strengthened for some small task beyond its unbacked, uninvigorated power; so Jesus Christ will give us strength within, and also will order the march of His Providence and send the gift of His Spirit, for the succour and the strengthening of all whose names are written on His ephod. He has gone within the veil. He has left us heavy tasks, but our names are on His shoulders, and we 'can do all things in Christ who strengthened us.'

III. Still further, this symbol suggests to us the depth and reality of Christ's sympathy.

The heart is, in our language, the seat of love. It is not so in the Old Testament. Affection is generally allocated to another part of the frame; but here the heart stands for the organ of care, of thought, of interest. For, according to the Old Testament view of the relation between man's body and man's soul, the very seat and centre of the individual life is in the heart. I suppose that was because it was known that, somehow or other, the blood came thence. Be that as it may, the thought is clear throughout all the Old Testament that the heart is the man, and the man is the heart. And so, if Jesus bears our names upon His heart, that does not express merely representation nor merely intercession, but it expresses also personal regard, individualising knowledge. For Aaron wore not one great jewel with 'Israel' written on it, but twelve little ones, with 'Dan,' 'Benjamin,' and 'Ephraim,' and all the rest of them, each on his own gem.

So we can say, 'Such a High Priest became us, who could have compassion upon the ignorant, and upon them that are out of the way'; and we can fall back on that old-fashioned but inexhaustible source of consolation and strength: 'In all their affliction He was afflicted'; and though the noise of the tempests which toss us can scarcely be supposed to penetrate into the veiled place where He dwells on high, yet we may be sure—and take all the peace and consolation and encouragement out of it that it is meant to give us—that 'we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities,' but that Himself, having known miseries, 'is able to succour them that are tempted.' Our names are on Christ's heart.

IV. Then, lastly, we have here a suggestion of how precious to Aaron Israel is.

Jewels were chosen to symbolise the tribes. Bits of tin, potsherds, or anything else that one could have scratched letters upon, would have done quite as well. But 'the precious things of the everlasting mountains' were chosen to bear the dear names. 'The Lord's portion is His people'; and precious in the eyes of Christ are the souls for whom He has given so much. They are not only precious, but lustrous, flashing back the light in various colours indeed, according to their various laws of crystallisation, but all receptive of it and all reflective of it. I said that the names on the breastplate of judgment expressed the acquittal and acceptance of Israel. But does Christ's work for us stop with simple acquittal? Oh no! 'Whom He justified them He also glorified,' And if our souls are 'bound in the bundle of life,' and our names are written on the heart of the Christ, be sure that mere forgiveness and acquittal is the least of the blessings which He intends to give, and that He will not be satisfied until in all our nature we receive and flash back the light of His own glory.

It is very significant in this aspect that the names of the twelve tribes are described as being written on the precious stones which make the walls of the New Jerusalem. Thus borne on Christ's heart whilst He is within the veil and we are in the outer courts, we may hope to be carried by His sustaining and perfecting hand into the glories, and be made participant of the glories. Let us see to it that we write His name on our hearts, on their cares, their thought, their love, and on our hands, on their toiling and their possessing; and then, God helping us, and Christ dwelling in us, we shall come to the blessed state of those who serve Him, and bear His name flaming conspicuous for ever on their foreheads.

Three Inscriptions With One Meaning

'Thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it ... HOLINESS TO THE LORD.'—EXODUS xxviii. 36.

'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.'—ZECH. xiv. 20.

'His name shall be in their foreheads.'—REV. xxii. 4.

You will have perceived my purpose in putting these three widely separated texts together. They all speak of inscriptions, and they are all obviously connected with each other. The first of them comes from the ancient times of the institution of the ceremonial ritual, and describes a part of the high priest's official dress. In his mitre was a thin plate of gold on which was written, 'Holiness to the Lord.' The second of them comes from almost the last portion recorded of the history of Israel in the Old Testament, and is from the words of the great Prophet of the Restoration—his ideal presentation of the Messianic period, in which he recognises as one feature, that the inscription on the mitre of the high priest shall be written on 'the bells of the horses.' And the last of them is from the closing vision of the celestial kingdom, the heavenly and perfected form of the Christian Church. John, probably remembering the high priest and his mitre, with its inscription upon the forehead, says: 'His servants shall do Him priestly service'—for that is the meaning of the word inadequately translated 'serve Him'—'and see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.'

These three things, then—the high priest's mitre, the horses' bells, the foreheads of the perfected saints—present three aspects of the Christian thought of holiness. Take them one by one.

I. The high priest's mitre.

The high priest was the official representative of the nation. He stood before God as the embodied and personified Israel. For the purposes of worship Israel was the high priest, and the high priest was Israel. And so, on his forehead, not to distinguish him from the rest of the people, but to include all the people in his consecration, shone a golden plate with the motto, 'Holiness to the Lord.' So, at the very beginning of Jewish ritual there stands a protest against all notions that make 'saint' the designation of any abnormal or exceptional sanctity, and confine the name to the members of any selected aristocracy of devoutness and goodness. All Christian men, *ex officio*, by the very fact of their Christianity, are saints, in the true sense of the word. And the representative of the whole of Israel stood there before God, with this inscription blazing on his forehead, as a witness that, whatsoever holiness may be, it belongs to every member of the true Israel.

And what is it? It is a very unfortunate thing—indicating superficiality of thought—that the modern popular notion of 'holiness' identifies it with purity, righteousness, moral perfection. Now that idea *is* in it, but is not the whole of it. For, not to spend time upon mere remarks on words, the meaning of the word thus rendered is in Hebrew, as well as in Greek and in our own English, one and the same. The root-meaning is 'separated,' 'set apart,' and the word expresses primarily, not moral character, but relation to God. That makes all the difference; and it incalculably deepens the conception, as well as puts us on the right track for understanding the only possible means by which there can ever be realised that moral perfection and excellence which has unfortunately monopolised the meaning of the word in

most people's minds. The first thought is 'set apart to God.' That is holiness, in its root and germ.

And how can we be set apart for God? You may devote a dead thing for certain uses easily enough. How can a man be separated and laid aside?

Well, there is only one way, brethren, and that is by self-surrender. 'Yield yourselves to God' is but the other side, or, rather, the practical shape, of the Old and the New Testament doctrine of holiness. A man becomes God's when he says, 'Lord, take me and mould me, and fill me and cleanse me, and do with me what Thou wilt.' In that self-surrender, which is the tap-root of all holiness, the first and foremost thing to be offered is that most obstinate of all, the will that is in us. And when we yield our wills in submission both to commandments and providences, both to gifts and to withdrawals, both to gains and to losses, both to joys and to sorrows, then we begin to write upon our foreheads 'Holiness to the Lord.' And when we go on to yield our hearts to Him, by enshrining Him sole and sovereign in their innermost chamber, and turning to Him the whole current of our lives and desires, and hopes and confidences, which we are so apt to allow to run to waste and be sucked up in the desert sands of the world, then we write more of that inscription. And when we fill our minds with joyful submission to His truth, and occupy our thoughts with His mighty Name and His great revelation, and carry Him with us in the hidden corners of our consciousness, even whilst we are busy about daily work, then we add further letters to it. And when the submissive will, and the devoted heart, and the occupied thoughts are fully expressed in daily life and its various external duties, then the writing is complete. 'Holiness to the Lord' is self-surrender of will and heart and mind and everything. And that surrender is of the very essence of Christianity.

What is a saint? Some man or woman that has practised unheard-of austerities? Somebody that has lived an isolated and self-regarding life in convent or monastery or desert? No! a man or woman in the world who, moved by the mercies of God, yields self to God as 'a living sacrifice.'

So the New Testament writers never hesitate to speak even of such very imperfect Christians as were found in abundance in churches like Corinth and Galatia as being all 'saints,' every man of them. That is not because the writers were minimising their defects, or idealising their persons, but because, if they are Christians at all, they are saints; seeing that no man is a Christian who has not been drawn by Christ's great sacrifice for him to yield himself a sacrifice for Christ.

Of course that intrusive idea which has, in popular apprehension, so swallowed up the notion of holiness—viz. that of perfection of moral character or conduct—is included in this other, or rather is developed from it. For the true way to conquer self is to surrender self; and the more entire our giving up of ourselves, the more certainly shall we receive ourselves back again from His hands. 'By the mercies of God, I beseech you, yield yourselves living sacrifices.'

II. I come to my next text—the horses' bells.

Zechariah has a vision of the ideal Messianic times, and, of course, as must necessarily be the case, his picture is painted with colours laid upon his palette by his experience, and he depicts that distant future in the guise suggested to him by what he saw around him. So we have to disentangle from his words the sentiment which he expresses, and to recognise the symbolic way in which he puts it. His thought is this,—the inscription on the high priest's mitre will be written on the bells which ornament the harness of the horses, which in Israel were never used as with us, but only either for war or for pomp and display, and the use of which was

always regarded with a certain kind of doubt and suspicion. Even these shall be consecrated in that far-off day.

And then he goes on with variations on the same air, 'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the Lord,"' and adds that 'the pots in the Lord's house'—the humble vessels that were used for the most ordinary parts of the Temple services—'shall be like the bowls before the altar,' into which the sacred blood of the offerings was poured. The most external and secular thing bearing upon religion shall be as sacred as the sacredest. But that is not all. 'Yea! every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them,' and put their offerings therein. That is to say, the coarse pottery vessels that were in every poverty-stricken house in the city shall be elevated to the rank of the sacred vessels of the Temple. Domestic life with all its secularities shall be hallowed. The kitchens of Jerusalem shall be as truly places of worship as is the inner shrine of the Most High.

On the whole, the prophet's teaching is that, in the ideal state of man upon earth, there will be an entire abolition of the distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular'; a distinction that has wrought infinite mischief in the world, and in the lives of Christian people.

Let me translate these words of our prophet into English equivalents. Every cup and tumbler in a poor man's kitchen may be as sacred as the communion chalice that passes from lip to lip with the 'blood of Jesus Christ' in it. Every common piece of service that we do, down among the vulgarities and the secularities and the meannesses of daily life, may be lifted up to stand upon precisely the same level as the sacredest office that we undertake. The bells of the horses may jingle to the same tune as the trumpets of the priests sounded within the shrine, and on all, great and small, may be written, 'Holiness to the Lord.'

But let us remember that that universally diffused sanctity will need to have a centre of diffusion, else there will be no diffusion, and that all life will become sacred when the man that lives it has 'Holiness to the Lord' written on his forehead, and not else. If that be the inscription on the driver's heart, the horses that he drives will have it written on their bells, but they will not have it unless it be. Holy men make all things holy. 'To the pure all things are pure,' but unto them that are unclean and disobedient there is nothing pure. Hallow thyself, and all things are clean unto thee.

III. And so I come to my third text—the perfected saints' foreheads.

The connection between the first and the last of these texts is as plain and close as between the first and the second. For John in his closing vision gives emphasis to the priestly idea as designating in its deepest relations the redeemed and perfected Christian Church. Therefore he says, as I have already explained, 'His servants shall do Him *priestly* service, and His name shall be in their foreheads.' The old official dress of the high priest comes into his mind, and he paints the future, just as Zechariah did, under the forms of the past, and sees before the throne the perfected saints, each man of them with that inscription clear and conspicuous.

But there is an advance in his words which I think it is not fanciful to note. It is only the *name* that is written in the perfected saint's forehead. Not the 'Holiness unto the Lord,' but just the bare name. What does that mean? Well, it means the same as your writing your name in one of your books does, or as when a man puts his initials on the back of his oxen, or as the old practice of branding the master's mark upon the slave did. It means absolute ownership.

But it means something more. The name is the manifested personality, the revealed God, or, as we say in an abstract way, the character of God. That Name is to be in the foreheads of His

perfected people. How does it come to be there? Read also the clause before the text—'His servants shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.' That is to say, the perfected condition is not reached by surrender only, but by assimilation; and that assimilation comes by contemplation. The faces that are turned to Him, and behold Him, are smitten with the light and shine, and those that look upon them see 'as it had been the face of an angel,' as the Sanhedrim saw that of Stephen, when he beheld the Son of Man 'standing at the right hand of God.'

My last text is but a picturesque way of saying what the writer of it says in plain words when he declares, 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The name is to be 'in their foreheads,' where every eye can see it. Alas! alas! it is so hard for us to live out our best selves, and to show to the world what is in us. Cowardice, sheepishness, and a hundred other reasons prevent it. In this poor imperfect state no emotion ever takes shape and visibility without losing more or less of its beauty. But yonder the obstructions to self-manifestation will be done away; and 'when He shall be manifested, we also shall be manifested with Him in glory.'

'Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father's Kingdom.' But the beginning of it all is 'Holiness to the Lord' written on our hearts; and the end of that is the vision which is impossible without holiness, and which leads on to the beholder's perfect likeness to his Lord.

The Altar Of Incense

'Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon.' —EXODUS xxx. 1.

Ceremonies are embodied thoughts. Religious ceremonies are moulded by, and seek to express, the worshipper's conception of his God, and his own relation to Him; his aspirations and his need. Of late years scholars have been busy studying the religions of the more backward races, and explaining rude and repulsive rites by pointing to the often profound and sometimes beautiful ideas underlying them. When that process is applied to Australian and Fijian savages, it is honoured as a new and important study; when we apply it to the Mosaic Ritual it is pooh-poohed as 'foolish spiritualising.' Now, no doubt, there has been a great deal of nonsense talked in regard to this matter, and a great deal of ingenuity wasted in giving a Christian meaning—or, may I say, a Christian twist?—to every pin of the Tabernacle, and every detail of the ritual. Of course, to exaggerate a truth is the surest way to discredit a truth, but the truth remains true all the same, and underneath that elaborate legislation, which makes such wearisome and profitless reading for the most of us, in the Pentateuch, there lie, if we can only grasp them, great thoughts and lessons that we shall all be the better for pondering.

To one item of these, this altar of incense, I call attention now, because it is rich in suggestions, and leads us into very sacred regions of the Christian life which are by no means so familiar to many of us as they ought to be. Let me just for one moment state the facts with which I wish to deal. The Jewish Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple, were arranged in three compartments: the outermost court, which was accessible to all the people; the second, which was trodden by the priests alone; and the third, where the Shechinah dwelt in solitude, broken only once a year by the foot of the High Priest. That second court we are concerned with now. There are three pieces of ecclesiastical furniture in it: an altar in the centre, flanked on either side by a great lampstand, and a table on which were piled loaves. It is to that central piece of furniture that I ask your attention now, and to the thoughts that underlie it, and the lessons that it teaches.

I. This altar shows us what prayer is.

Suppose we had been in that court when in the morning or in the evening the priest came with the glowing pan of coals from another altar in the outer court, and laid it on this altar, and heaped upon it the sticks of incense, we should have seen the curling, fragrant wreaths ascending till 'the House was filled with smoke,' as a prophet once saw it. We should not have wanted any interpreter to tell us what that meant. What could that rising cloud of sweet odours signify but the ascent of the soul towards God? Put that into more abstract words, and it is just the old, hackneyed commonplace which I seek to try to freshen a little now, that incense is the symbol of prayer. That that is so is plain enough, not only from the natural propriety of the case, but because you find the identification distinctly stated in several places in Scripture, of which I quote but two instances. In one psalm we read, 'Let my prayer come before Thee as incense.' In the Book of the Apocalypse we read of 'golden bowls full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.' And that the symbolism was understood by, and modified the practice of, the nation, we are taught when we read that whilst Zechariah the priest was within the court offering incense, as it was his lot to do, 'the whole multitude of the people were without praying,' doing that which the priest within the court symbolised by his offering. So then we come to this, dear friends, that we fearfully misunderstand and limit the nobleness and the essential character of prayer when, as we are always tempted to do by our inherent self-regard, we make petition its main feature and form. Of course, so long as we

are what we shall always be in this world, needy and sinful creatures; and so long as we are what we shall ever be in all worlds, creatures absolutely dependent for life and everything on the will and energy of God, petition must necessarily be a very large part of prayer. But the more we grow into His likeness, and the more we understand the large privileges and the glorious possibilities which lie in prayer, the more will the relative proportions of its component parts be changed, and petition will become less, and aspiration will become more. The essence of prayer, the noblest form of it, is thus typified by the cloud of sweet odours that went up before God.

In all true prayer there must be the lowest prostration in reverence before the Infinite Majesty. But the noblest prayer is that which lifts 'them that are bowed down' rather than that which prostrates men before an inaccessible Deity. And so, whilst we lie low at His feet, that may be the prayer of a mere theist, but when our hearts go out towards Him, and we are drawn to Himself, that is the prayer that befits Christian aspiration; the ascent of the soul toward God is the true essence of prayer. As one of the non-Christian philosophers—seekers after God, if ever there were such, and who, I doubt not, found Him whom they sought—has put it, 'the flight of the lonely soul to the only God'; that is prayer. Is that my prayer? We come to Him many a time burdened with some very real sorrow, or weighted with some pressing responsibility, and we should not be true to ourselves, or to Him, if our prayer did not take the shape of petition. But, as we pray, the blessing of the transformation of its character should be realised by us, and that which began with the cry for help and deliverance should always be, and it always will be, if the cry for help and deliverance has been of the right sort, sublimed into 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' The Book of Ecclesiastes describes death as the 'return of the spirit to God who gave it.' That is the true description of prayer, a going back to the fountain's source. Flames aspire; to the place 'whence the rivers came thither they return again.' The homing pigeon or the migrating bird goes straight through many degrees of latitude, and across all sorts of weather, to the place whence it came. Ah! brethren, let us ask ourselves if our spirits thus aspire and soar. Do we know what it is to be, if I might so say, like those captive balloons that are ever yearning upwards, and stretching to the loftiest point permitted them by the cord that tethers them to earth?

Now another thought that this altar of incense may teach us is that the prayer that soars must be kindled. There is no fragrance in a stick of incense lying there. No wreaths of ascending smoke come from it. It has to be kindled before its sweet odour can be set free and ascend. That is why so much of our prayer is of no delight to God, and of no benefit to us, because it is not on fire with the flame of a heart kindled into love and thankfulness by the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The cold vapours lie like a winding-sheet down in the valleys until the sun smites them, warms them, and draws them up. And our desires will hover in the low levels, and be dank and damp, until they are drawn up to the heights by the warmth of the Sun of righteousness. Oh! brethren, the formality and the coldness, to say nothing of the inconsecutiveness and the interruptedness by rambling thoughts that we all know in our petitions, in our aspirations, are only to be cured in one way:—

'Come! shed abroad a Saviour's love, And that will kindle ours.'

It is the stretched string that gives out musical notes; the slack one is dumb. And if we desire that we may be able to be sure, as our Master was, when He said, 'I know that Thou hearest me always,' we must pray as He did, of whom it is recorded that 'He prayed the more earnestly,' and 'was heard in that He feared.' The word rendered 'the more earnestly' carries in it a metaphor drawn from that very fact that I have referred to. It means 'with the more stretched-out extension and intensity.' If our prayers are to be heard as music in heaven, they must come from a stretched string.

Once more, this altar of incense teaches us that kindled prayer delights God. That emblem of the sweet odour is laid hold of with great boldness by more than one Old and New Testament writer, in order to express the marvellous thought that there is a mutual joy in the prayer of faith and love, and that it rises as ‘an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.’ The cuneiform inscriptions give that thought with characteristic vividness and grossness when they speak about the gods being ‘gathered like flies round the steam of the sacrifice.’ We have the same thought, freed from all its grossness, when we think that the curling wreaths going up from a heart aspiring and enflamed, come to Him as a sweet odour, and delight His soul. People say, ‘that is anthropomorphism—making God too like a man.’ Well, man is like God, at any rate, and surely the teaching of that great name ‘Father’ carries with it the assurance that just as fathers of flesh are glad when they see that their children like best to be with them, so there is something analogous in that joy before the angels of heaven which the Father has, not only because of the prodigal who comes back, but because of the child who has long been with Him, and is ever seeking to nestle closer to His heart. The Psalmist was lost in wonder and thankfulness that he was able to say ‘He was extolled with my tongue.’ Surely it should be a gracious, encouraging, strengthening thought to us all, that even our poor aspirations may minister to the divine gladness.

Now let us turn to another thought.

II. This altar shows us where prayer stands in the Christian life.

There are two or three points in regard to its position which it is no fanciful spiritualising, but simply grasping the underlying meaning of the institution, if we emphasise. First, let me remind you that there was another altar in the outer court, whereon was offered the daily sacrifice for the sins of the people. That altar came first, and the sacrifice had to be offered on it first, before the priest came into the inner court with the coals from that altar, and the incense kindled by them. What does that say to us? The altar of incense is not approached until we have been to the altar of sacrifice. It is no mere arbitrary appointment, nor piece of evangelical narrowness, which says that there is no real access to God, in all the fullness and reality of His revealed character for us sinful men, until our sins have been dealt with, taken away by the Lamb of God, sacrificed for us. And it is simply the transcript of experience which declares that there will be little inclination or desire to come to God with the sacrifice of praise and prayer until we have been to Christ, the sacrifice of propitiation and pardon. Brethren, we need to be cleansed, and we can only be delivered from the unholiness which is the perpetual and necessary barrier to our vision of God by making our very own, through simple faith, the energy and the blessedness of that great Sacrifice of propitiation. Then, and then only, do we properly come to the altar of incense. Its place in the Christian life is second, not first. ‘First be reconciled to thy’ Father, ‘then lay’ the incense ‘on the altar.’

Again, great and deep lessons are given to us in the place of our altar in regard to the other articles that stood in that inner court. I have said that there were three of them. In the centre this altar of incense; on the one hand the great lampstand; on the other hand the table with loaves thereon. The one symbolised Israel’s function in the world to be its light, which in our function too, and the other with loaves thereon symbolised the consecration to God of Israel’s activities, and their results.

But between the two, central to both, stood the altar of incense. What does that say as to the place of prayer, defined as I have defined it, in the Christian life? It says this, that the light will burn dim and go out, and the loaves, the expression and the consequences of our activities, will become mouldy and dry, unless both are hallowed and sustained by prayer. And that lesson is one which we all need, and which I suppose this generation needs quite as much as, if not more than, any that has gone before it. For life has become so swift and

rushing, and from all sides, the Church, the world, society, there come such temptations, and exhortations, and necessities, for strenuous and continuous work, that the basis of all wholesome and vigorous work, communion with God, is but too apt to be put aside and relegated to some inferior position. The carbon points of the electric arc-light are eaten away with tremendous rapidity in the very act of giving forth their illumination, and they need to be continually approximated and to be frequently renewed. The oil is burned away in the act of shining, and the lamp needs to be charged again. If we are to do our work in the world as its lights, and if we are to have any activities fit to be consecrated to God and laid on the Table before the Veil, it can only be by our making the altar of incense the centre, and these others subsidiary.

One last thought—the place of prayer in the Christian life is shadowed for us by the position of this altar in reference to 'the secret place of the Most High,' that mysterious inner court which was dark but for the Shechinah's light, and lonely but for the presence of the worshipping cherubim and the worshipped God. It stood, as we are told a verse or two after my text, 'before the veil.' A straight line drawn from the altar of sacrifice would have bisected the altar of incense as it passed into the mercy-seat and the glory. And that just tells us that the place of prayer in the Christian lift is that it is the direct way of coming close to God. Dear brother, we shall never lift the veil, and stand in 'the secret place of the Most High,' unless we take the altar of incense on our road.

There is one more thought here—

III. The altar of incense shows us how prayer is to be cultivated.

Twice a day, morning and evening, came the officiating priest with his pan of coals and incense, and laid it there; and during all the intervening hours between the morning and the evening the glow lay half hidden in the incense, and there was a faint but continual emission of fragrance from the smouldering mass that had been renewed in the morning, and again in the evening. And does not that say something to us? There must be definite times of distinct prayer if the aroma of devotion is to be diffused through our else scentless days. I ask for no pedantic adherence, with monastic mechanicalness, to hours and times, and forms of petitions. These are needful crutches to many of us. But what I do maintain is that all that talk which we hear so much of in certain quarters nowadays as to its not being necessary for us to have special times of prayer, and as to its being far better to have devotion diffused through our lives, and of how *laborare est orare*—to labour is to pray—all that is pernicious nonsense if it is meant to say that the incense will be fragrant and smoulder unless it is stirred up and renewed night and morning. There must be definite times of prayer if there is to be diffused devotion through the day. What would you think of people that said, 'Run your cars by electricity. Get it out of the wires; it will come! Never mind putting up any generating stations'? And not less foolish are they who seek for a devotion permeating life which is not often concentrated into definite and specific acts.

But the other side is as true. It is bad to clot your religion into lumps, and to leave the rest of the life without it. There must be the smouldering all day long. 'Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing.' You can pray thus. Not set prayer, of course; but a reference to Him, a thought of Him, like some sweet melody, 'so sweet we know not we are listening to it,' may breathe its fragrance, and diffuse its warmth into the commonest and smallest of our daily activities. It was when Gideon was threshing wheat that the angel appeared to him. It was when Elisha was ploughing that the divine inspiration touched him. It was when the disciples were fishing that they saw the Form on the shore. And when we are in the way of our common life it is possible that the Lord may meet us, and that our souls may be aspiring to Him. Then work will be worship; then burdens will be lightened; then our lamps will burn;

then the fruits of our daily lives will ripen; then our lives will be noble; then our spirits will rest as well as soar, and find fruition and aspiration perpetually alternating in stable succession of eternal progress.

Ransom For Souls—I

'Then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul.' —EXODUS xxx. 12.

This remarkable provision had a religious intention. Connect it with the tax-money which Peter found in the fish's mouth.

I. Its meaning. Try to realise an Israelite's thoughts at the census. 'I am enrolled among the people and army of God: am I worthy? What am I, to serve so holy a God?' The payment was meant—

(a) To excite the sense of sin. This should be present in all approach to God, in all service; accompanying the recognition of our Christian standing. Our sense of sin is far too slight and weak; this defect is at the root of much feebleness in popular religion. The sense of sin must embrace not outward acts only, but inner spirit also.

(b) To suggest the possibility of expiation. It was 'ransom' *i.e.* 'covering,' something paid that guilt might be taken away and sin regarded as non-existent. This is, of course, obviously, only a symbol. No tax could satisfy God for sin. The very smallness of the amount shows that it is symbolical only. 'Not with corruptible things as silver' is man redeemed.

II. Its identity for all. Rich or poor, high or low, all men are equal in sin. There are surface differences and degrees, but a deep identity beneath. So on the same principle all souls are of the same value. Here is the true democracy of Christianity. So there is one ransom for all, for the need of all is identical.

III. Its use. It was melted down for use in the sanctuary, so as to be a 'memorial' permanently present to God when His people met with Him. The greater portion was made into bases for the boards of the sanctuary. That is, God's dwelling with men and our communion with Him all rest on the basis of ransom. We are 'brought nigh by the blood of Christ.'

Ransom For Souls—II

'The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel….'—EXODUS xxx. 15.

This tax was exacted on numbering the people. It was a very small amount, about fifteen pence, so it was clearly symbolical in its significance. Notice—

I. The broad principle of equality of all souls in the sight of God. Contrast the reign of caste and class in heathendom with the democracy of Judaism and of Christianity.

II. The universal sinfulness. Payment of the tax was a confession that all were alike in this: not that all were equally sinful, but all were sinful, whatever variations of degree might exist.

'There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

III. The one ransom. It was a prophecy of which *we* know the meaning. Recall the incident of the 'stater' in the fish's mouth.

Christ declares His exemption from the tax. Yet He voluntarily comes under it, and He provides the payment of it for Himself and for Peter.

He does so by a miracle.

The Apostle has to 'take and give it'; so faith is called into exercise.

Thus there is but one Sacrifice for all; and the poorest can exercise faith and the richest can do no more. 'None other name.'

The Golden Calf

'And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 2. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. 3. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. 4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. 6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. 7. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt…. 30. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. 31. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. 33. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book. 34. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee. Behold, Mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. 35. And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.'—EXODUS xxxii. 1-8; 30-35.

It was not yet six weeks since the people had sworn, 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient.' The blood of the covenant, sprinkled on them, was scarcely dry when they flung off allegiance to Jehovah. Such short-lived loyalty to Him can never have been genuine. That mob of slaves was galvanised by Moses into obedience; and since their acceptance of Jehovah was in reality only yielding to the power of one strong will and its earnest faith, of course it collapsed as soon as Moses disappeared.

We have to note, first, the people's universal revolt. The language of verse 1 may easily hide to a careless reader the gravity and unanimity of the apostasy. 'The people gathered themselves together.' It was a national rebellion, a flood which swept away even some faithful, timid hearts. No voices ventured to protest. What were the elders, who shortly before 'saw the God of Israel,' doing to be passive at such a crisis? Was there no one to bid the fickle multitude look up to the summit overhead, where the red flames glowed, or to remind them of the hosts of Egypt lying stark and dead on the shore? Was Miriam cowed too, and her song forgotten?

We need not cast stones at these people; for we also have short memories for either the terrible or the gracious revelations of God in our own lives. But we may learn the lesson that God's lovers have to set themselves sometimes dead against the rush of popular feeling, and that there are times when silence or compliance is sin.

It would have been easy for the rebels to have ignored Aaron, and made gods for themselves. But they desired to involve him in their apostasy, and to get 'official sanction' for it. He had been left by Moses as his lieutenant, and so to get him implicated was to stamp the movement as a regular and entire revolt.

The demand 'to make gods' (or, more probably, 'a god') flew in the face of both the first and second commandments. For Jehovah, who had forbidden the forming of any image, was denied in the act of making it. To disobey Him was to cast Him off. The ground of the rebellion was the craving for a visible object of trust and a visible guide, as is seen by the reason assigned for the demand for an image. Moses was out of sight; they must have something to look at as their leader. Moses had disappeared, and, to these people who had only been heaved up to the height of believing in Jehovah by Moses, Jehovah had disappeared with him. They sank down again to the level of other races as soon as that strong lever ceased to lift their heavy apprehensions.

How ridiculous the assertion that they did not know what had become of Moses! They knew that he was up there with Jehovah. The elders could have told them that. The fire on the mount might have burned in on all minds the confirmation. Note, too, the black ingratitude and plain denial of Jehovah in 'the *man* that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.' They refuse to recognise God's part. It was Moses only who had done it; and now that he is gone they must have a visible god, like other nations.

Still sadder than their sense-bound wish is Aaron's compliance. He knew as well as we do what he should have said, but, like many another man in influential position, when beset by popular cries, he was frightened, and yielded when he should have 'set his face like a flint.' His compliance has in essentials been often repeated, especially by priests and ministers of religion who have lent their superior abilities or opportunities to carry out the wishes of the ignorant populace, and debased religion or watered down its prohibitions, to please and retain hold of them. The Church has incorporated much from heathenism. Roman Catholic missionaries have permitted 'converts' to keep their old usages. Protestant teachers have acquiesced in, and been content to find the brains to carry out, compromises between sense and soul, God's commands and men's inclinations.

We need not discuss the metallurgy of verse 4. But clearly Aaron asked for the earrings, not, as some would have it, hoping that vanity and covetousness would hinder their being given, but simply in order to get gold for the bad work which he was ready to do. The reason for making the thing in the shape of a calf is probably the Egyptian worship of Apis in that form, which would be familiar to the people.

We must note that it was the people who said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' Aaron seems to keep in the rear, as it were. He makes the calf, and hands it over, and leaves them to hail it and worship. Like all cowards, he thought that he was lessening his guilt by thus keeping in the background. Feeble natures are fond of such subterfuges, and deceive themselves by them; but they do not shift their sin off their shoulders.

Then he comes in again with an impotent attempt to diminish the gravity of the revolt. 'When he *saw* this,' he tried to turn the flood into another channel, and so proclaimed a 'feast to Jehovah'!—as if He could be worshipped by flagrant defiance of His commandments, or as if He had not been disavowed by the ascription to the calf, made that morning out of their own trinkets, of the deliverance from Egypt. A poor, inconsequential attempt to save appearances and hallow sin by writing God's name on it! The 'god' whom the Israelites worshipped under the image of a calf, was no less another 'god before Me,' though it was called by the name of Jehovah. If the people had their idol, it mattered nothing to them, and it mattered as little to

Jehovah, what ‘name’ it bore. The wild orgies of the morrow were not the worship which He accepts.

What a contrast between the plain and the mountain! Below, the shameful feast, with its parody of sacrifice and its sequel of lust-inflamed dancing; above, the awful colloquy between the all-seeing righteous Judge and the intercessor! The people had cast off Jehovah, and Jehovah no more calls them ‘My,’ but ‘*thy* people.’ They had ascribed their Exodus first to Moses, and next to the calf. Jehovah speaks of it as the work of Moses.

A terrible separation of Himself from them lies in ‘*thy* people, which *thou* broughtest up,’ and Moses’ bold rejoinder emphasises the relation and act which Jehovah seems to suppress (verse 11). Observe that the divine voice refuses to give any weight to Aaron’s trick of compromise. These are no worshippers of Jehovah who are howling and dancing below there. They are ‘worshipping *it*, and sacrificing to it,’ not to Him. The cloaks of sin may partly cover its ugliness here, but they are transparent to His eyes, and many a piece of worship, which is said to be directed to Him, is, in His sight, rank idolatry.

We do not deal with the magnificent courage of Moses, his single-handed arresting of the wild rebellion, and the severe punishment by which he trampled out the fire. But we must keep his severity in mind if we would rightly judge his self-sacrificing devotion, and his self-sacrificing devotion if we would rightly judge his severity.

No words of ours can make more sublime his utter self-abandonment for the sake of the people among whom he had just been flaming in wrath, and smiting like a destroying angel. That was a great soul which had for its poles such justice and such love. The very words of his prayer, in their abruptness, witness to his deep emotion. ‘If Thou wilt forgive their sin’ stands as an incomplete sentence, left incomplete because the speaker is so profoundly moved. Sometimes broken words are the best witnesses of our earnestness. The alternative clause reaches the high-water mark of passionate love, ready to give up everything for the sake of its objects. The ‘book of life’ is often spoken of in Scripture, and it is an interesting study to bring together the places where the idea occurs (see Ps. lxix. 28; Dan. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5). The allusion is to the citizens’ roll (Ps. lxxxvii. 6). Those whose names are written there have the privileges of citizenship, and, as it is the ‘book of life’ (or ‘*of the living*’), life in the widest sense is secured to them. To blot out of it, therefore, is to cut a man off from fellowship in the city of God, and from participation in life.

Moses was so absorbed in his vocation that his life was less to him than the well-being of Israel. How far he saw into the darkness beyond the grave we cannot say; but, at least, he was content, and desirous to die on earth, if thereby Israel might continue to be God’s people. And probably he had some gleam of light beyond, which enhanced the greatness of his offered sacrifice. To die, whatever loss of communion with God that involved here or hereafter, would be sweet if thereby he could purchase Israel’s restoration to God’s favour. We cannot but think of Paul willing to be separated from Christ for his brethren’s sake.

We may well think of a greater than Moses or Paul, who did bear the loss which they were willing to bear, and died that sin might be forgiven. Moses was a true type of Christ in that act of supreme self-sacrifice; and all the heroism, the identification of himself with his people, the love which willingly accepts death, that makes his prayer one of the greatest deeds on the page of history, are repeated in infinitely sweeter, more heart-subduing fashion in the story of the Cross. Let us not omit duly to honour the servant; let us not neglect to honour and love infinitely more the Lord. ‘This man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.’ Let us see that we render Him

‘Thanks never ceasing, And infinite love.’

The Swift Decay Of Love

'And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. 16. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. 17. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. 18. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. 19. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. 20. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. 21. And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? 22. And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. 23. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 24. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. 25. And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) 26. Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.'—EXODUS xxxii. 15-26.

Moses and Joshua are on their way down from the mountain, the former carrying the tables in his hands and a heavier burden in his heart,—the thought of the people's swift apostasy. Joshua's soldierly ear interprets the shouts which are borne up to them as war-cries; 'He snuffeth the battle afar off, and saith Aha!' But Moses knew that they meant worse than war, and his knowledge helped his ear to distinguish a cadence and unison in the noise, unlike the confused mingling of the victors' yell of triumph and the shriek of the conquered. If we were dealing with fiction, we should admire the masterly dramatic instinct which lets the ear anticipate the eye, and so prepares us for the hideous sight that burst on these two at some turn in the rocky descent.

I. Note, then, what they saw. The vivid story puts it all in two words,—'the calf and the dancing.' There in the midst, perhaps on some pedestal, was the shameful copy of the Egyptian Apis; and whirling round it in mad circles, working themselves into frenzy by rapid motion and frantic shouts, were the people,—men and women, mingled in the licentious dance, who, six short weeks before, had sworn to the Covenant. Their bestial deity in the centre, and they compassing it with wild hymns, were a frightful contradiction of that grey altar and the twelve encircling stones which they had so lately reared, and which stood unregarded, a bowshot off, as a silent witness against them. Note the strange, irresistible fascination of idolatry. Clearly the personal influence of Moses was the only barrier against it. The people thought that he had disappeared, and, if so, Jehovah had disappeared with him. We wonder at their relapses into idolatry, but we forget that it was then universal, that Israel was at the beginning of its long training, that not even a divine revelation could produce harvest in seedtime, and that to look for a final and complete deliverance from the 'veil that was spread over all nations,' at this stage, is like expecting a newly reclaimed bit of the backwoods to grow grass as thick and velvety as has carpeted some lawn that has been mown

and cared for for a century. Grave condemnation is the due of these short-memoried rebels, who set up their ‘abomination’ in sight of the fire on Sinai; but that should not prevent our recognising the evidence which their sin affords of the tremendous power of idolatry in that stage of the world’s history. Israel’s proneness to fall back to heathenism makes it certain that a supernatural revelation is needed to account for their possession of the loftier faith which was so far above them.

That howling, leaping crowd tells what sort of religion they would have ‘evolved’ if left to themselves. Where did ‘Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me’ come from? Note the confusion of thought, so difficult for us to understand, which characterises idolatry. What a hopelessly inconsequential cry that was, ‘Make us gods, which shall go before us!’ and what a muddle of contradictions it was that men should say ‘These be thy gods,’ though they knew that the thing was made yesterday out of their own earrings! It took more than a thousand years to teach the nation the force of the very self-evident argument, as it seems to us, ‘the workman made it, therefore it is not God.’ The theory that the idol is only a symbol is not the actual belief of idolaters. It is a product of the study, but the worshipper unites in his thought the irreconcilable beliefs that it was made and is divine. A goldsmith will make and sell a Madonna, and when it is put in the cathedral, will kneel before it.

Note what was the sin here. It is generally taken for granted that it was a breach of the second, not of the first, commandment, and Aaron’s proclamation of ‘a feast to the Lord’ is taken as proving this. Aaron was probably trying to make an impossible compromise, and to find some salve for his conscience; but it does not follow that the people accepted the half-and-half suggestion. Leaders who try to control a movement which they disapprove, by seeming to accept it, play a dangerous game, and usually fail. But whether the people call the calf ‘Jehovah’ or ‘Apis’ matters very little. There would be as complete apostasy to another god, though the other god was called by the same name, if all that really makes his ‘name’ was left out, and foreign elements were brought in. Such worship as these wild dances, offered to an image, broke both the commandments, no matter by what name the image was invoked.

The roots of idolatry are in all men. The gross form of it is impossible to us; but the need for aid from sense, the dependence on art for wings to our devotion, which is a growing danger to-day, is only the modern form of the same dislike of a purely spiritual religion which sent these people dancing round their calf.

II. Mark Moses’ blaze of wrath and courageous, prompt action. He dashes the tables on the rock, as if to break the record of the useless laws which the people have already broken, and, with his hands free, flings himself without pause into the midst of the excited mob. Verses 19 and 20 bear the impression of his rapid, decisive action in their succession of clauses, each tacked on to the preceding by a simple ‘and.’ Stroke followed stroke. His fiery earnestness swept over all obstacles, the base riot ceased, the ashamed dancers slunk away. Some true hearts would gather about him, and carry out his commands; but he did the real work, and, single-handed, cowed and controlled the mob. No doubt, it took more time than the brief narrative, at first sight, would suggest. The image is flung into the fire from which it had come out. The fire made it, and the fire shall unmake it. We need not find difficulty in ‘burning’ a golden idol. That does not mean ‘calcined,’ and the writer is not guilty of a blunder, nor needed to be taught that you cannot burn gold. The next clause says that after it was ‘burned,’ it was still solid; so that, plainly, all that is meant is, that the metal was reduced to a shapeless lump. That would take some time. Then it was broken small; there were plenty of rocks to grind it up on. That would take some more time, but not a finger was lifted to prevent it. Then the more or less finely broken up fragments are flung into the brook, and,

with grim irony, the people are bid to drink. ‘You shall have enough of your idol, since you love him so. Here, down with him! You will have to take the consequences of your sin. You must drink as you have brewed.’ It is at once a contemptuous demonstration of the idol’s impotence, and a picture of the sure retribution.

But we may learn two things from this figure of the indignant lawgiver. One is, that the temper in which to regard idolatry is not one of equable indifference nor of scientific investigation, but that some heat of moral indignation is wholesome. We are all studying comparative mythology now, and getting much good from it; but we are in some danger of forgetting that these strange ideas and practices, which we examine at our ease, have spread spiritual darkness and moral infection over continents and through generations. Let us understand them, by all means; let us be thankful to find fragments of truth in, or innocent origins of, repulsive legends; but do not let the student swallow up the Christian in us, nor our minds lose their capacity of wholesome indignation at the systems, blended with Christ-like pity and effort for the victims.

We may learn, further, how strong a man is when he is all aflame with true zeal for God. The suddenness of Moses’ reappearance, the very audacity of his act, the people’s habit of obedience, all helped to carry him through the crisis; but the true secret of his swift victory was his own self-forgetting faith. There is contagion in pure religious enthusiasm. It is the strongest of all forces. One man, with God at his back, is always in the majority. He whose whole soul glows with the pure fire, will move among men like flame in stubble. ‘All things are possible to him that believeth.’ Consecrated daring, animated by love and fed with truth, is all-conquering.

III. Note the weaker nature of Aaron, taking refuge in a transparent lie. Probably his dialogue with his brother came in before the process described in the former verses was accomplished. But the narrative keeps all that referred to the destruction of the idol together, and goes by subject rather than by time. We do not learn how Moses had come to know Aaron’s share in the sin, but his question is one of astonishment. Had they bewitched him anyhow? or what inducement had led him so far astray? The stronger and devouter soul cannot conceive how the weaker had yielded. Aaron’s answer puts the people’s wish forward. ‘They said, Make us gods’; that was all which they had ‘done.’ A poor excuse, as Aaron feels even while he is stammering it out. What would Moses have answered if the people had ‘said’ so to him? Did he, standing there, with the heat of his struggle on him yet, look like a man that would acknowledge any demand of a mob as a reason for a ruler’s compliance? It is the coward’s plea. How many ecclesiastics and statesmen since then have had no better to offer for their acts! Such fear of the Lord as shrivelled before the breath of popular clamour could have had no deep roots. One of the first things to learn, whether we are in prominent or in private positions, is to hold by our religious convictions in supreme indifference to all surrounding voices, and to let no threats nor entreaties lead us to take one step beyond or against conscience.

Aaron feels the insufficiency of the plea, when he has to put it into plain words to such a listener, and so he flies to the resource of timid and weak natures, a lie. For what did he ask the gold, and put it into the furnace, unless he meant to make a god? Perhaps he had told the people the same story, as priests in all lands have been apt to claim a miraculous origin for idols. And he repeats it now, as if, were it true, he would plead the miracle as a vindication of the worship as well as his absolution. But the lie is too transparent to deserve even an answer, and Moses turns silently from him.

Aaron’s was evidently the inferior nature, and was less deeply stamped with the print of heaven than his brother’s. His feeble compliance is recorded as a beacon for all persons in

places of influence or authority, warning them against self-interested or cowardly yielding to a popular demand, at the sacrifice of the purity of truth and the approval of their own consciences. He was not the last priest who has allowed the supposed wishes of the populace to shape his representations of God, and has knowingly dropped the standard of duty or sullied the clear brightness of truth in deference to the many-voiced monster.

IV. Note the rallying of true hearts round Moses. The Revised Version reads ‘broken loose’ instead of ‘naked,’ and the correction is valuable. It explains the necessity for the separation of those who yet remained bound by the restraints of God’s law, and for the terrible retribution that followed. The rebellion had not been stamped out by the destruction of the calf; and though Moses’ dash into their midst had cowed the rebels for a time, things had gone too far to settle down again at once. The camp was in insurrection. It was more than a riot, it was a revolution. With the rapid eye of genius, Moses sees the gravity of the crisis, and, with equally swift decisiveness, acts so as to meet it. He ‘stood in the gate of the camp,’ and made the nucleus for the still faithful. His summons puts the full seriousness of the moment clearly before the people. They have come to a fork in the road. They must be either for Jehovah or against Him. There can be no mixing up of the worship of Jehovah and the images of Egypt, no tampering with God’s service in obedience to popular clamour. It must be one thing or other. This is no time for the family of ‘Mr. Facing-both-ways’; the question for each man is, ‘Under which King?’ Moses’ unhesitating confidence that he is God’s soldier, and that to be at his side is to be on God’s side, was warranted in him, but has often been repeated with less reason by eager contenders, as they believed themselves to be, for God. No doubt, it becomes us to be modest and cautious in calling all true friends of God to rank themselves with us. But where the issue is between foul wrong and plain right, between palpable idolatry, error, or unbridled lust, and truth, purity, and righteousness, the Christian combatant for these is entitled to send round the fiery cross, and proclaim a crusade in God’s name. There will always be plenty of people with cold water to pour on enthusiasm. We should be all the better for a few more, who would venture to feel that they are fighting for God, and to summon all who love Him to come to their and His help.

Moses’ own tribe responded to the summons. And, no doubt, Aaron was there too, galvanised into a nobler self by the courage and fervour of his brother, and, let us hope, urged by penitence, to efface the memory of his faithlessness by his heroism now.

We do not go on to the dreadful retribution, which must be regarded, not as massacre, but as legal execution. It is folly to apply to it, or to other analogous instances, the ideas of this Christian century. We need not be afraid to admit that there has been a development of morality. The retributions of a stern age were necessarily stern. But if we want to understand the heart of Moses, or of Moses’ God, we must not look only at the ruler of a wild people trampling out a revolt at the sacrifice of many lives, but listen to him, as the next section of the narrative shows him, pleading with tears for the rebels, and offering even to let his own name be blotted out of God’s book if their sin might be forgiven. So, coupling the two parts of his conduct together, we may learn a little more clearly a lesson, of which this age has much need,—the harmony of retributive justice and pitying love; and may come to understand that Moses learned both the one and the other by fellowship with the God in whom they both dwell in perfection and concord.

The Mediator's Threefold Prayer

'And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. 13. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight: and consider that this nation is Thy people. 14. And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. 15. And he said unto Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us! So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth, 17. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. 18. And he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. 19. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. 20. And he said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. 21. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 22. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: 23. And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shall see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen.'—EXODUS xxxiii. 12-23.

The calf worship broke the bond between God and Israel. Instead of His presence, 'an angel' is to lead them, for His presence could only be destruction. Mourning spreads through the camp, in token of which all ornaments are laid aside. The fate of the nation is in suspense, and the people wait, in sad attire, till God knows 'what to do unto' them. The Tabernacle is carried beyond the precincts of the camp, in witness of the breach, and all the future is doubtful. The preceding context describes (vs. 7-11) not one event, but the standing order of these dark days, when the camp had to be left if God was to be found, and when Moses alone received tokens of God's friendship, and the people stood wistfully and tremblingly gazing from afar, while the cloudy pillar wavered down to the Tabernacle door. Duty brought Moses back from such communion; but Joshua did not need to come near the tents of the evil-doers, and, in the constancy of devout desire, made his home in the Tabernacle. In one of these interviews, so close and familiar, the wonderful dialogue here recorded occurred. It turns round three petitions, to each of which the Lord answers.

I. We have the leader's prayer for himself, with the over-abundant answer of God. In the former chapter, we had the very sublimity of intercession, in which the stern avenger of idolatry poured out his self-sacrificing love for the stiff-necked nation whom he had had to smite, and offered himself a victim for them. Here his first prayer is mainly for himself, but it is not therefore a selfish prayer. Rather he prays for gifts to himself, to fit him for his service to them. We may note separately the prayer, and the pleas on which it is urged. 'Show me now Thy way (or ways), that I may know Thee.' The desire immediately refers to the then condition of things. As we have pointed out, it was a time of suspense. In the strong metaphor of the context, God was making up His mind on His course, and Israel was waiting with hushed breath for the *dénouement*. It was not the entrance of the nation into the promised land which was in doubt, but the manner of their guidance, and the penalties of their idolatry. These things Moses asked to know, and especially, as verse 12 shows, to receive some more definite communication as to their leader than the vague 'an angel.' But the specific

knowledge of God's 'way' was yearned for by him, mainly, as leading on to a deeper and fuller and more blessed knowledge of God Himself, and that again as leading to a fuller possession of God's favour, which, as already in some measure possessed, lay at the foundation of the whole prayer. The connection of thought here goes far beyond the mere immediate blessing, which Moses needed at the moment. That cry for insight into the purposes and methods of Him whom the soul trusts, amid darkness and suspense, is the true voice of sonship. The more deeply it sees into these, the more does the devout soul feel the contrast between the spot of light in which it lives and the encircling obscurity, and the more does it yearn for the further setting back of the boundaries. Prayer does more than effort, for satisfying that desire. Nor is it mere curiosity or the desire for intellectual clearness that moves the longing. For the end of knowing God's ways is, for the devout man, a deeper, more blessed knowledge of God Himself, who is best known in His deeds; and the highest, most blessed issue of the God-given knowledge of God, is the conscious sunshine of His favour shining ever on His servant. That is not a selfish religion which, beginning with the assurance that we have found grace in His sight, seeks to climb, by happy paths of growing knowledge of Him as manifested in His ways, to a consciousness of that favour which is made stable and profound by clear insight into the depths of His purposes and acts.

The pleas on which this prayer is urged are two: the suppliant's heavy tasks, and God's great assurances to him. He boldly reminds God of what He has set him to do, and claims that he should be furnished with what is needful for discharging his commission. How can he lead if he is kept in the dark? When we are as sure as Moses was of God's charge to us, we may be as bold as he in asking the needful equipment for it. God does not send His servants out to sow without seed, or to fight without a sword. His command is His pledge. He smiles approval when His servants' confidence assumes even bold forms, which sound like remonstrance and a suspicion that He was forgetting, for He discerns the underlying eagerness to do His will, and the trust in Him. The second plea is built on God's assurances of intimate and distinguishing knowledge and favour. He had said that He knew Moses 'by name,' by all these calls and familiar interviews which gave him the certainty of his individual relation to, and his special appointment from, the Lord. Such prerogative was inconsistent with reserve. The test of friendship is confidence. So pleads Moses, and God recognises the plea. 'I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.'

The plea based upon the relation of the people to God is subordinate in this first prayer. It is thrown in at the end almost as an afterthought; it boldly casts responsibility off Moses on to God, and does so to enforce the prayer that he should be equipped with all requisites for his work, as if he had said, 'It is more Thy concern than mine, that I should be able to lead them.' The divine answer is a promise to go not with the people, but with Moses. It is therefore not yet a full resolving of the doubtful matter, nor directly a reply to Moses' prayer. In one aspect it is less, and in another more, than had been asked. It seals to the man and to the leader the assurance that for himself he shall have the continual presence of God, in his soul and in his work, and that, in all the weary march, he will have rest, and will come to a fuller rest at its end. Thus God ever answers the true hearts that seek to know Him, and to be fitted for their tasks. Whether the precise form of desire be fulfilled or no, the issue of such bold and trustful pleading is always the inward certainty of God's face shining on us, and the experience of repose, deep and untroubled in the midst of toil, so that we may be at once pilgrims towards, and dwellers in, 'the house of the Lord,'

II. We have the intercessor's prayer for the people, with the answer (vs. 15-17). If the promise of verse 14 is taken as referring to the people, there is nothing additional asked in

this second stage, and the words of verse l7, ‘this thing also,’ are inexplicable. Observe that ‘with me’ in verse 15 is a supplement, and that the ‘us’ of the next clause, as well as the whole cast of verse 16, suggests that we should rather supply ‘with us,’ The substance, then, of the second petition, is the extension of the promise, already given to Moses for himself, to the entire nation. Observe how he identifies himself with them, making them ‘partakers’ in his grace, and reiterating ‘I and Thy people,’ as if he would have no blessing which was not shared by them. He seeks that the withdrawal of God’s presence, which had been the consequence of Israel’s withdrawal from God, should be reversed, and that not he alone, but all the rebels, might still possess His presence.

The plea for this prayer is God’s honour, which was concerned in making it plain even in the remote wilderness, to the wandering tribes there, that His hand was upon Israel. Moses expands the argument which he had just touched before. The thought of His own glory as the motive of God’s acts, may easily be so put at to be repulsive; but at bottom it is the same as to say that His motive is love—for the glory which He seeks is the communication of true thoughts concerning His character, that men may be made glad and like Himself thereby. Moses has learned that God’s heart must long to reveal its depth of mercy, and therefore he pleads that even sinful Israel should not be left by God, in order that some light from His face may strike into a dark world. There is wide benevolence, as well as deep insight into the desires of God, in the plea.

The divine answer yields unconditionally to the request, and rests the reason for so doing wholly on the relation between God and Moses. The plea which he had urged in lowly boldness as the foundation of both his prayers is endorsed, and, for his sake, the divine presence is again granted to the people.

Can we look at this scene without seeing in it the operation on a lower field of the same great principle of intercession, which reaches its unique example in Jesus Christ? It is not arbitrary forcing of the gospel into the history, but simply the recognition of the essence of the history, when we see in it a foreshadowing of our great High-priest. He, too, knits Himself so closely with us, both by the assumption of our manhood and by the identity of loving sympathy, that He accepts nothing from the Father’s hand for Himself alone. He, too, presents Himself before God, and says ‘I and Thy people.’ The great seal of proof for the world that He is the beloved of God, lies in the divine guardianship and guidance of His servants. His prayer for them prevails, and the reason for its prevalence is God’s delight in Him. The very sublime of self-sacrificing love was in the lawgiver, but the height of his love, measured against the immeasurable altitude of Christ’s, is as a mole-hill to the Andes.

III. We have the last soaring desire which rises above the limits of the present. These three petitions teach the insatiableness, if we may use the word, of devout desires. Each request granted brings on a greater. ‘The gift doth stretch itself as ‘tis received.’ Enjoyment increases capacity, and increase of capacity is increase of desire. God being infinite, and man capable of indefinite growth, neither the widening capacity nor the infinite supply can have limits. This is not the least of the blessings of a devout life, that the appetite grows with what it feeds on, and that, while there is always satisfaction, there is never satiety.

Moses’ prayer sounds presumptuous, but it was heard unblamed, and granted in so far as possible. It was a venial error—if error it may be called—that a soul, touched with the flame of divine love, should aspire beyond the possibilities of mortality. At all events, it was a fault in which he has had few imitators. *Our* desires keep but too well within the limits of the possible. The precise meaning of the petition must be left undetermined. Only this is clear, that it was something far beyond even that face-to-face intercourse which he had had, as well as beyond that vision granted to the elders. If we are to take ‘glory’ in its usual sense, it

would mean the material symbol of God's presence, which shone at the heart of the pillar, and dwelt afterwards between the cherubim, but probably we must attach a loftier meaning to it here, and rather think of what we should call the uncreated and infinite divine essence. Only do not let us make Moses talk like a metaphysician or a theological professor. Rather we should hear in his cry the voice of a soul thrilled through and through with the astounding consciousness of God's favour, blessed with love-gifts in answered prayers, and yearning for more of that light which it feels to be life.

And if the petition be dark, the answer is yet more obscure 'with excess of light.' Mark how it begins with granting, not with refusing. It tells how much the loving desire has power to bring, before it speaks of what in it must be denied. There is infinite tenderness in that order of response. It speaks of a heart that does not love to say 'no,' and grants our wishes up to the very edge of the possible, and wraps the bitterness of any refusal in the sweet envelope of granted requests. A broad distinction is drawn between that in God which can be revealed, and that which cannot. The one is 'glory,' the other 'goodness,' corresponding, we might almost say, to the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'natural' attributes of God. But, whatever mysterious revelation under the guise of vision may be concealed in these words, and in the fulfilment of them in the next chapter, they belong to the 'things which it is impossible for a man to utter,' even if he has received them. We are on more intelligible ground in the next clause of the promise, the proclamation of 'the Name.' That expression is, in Scripture, always used as meaning the manifested character of God. It is a revelation addressed to the spirit, not to the sense. It is the translation, so far as it is capable of translation, of the vision which it accompanied; it is the treasure which Moses bore away from Sinai, and has shared among us all. The reason for his prayer was probably his desire to have his mediatorial office confirmed and perfected; and it was so, by that proclamation of the Name. The reason for this marvellous gift is next set forth as being God's own unconditional grace and mercy. He is His own motive, His own reason. Just as the independent and absolute fullness of His being is expressed by the name 'I am that I am,' so the independent and absolute freeness of His mercy, whether in granting Moses' prayer or in pardoning the people, is expressed by 'I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' Not till all this exuberance of gracious answer has smoothed the way does the denial of the impossible request come; and even then it is so worded as to lay all the emphasis on what is granted, and to show that the refusal is but another phase of love. The impossibility of beholding the Face is reiterated, and then the careful provisions which God will make for the fulfilment of the possible part of the bold wish are minutely detailed. The distinction between the revealable and unrevealable, which has been already expressed by the contrast of 'glory' and 'grace,' now appears in the distinction between the 'face' which cannot be looked on, and the 'back' which may be.

Human language and thought are out of their depth here. We must be content to see a dim splendour shining through the cloudy words, to know that there was granted to one man a realisation of God's presence, and a revelation of His character, so far transcending ordinary experiences as that it was fitly called sight, but yet as far beneath the glory of His being as the comparatively imperfect knowledge of a man's form, when seen only from behind, is beneath that derived from looking him in the face.

But whatever was the singular prerogative of the lawgiver, as he gazed from the cleft of the rock at the receding glory, we see more than he ever did; and the Christian child, who looks upon the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' has a vision which outshines the flashing radiance that shone round Moses. It deepened his convictions, confirmed his faith, added to his assurance of his divine commission, but only added to his knowledge of God by the proclamation of the Name, and that Name is more fully proclaimed in our ears. Sinai, with all

its thunders, is silent before Calvary. And he who has Jesus Christ to declare God's Name to him need not envy the lawgiver on the mountain, nor even the saints in heaven.

God Proclaiming His Own Name

'The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.'—EXODUS xxxiv. 6.

This great event derives additional significance and grandeur from the place in which it stands. It follows the hideous act of idolatry in which the levity and sinfulness of Israel reached their climax. The trumpet of Sinai had hardly ceased to peal, and there in the rocky solitudes, in full view of the mount 'that burned with fire,' while the echoes of the thunder and the Voice still lingered, one might say, among the cliffs, that mob of abject cowards were bold enough to shake off their allegiance to God, and, forgetful of all the past, plunged into idolatry, and wallowed in sensuous delights. What a contrast between Moses on the mount and Aaron and the people in the plain! Then comes the wonderful story of the plague and of Moses' intercession, followed by the high request of Moses, so strange and yet so natural at such a time, for the vision of God's 'glory.' Into all the depths of that I do not need to plunge. Enough that he is told that his desire is beyond the possibilities of creatural life. The mediator and lawgiver cannot rise beyond the bounds of human limitations. But what *can* be *shall* be. God's 'goodness' will pass before him. Then comes this wonderful advance in the progress of divine revelation. If we remember the breach of the Covenant, and then turn to these words, considered as evoked by the people's sin, they become very remarkable. If we consider them as the answer to Moses' desire, they are no less so. Taking these two thoughts with us, let us consider them in—

I. The answer to the request for a sensuous manifestation.

The request is 'show me,' as if some visible manifestation were desired and expected, or, if not a visible, at least a direct perception of Jehovah's glory.' Moses desires that he, as mediator and lawgiver, may have some closer knowledge. The answer to his request is a word, the articulate proclamation of the 'Name' of the Lord. It is higher than all manifestation to sense, which was what Moses had asked. Here there is no symbol as of the Lord in the 'cloud.' The divine manifestation is impossible to sense, and that, too, not by reason of man's limitations, but by reason of God's nature. The manifestation to spirit in full immediate perception is impossible also. It has to be maintained that we know God only 'in part'; but it does not follow that our knowledge is only representative, or is not of Him 'as He is.' Though not whole it is real, so far as it goes.

But this is not the highest form. Words and propositions can never reveal so fully, nor with such certitude, as a personal revelation. But we have Christ's life, 'God manifest': not words about God, but the manifestation of the very divine nature itself in action. 'Merciful':—and we see Jesus going about 'doing good.' 'Gracious,' and we see Him welcoming to Himself all the weary, and ever bestowing of the treasures of His love. 'Longsuffering':—'Father! forgive them!' God is 'plenteous in mercy and in truth,' forgiving transgression and sin:—'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'

How different it all is when we have deeds, a human life, on which to base our belief! How much more certain, as well as coming closer to our hearts! Merely verbal statements need proof, they need warming. In Christ's showing us the Father they are changed as from a painting to a living being; they are brought out of the region of abstractions into the concrete.

'And so the word had breath, and wrought With human hands the creed of creeds.'

'Show us the Father and it sufficeth us.' 'He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.'

Is there any other form of manifestation possible? Yes; in heaven there will be a closer vision of Christ—not of God. Our knowledge of Christ will there be expanded, deepened, made more direct. We know not how. There will be bodily changes: 'Like unto the body of His glory.' etc. 'We shall be like Him.' 'Changed from glory to glory.'

II. The answer to the desire to see God's glory.

The 'Glory' was the technical name for the lustrous cloud that hung over the Mercy-seat, but here it probably means more generally some visible manifestation of the divine presence. What Moses craved to see with his eyes was the essential divine light. That vision he did not receive, but what he did receive was partly a visible manifestation, though not of the dazzling radiance which no human eye can see and live, and still more instructive and encouraging, the communication in words of that shining galaxy of attributes, 'the glories that compose Thy name.' In the name specially so-called, the name Jehovah, was revealed absolute eternal Being, and in the accompanying declaration of so-called 'attributes' were thrown into high relief the two qualities of merciful forgiveness and retributive justice. The 'attributes' which separate God from us, and in which vulgar thought finds the marks of divinity, are conspicuous by their absence. Nothing is said of omniscience, omnipresence, and the like, but forgiveness and justice, of both of which men carry analogues in themselves, are proclaimed by the very voice of God as those by which He desires that He should be chiefly conceived of by us.

The true 'glory of God' is His pardoning Love. That is the glowing heart of the divine brightness. If so, then the very heart of that heart of brightness, the very glory of the 'Glory of God,' is the Christ, in whom we behold that which was at once 'the glory as of the only begotten of the Father' and the 'Glory of the Father.'

In Jesus these two elements, pardoning love and retributive justice, wondrously meet, and the mystery of the possibility of their harmonious co-operation in the divine government is solved, and becomes the occasion for the rapturous gratitude of man and the wondering adoration of principalities and powers in heavenly places. Jesus has manifested the divine mercifulness; Jesus has borne the burden of sin and the weight of the divine Justice. The lips that said 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee,' also cried, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The tenderest manifestation of the God 'plenteous in mercy … forgiving iniquity,' and the most awe-kindling manifestation of the God 'that will by no means clear the guilty,' are fused into one, when we 'behold that Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.'

III. The answer to a great sin.

This Revelation is the immediate issue of Israel's great apostasy.

Sin evokes His pardoning mercy. This insignificant speck in Creation has been the scene of the wonder of the Incarnation, not because its magnitude was great, but because its need was desperate. Men, because they are sinners, have been subjects of an experience more precious than the 'angels which excel in strength' and hearken 'to the voice of His word' have known or can know. The wilder the storm of human evil roars and rages, the deeper and louder is the voice that peals across the storm. So for us all Christ is the full and final revelation of God's grace. The last, because the perfect embodiment of it; the sole, because the sufficient manifestation of it. 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

Sin And Forgiveness

'... Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty....'—EXODUS xxiv. 7.

The former chapter tells us of the majesty of the divine revelation as it was made to Moses on 'the mount of God.' Let us notice that, whatever was the visible pomp of the external Theophany to the senses, the true revelation lay in the proclamation of the 'Name'; the revelation to the conscience and the heart; and such a revelation had never before fallen on mortal ears. It is remarkable that the very system which was emphatically one of law and retribution should have been thus heralded by a word which is perfectly 'evangelical' in its whole tone. That fact should have prevented many errors as to the relation of Judaism and Christianity. The very centre of the former was 'God is love,' 'merciful and gracious,' and if there follows the difficult addition 'visiting the iniquities,' etc., the New Testament adds its 'Amen' to that. True, the harmony of the two and the great revelation of the *means* of forgiveness lay far beyond the horizon of Moses and his people, but none the less was it the message of Judaism that 'there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.' The law spoke of retribution, justice, duty, and sin, but side by side with the law was another institution, the sacrificial worship, which proclaimed that God was full of love, and that the sinner was welcomed to His side. And it is the root of many errors to transfer New Testament language about the law to the whole Old Testament system. But, passing away from this, I wish to look at two points in these words.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

II. The divine treatment of them.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

Observe the threefold form of expression—iniquity and transgression and sin.

It seems natural that in the divine proclamation of His own holy character, the sinful nature of men should be characterised with all the fervid energy of such words; for the accumulation even of synonyms would serve a *moral* purpose, expressive at once of the divine displeasure against sin, and of the free full pardon for it in all its possible forms. But the words are very far from all meaning the same thing. They all designate the same actions, but from different points of view, and with reference to different phases and qualities of sin.

Now these three expressions are inadequately represented by the English translation.

'Iniquity' literally means 'twisting,' or 'something twisted,' and is thus the opposite of 'righteousness,' or rather of what is 'straight.' It is thus like our own 'right' and 'wrong,' or like the Latin 'in-iquity' (by which it is happily enough rendered in our version). So looking at this word and the thoughts which connect themselves with it, we come to this:—

(1) All sin of every sort is deviation from a standard to which we ought to be conformed.

Note the graphic force of the word as giving the straight line to which our conduct ought to run parallel, and the contrast between it and the wavering curves into which our lives meander, like the lines in a child's copy-book, or a rude attempt at drawing a circle at one sweep of the pencil. Herbert speaks of

'The crooked wandering ways in which we live.'

There is a path which is 'right' and one which is 'wrong,' whether we believe so or not.

There are hedges and limitations for us all. This law extends to the ordering of all things, whether great or small. If a line be absolutely straight, and we are running another parallel to it, the smallest possible wavering is fatal to our copy. And the smallest deflection, if produced, will run out into an ever-widening distance from the straight line.

There is nothing which it is more difficult to get into men's belief than the sinfulness of little sins; nothing more difficult to cure ourselves of than the habit of considering quantity rather than quality in moral questions. What a solemn thought it is, that of a great absolute law of right rising serene above us, embracing everything! And this is the first idea that is here in our text—a grave and deep one.

But the second of these expressions for sin literally means 'apostasy,' 'rebellion,' not 'transgression,' and this word brings in a more solemn thought yet, viz.:—

(2) Every sin is apostasy from or rebellion against God.

The former word dealt only with abstract thought of a 'law,' this with a 'Lawgiver.'

Our obligations are not merely to a law, but to Him who enacted it. So it becomes plain that the very centre of all sin is the shaking off of obedience to God. Living to 'self' is the inmost essence of every act of evil, and may be as virulently active in the smallest trifle as in the most awful crime.

How infinitely deeper and darker this makes sin to be!

When one thinks of our obligations and of our dependence, of God's love and care, what an 'evil and a bitter thing' every sin becomes!

Urge this terrible contrast of a loving Father and a disobedient child.

This idea brings out the ingratitude of all sin.

But the third word here used literally means 'missing an aim,' and so we come to

(3) Every sin misses the goal at which we should aim. There may be a double idea here—that of failing in the great purpose of our being, which is already partially included in the first of these three expressions, or that of missing the aim which we proposed to ourselves in the act. All sin is a failure.

By it we fall short of the loftiest purpose. Whatever we gain we lose more.

Every life which has sin in it is a 'failure.' You may be prosperous, brilliant, successful, but you are 'a failure.'

For consider what human life might be: full of God and full of joy. Consider what the 'fruits' of sin are. 'Apples of Sodom.' How sin leads to sorrow. This is an inevitable law. Sin fails to secure what it sought for. All 'wrong' is a mistake, a blunder. 'Thou fool!'

So this word suggests the futility of sin considered in its consequences. 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' 'The end of these things is death.'

II. The divine treatment of sins.

'Forgiving,' and yet not suffering them to go unpunished.

(1) God *forgives*, and yet He does not leave sin unpunished, for He will 'by no means *clear* the guilty.'

The one word refers to His love, His heart; the other to the retributions which are inseparable from the very course of nature.

Forgiveness is the flow of God's love to all, and the welcoming back to His favour of all who come. Forgiveness likewise includes the escape from the extreme and uttermost consequences of sin in this life and in the next, the sense of God's displeasure here, and the final separation from Him, which is eternal death. Forgiveness is not inconsistent with retribution. There must needs be retribution, from—

(a) The very constitution of our nature.

Conscience, our spiritual nature, our habits all demand it.

(b) The constitution of the world.

In it all things work under God, but only for 'good' to them who love God. To all others, sooner or later, the Nemesis comes. 'Ye shall eat of the fruit of your doings.'

(2) *God* forgives, and therefore He does not leave sin unpunished. It is divine mercy that strikes. The end of His chastisement is to separate us from our sins.

(3) Divine forgiveness and retributive justice both centre in the revelation of the Cross.

To us this message comes. It was the hidden heart of the Mosaic system. It was the revelation of Sinai. To Israel it was 'proclaimed' in thunder and darkness, and the way of forgiveness and the harmony of righteousness and mercy were veiled. To us it is proclaimed from Calvary. There in full light the Lord passes before us and proclaims, 'I am the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious.' 'Ye are come … unto Jesus.' 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.' 'This is my Beloved Son, hear Him!'

Blessed And Tragic Unconsciousness

'... Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.'—EXODUS xxxiv. 29.

'... And Samson wist not that the Lord had departed from him.'—JUDGES xvi. 20.

The recurrence of the same phrase in two such opposite connections is very striking. Moses, fresh from the mountain of vision, where he had gazed on as much of the glory of God as was accessible to man, caught some gleam of the light which he adoringly beheld; and a strange radiance sat on his face, unseen by himself, but visible to all others. So, supreme beauty of character comes from beholding God and talking with Him; and the bearer of it is unconscious of it.

Samson, fresh from his coarse debauch, and shorn of the locks which he had vowed to keep, strides out into the air, and tries his former feats; but his strength has left him because the Lord has left him; and the Lord has left him because, in his fleshly animalism, he has left the Lord. Like, but most unlike, Moses, he knows not his weakness. So strength, like beauty, is dependent upon contact with God, and may ebb away when that is broken, and the man may be all unaware of his weakness till he tries his power, and ignominiously fails.

These two contrasted pictures, the one so mysteriously grand and the other so tragic, may well help to illustrate for us truths that should be burned into our minds and our memories.

I. Note, then, the first thought which they both teach us, that beauty and strength come from communion with God.

In both the cases with which we are dealing these were of a merely material sort. The light on Moses' face and the strength in Samson's arm were, at the highest, but types of something far higher and nobler than themselves. But still, the presence of the one and the departure of the other alike teach us the conditions on which we may possess both in nobler form, and the certainty of losing them if we lose hold of God.

Moses' experience teaches us that the loftiest beauty of character comes from communion with God. That is the use that the Apostle makes of this remarkable incident in 2 Cor. iii, where he takes the light that shone from Moses' face as being the symbol of the better lustre that gleams from all those who 'behold (or reflect) the glory of the Lord' with unveiled faces, and, by beholding, are 'changed into the likeness' of that on which they gaze with adoration and longing. The great law to which, almost exclusively, Christianity commits the perfecting of individual character is this: Look at Him till you become like Him, and in beholding, be changed. 'Tell me the company a man keeps, and I will tell you his character,' says the old proverb. And what is true on the lower levels of daily life, that most men become assimilated to the complexion of those around them, especially if they admire or love them, is the great principle whereby worship, which is desire and longing and admiration in the superlative degree, stamps the image of the worshipped upon the character of the worshipper. 'They followed after vanity, and have become vain,' says one of the prophets, gathering up into a sentence the whole philosophy of the degradation of humanity by reason of idolatry and the worship of false gods. 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' The law works upwards as well as downwards, for whom we worship we declare to be infinitely good; whom we worship we long to be like; whom we worship we shall certainly imitate.

Thus, brethren, the practical, plain lesson that comes from this thought is simply this: If you want to be pure and good, noble and gentle, sweet and tender; if you desire to be delivered from your own weaknesses and selfish, sinful idiosyncrasies, the way to secure your desire is, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' Contemplation, which is love and longing, is the parent of all effort that succeeds. Contemplation of God in Christ is the master-key that opens this door, and makes it possible for the lowliest and the foulest amongst us to cherish unpresumptuous hopes of being like Him' if we see Him as He is revealed here, and perfectly like Him when yonder we see Him 'as He *is*.'

There have been in the past, and there are today, thousands of simple souls, shut out by lowliness of position and other circumstances from all the refining and ennobling influences of which the world makes so much, who yet in character and bearing, ay, and sometimes in the very look of their meek faces, are living witnesses how mighty to transform a nature is the power of loving gazing upon Jesus Christ. All of us who have had much to do with Christians of the humbler classes know that. There is no influence to refine and beautify men like that of living near Jesus Christ, and walking in the light of that Beauty which is 'the effulgence of the divine glory and the express image of His Person.'

And in like manner as beauty so strength comes from communion with God and laying hold on Him. We can only think of Samson as a 'saint' in a very modified fashion, and present him as an example in a very limited degree. His dependence upon divine power was rude, and divorced from elevation of character and morality, but howsoever imperfect, fragmentary, and I might almost say to our more trained eyes, grotesque, it looks, yet there was a reality in it; and when the man was faithless to his vow, and allowed the crafty harlot's scissors to shear from his head the token of his consecration, it was because the reality of the consecration, rude and external as that consecration was, both in itself and in its consequences, had passed away from him.

And so we may learn the lesson, taught at once by the flashing face of the lawgiver and the enfeebled force of the hero, that the two poles of perfectness in humanity, so often divorced from one another—beauty and strength—have one common source, and depend for their loftiest position upon the same thing. God possesses both in supremest degree, being the Almighty and the All-fair; and we possess them in limited, but yet possibly progressive, measure, through dependence upon Him. The true force of character, and the true power for work, and every real strength which is not disguised weakness, 'a lath painted to look like iron,' come on condition of our keeping close by God. The Fountain is open for you all; see to it that you resort thither.

II. And now the second thought of my text is that the bearer of the radiance is unconscious of it.

'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.' In all regions of life, the consummate apex and crowning charm of excellence is unconsciousness of excellence. Whenever a man begins to imagine that he is good, he begins to be bad; and every virtue and beauty of character is robbed of some portion of its attractive fairness when the man who bears it knows, or fancies, that he possesses it. The charm of childhood is its perfect unconsciousness, and the man has to win back the child's heritage, and become 'as a little child,' if he would enter into and dwell in the 'Kingdom of Heaven.' And so in the loftiest region of all, that of the religious life, you may be sure that the more a man is like Christ, the less he knows it; and the better he is, the less he suspects it. The reasons why that is so, point, at the same time, to the ways by which we may attain to this blessed self-oblivion. So let me put just in a word or two some simple, practical thoughts.

Let us, then, try to lose ourselves in Jesus Christ. That way of self-oblivion is emancipation and blessedness and power. It is safe for us to leave all thoughts of our miserable selves behind us, if instead of them we have the thought of that great, sweet, dear Lord, filling mind and heart. A man walking on a tight-rope will be far more likely to fall, if he is looking at his toes, than if he is looking at the point to which he is going. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, then we can safely look, neither to our feet nor to the gulfs; but straight at Him gazing, we shall straight to Him advance. 'Looking off' from ourselves 'unto Jesus' is safe; looking off anywhere else is peril. Seek that self-oblivion which comes from self being swallowed up in the thought of the Lord.

And again, I would say, think constantly and longingly of the unattained. 'Brethren! I count not myself to have apprehended.' Endless aspiration and a stinging consciousness of present imperfection are the loftiest states of man here below. The beholders down in the valley, when they look up, may see our figures against the skyline, and fancy us at the summit, but our loftier elevation reveals untrodden heights beyond; and we have only risen so high in order to discern more clearly how much higher we have to rise. Dissatisfaction with the present is the condition of excellence in all pursuits of life, and in the Christian life even more eminently than in all others, because the goal to be attained is in its very nature infinite; and therefore ensures the blessed certainty of continual progress, accompanied here, indeed, with the sting and bite of a sense of imperfection, but one day to be only sweetness, as we think of how much there is yet to be won in addition to the perfection of the present.

So, dear friends, the best way to keep ourselves unconscious of present attainments is to set our faces forward, and to make 'all experience' as 'an arch wherethro' gleams that untraveiled world to which we move.' 'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.'

The third practical suggestion that I would make is, cultivate a clear sense of your own imperfections. We do not need to try to learn our goodness. That will suggest itself to us only too clearly; but what we do need is to have a very clear sense of our shortcomings and failures, our faults of temper, our faults of desire, our faults in our relations to our fellows, and all the other evils that still buzz and sting and poison our blood. Has not the best of us enough of these to knock all the conceit out of us? A true man will never be so much ashamed of himself as when he is praised, for it will always send him to look into the deep places of his heart, and there will be a swarm of ugly, creeping things under the stones there, if he will only turn them up and look beneath. So let us lose ourselves in Christ, let us set our faces to the unattained future, let us clearly understand our own faults and sins.

III. Thirdly, the strong man made weak is unconscious of his weakness.

I do not mean here to touch at all upon the general thought that, by its very nature, all evil tends to make us insensitive to its presence. Conscience becomes dull by practice of sin and by neglect of conscience, until that which at first was as sensitive as the palm of a little child's hand becomes as if it were 'seared with a hot iron.' The foulness of the atmosphere of a crowded hall is not perceived by the people in it. It needs a man to come in from the outer air to detect it. We can accustom ourselves to any mephitic and poisonous atmosphere, and many of us live in one all our days, and do not know that there is any need of ventilation or that the air is not perfectly sweet. The 'deceitfulness' of sin is its great weapon.

But what I desire to point out is an even sadder thing than that—namely, that Christian people may lose their strength because they let go their hold upon God, and know nothing about it. Spiritual declension, all unconscious of its own existence, is the very history of hundreds of nominal Christians amongst us, and, I dare say, of some of us. The very fact that you do not suppose the statement to have the least application to yourself is perhaps the very

sign that it does apply. When the lifeblood is pouring out of a man, he faints before he dies. The swoon of unconsciousness is the condition of some professing Christians. Frost-bitten limbs are quite comfortable, and only tingle when circulation is coming back. I remember a great elm-tree, the pride of an avenue in the south, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood, leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark. Some Christian people are like that; they manage to grow leaves, and even some fruit, but when the storm comes they will go down, because the heart has been out of their religion for years. 'Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him.'

And so, brother, because there are so many things that mask the ebbing away of a Christian life, and because our own self-love and habits come in to hide declension, let me earnestly exhort you and myself to watch ourselves very narrowly. Unconsciousness does not mean ignorant presumption or presumptuous ignorance. It is difficult to make an estimate of ourselves by poking into our own sentiments and supposed feelings and convictions, and the estimate is likely to be wrong. There is a better way than that. Two things tell what a man is—one, what he wants, and the other, what he does. As the will is, the man is. Where do the currents of your desires set? If you watch their flow, you may be pretty sure whether your religious life is an ebbing or a rising tide. The other way to ascertain what we are is rigidly to examine and judge what we do. 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.' Actions are the true test of a man. Conduct is the best revelation of character, especially in regard to ourselves. So let us 'watch and be sober'—sober in our estimate of ourselves, and determined to find every lurking evil, and to drag it forth into the light.

Again, let me say, let us ask God to help us. 'Search me, O God! and try me.' We shall never rightly understand what we are, unless we spread ourselves out before Him and crave that Divine Spirit, who is 'the candle of the Lord,' to be carried ever in our hands into the secret recesses of our sinful hearts. 'Anoint thine eyes with eye salve that thou mayest see,' and get the eye salve by communion with God, who will supply thee a standard by which to try thy poor, stained, ragged righteousness. The *collyrium*, the eye salve, may be, will be, painful when it is rubbed into the lids, but it will clear the sight; and the first work of Him, whose dearest name is *Comforter*, is to convince of sin.

And, last of all, let us keep near to Jesus Christ, near enough to Him to feel His touch, to hear His voice, to see His face, and to carry down with us into the valley some radiance on our countenances which may tell even the world, that we have been up where the Light lives and reigns.

'Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see,'

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'And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work….' —EXODUS xxxv. 21.

This is the beginning of the catalogue of contributions towards the erection of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. It emphasises the purely spontaneous and voluntary character of the gifts. There was plenty of compulsory work, of statutory contribution, in the Old Testament system of worship. Sacrifices and tithes and other things were imperative, but the Tabernacle was constructed by means of undemanded offerings, and there were parts of the standing ritual which were left to the promptings of the worshipper's own spirit. There was always a door through which the impulses of devout hearts could come in, to animate what else would have become dead, mechanical compliance with prescribed obligations. That spontaneous surrender of precious things, not because a man must give them, but because he delights in letting his love come to the surface and find utterance in giving which is still more blessed than receiving, had but a narrow and subordinate sphere of action assigned to it in the legal system of the Old Covenant, but it fills the whole sphere of Christianity, and becomes the only kind of offering which corresponds to its genius and is acceptable to Christ. We may look, then, not merely at the words of our text, but at the whole section of which they form the introduction, and find large lessons for ourselves, not only in regard to the one form of Christian service which is pecuniary liberality, but in reference to all which we have to do for Jesus Christ, in the picture which it gives us of that eager crowd of willing givers, flocking to the presence of the lawgiver, with hands laden with gifts so various in kind and value, but all precious because freely and delightedly brought, and all needed for the structure of God's house.

I. We have set forth here the true motive of acceptable service.

'They came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing.' There is a striking metaphor in that last word. Wherever the spirit is touched with the sweet influences of God's love, and loves and gives back again, that spirit is buoyant, lifted, raised above the low, flat levels where selfishness feeds fat and then rots. The spirit is raised by any great and unselfish emotion. There is buoyancy and glad consciousness of elevation in all the self-sacrifice of love, which dilates and lifts the spirit as the light gas smoothes out the limp folds of silk in a balloon, and sends it heavenwards, a full sphere. Only service or surrender, which is thus cheerful because it is the natural expression of love, is true service in God's sight. Whosoever, then, had his spirit raised and made buoyant by a great glad resolve to give up some precious thing for God's sanctuary, came with his gift in his hand, and he and it were accepted. That trusting of men's giving to spontaneous liberality was exceptional under the law. It is normal under the Gospel, and has filled the whole field, and driven out the other principle of statutory and constrained service and sacrifice altogether. We have its feeble beginnings in this incident. It is sovereign in Christ's Church. There are no pressed men on board Christ's ship. None but volunteers make up His army. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy might.' He cares nothing for any service but such as it would be pain to keep back; nothing for any service which is not given with a smile of glad thankfulness that we are able to give it.

And for the true acceptableness of Christian service, that motive of thankful love must be actually present in each deed. It is not enough that we should determine on and begin a course of sacrifice or work under the influence of that great motive, unless we renew it at each step.

We cannot hallow a row of actions in that wholesale fashion by baptizing the first of them with the cleansing waters of true consecration, while the rest are done from lower motives. Each deed must be sanctified by the presence of the true motive, if it is to be worthy of Christ's acceptance. But there is a constant tendency in all Christian work to slide off its only right foundation, and having been begun 'in the spirit,' to be carried on 'in the flesh.' Constant watchfulness is needed to resist this tendency, which, if yielded to, destroys the worth and power, and changes the inmost nature, of apparently devoted and earnest service.

Not the least subtle and dangerous of these spurious motives which steal in surreptitiously to mar our work for Christ is habit. Service done from custom, and representing no present impulse of thankful devotion, may pass muster with us, but does it do so with God? No doubt a habit of godly service is, in some aspects, a good, and it is well to enlist that tremendous power of custom which sways so much of our lives, on the side of godliness. But it is not good, but, on the contrary, pure loss, when habit becomes mechanical, and, instead of making it easier to call up the true motive, excludes that motive, and makes it easy to do the deed without it. I am afraid that if such thoughts were applied as a sieve to sift the abundant so-called Christian work of the present day, there would be an alarming and, to the workers, astonishing quantity of refuse that would not pass the meshes.

Let us, then, try to bring every act of service nominally done for Christ into conscious relation with the motive which ought to be its parent; for only the work that is done because our spirits lift us up, and our hearts are willing, is work that is accepted by Him, and is blessed to us.

And how is that to be secured? How is that glad temper of spontaneous and cheerful consecration to be attained and maintained? I know of but one way. 'Brethren,' said the Apostle, when he was talking about a very little matter—some small collection for a handful of poor people—'ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich.' Let us keep our eyes fixed upon that great pattern of and motive for surrender; and our hearts will become willing, touched with the fire that flamed in His. There is only one method of securing the gladness and spontaneousness of devotion and of service, and that is, living very near to Jesus Christ, and drinking in for ourselves, as the very wine that turns to blood and life in our veins, the spirit of that dear Master. Every one whose heart is lifted up will have it lifted up because it holds on by Him who hath ascended up, and who, being 'lifted up, draws all men to Him.' The secret of consecration is communion with Jesus Christ.

The appeal to lower motives is often tempting, but always a mistake. Continual contact with Jesus Christ, and realisation of what He has done for us, are sure to open the deep fountains of the heart, and to secure abundant streams. If we can tap these perennial reservoirs they will yield like artesian wells, and need no creaking machinery to pump a scanty and intermittent supply. We cannot trust this deepest motive too much, nor appeal to it too exclusively.

Let me remind you, too, that Christ's appeal to this motive leaves no loophole for selfishness or laziness. Responsibility is all the greater because we are left to assess ourselves. The blank form is sent to us, and He leaves it to our honour to fill it up. Do not tamper with the paper, for remember there is a Returning Officer that will examine your schedule, who knows all about your possessions. So, when He says, 'Give as you like; and I do not want anything that you do not like,' remember that 'Give as you like' ought to mean, 'Give as you, who have received everything from Me, are bound to give.'

II. We get here the measure of acceptable work.

We have a long catalogue, very interesting in many respects, of the various gifts that the people brought. Such sentences as these occur over and over again—'And every man with whom was found' so-and-so 'brought it'; 'And all the women did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun'; 'And the rulers brought' so-and-so. Such statements embody the very plain truism that what we have settles what we are bound to give. Or, to put it into grander words, capacity is the measure of duty. Our work is cut out for us by the faculties and opportunities that God has given us.

That is a very easy thing to say, but it is an uncommonly hard thing honestly to apply. For there are plenty of people that are smitten with very unusual humility whenever you begin to talk to them about work. 'It is not in my way,' 'I am not capable of that kind of service,' and so on, and so on. One would believe in the genuineness of the excuse more readily if there were anything about which such people said, 'Well, I *can* do that, at all events'; but such an all-round modesty, which is mostly observable when service is called for, is suspicious. It might be well for some of these retiring and idle Christians to remember the homely wisdom of 'You never know what you can do till you try.' On the other hand, there are many Christians who, for want of honest looking into their own power, for want of what I call sanctified originality, are content to run in the ruts that other people's vehicles have made, without asking themselves whether that is the gauge that their wheels are fit for. Both these sets of people flagrantly neglect the plain law that what we have settles what we should give.

The form as well as the measure of our service is determined thereby. 'She hath done what she could,' said Jesus Christ about Mary. We often read that, as if it were a kind of apology for a sentimental and useless gift, because it was the best that she could bestow. I do not hear that tone in the words at all. I hear, rather, this, that duty is settled by faculty, and that nobody else has any business to interfere with that which a Christian soul, all aflame with the love of God, finds to be the spontaneous and natural expression of its devotion to the Master. The words are the vindication of the form of loving service; but let us not forget that they are also a very stringent requirement as to its measure, if it is to please Christ. 'What she could'; the engine must be worked up to the last ounce of pressure that it will stand. All must be got out of it that can be got out of it. Is that the case about us? We talk about hard work for Christ. Have any of us ever, worked up to the edge of our capacity? I am afraid that if the principles that lie in this catalogue were applied to us, whether about our gold and silver, or about our more precious spiritual and mental possessions, *we* could not say, 'Every man with whom was found' this, that, and the other, 'brought it for the work.'

III. Notice, again, how in this list of offerings there comes out the great thought of the infinite variety of forms of service and offering, which are all equally needful and equally acceptable.

The list begins with 'bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold.' And then it goes on to 'blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood.' And then we read that the 'women did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun'—namely, the same things as have been already catalogued, 'the blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.' That looks as if the richer gave the raw material, and the women gave the labour. Poor women! they could not give, but they could spin. They had no stores, but they had ten fingers and a distaff, and if some neighbour found the stuff, the ten fingers joyfully set the distaff twirling, and spun the yarn for the weavers. Then there were others who willingly undertook the rougher work of spinning, not dainty thread for the rich soft stuffs whose colours were to glow in the sanctuary, but the coarse black goat's hair which was to be made into the heavy covering of the roof of the tabernacle. No doubt it was less pleasant labour than the other, but it got done by willing hands. And then, at the end of the whole enumeration, there comes, 'And the rulers brought

precious stones, and spices, and oil,' and all the expensive things that were needed. The large subscriptions are at the bottom of the list, and the smaller ones are in the place of honour. All this just teaches us this—what a host of things of all degrees of preciousness in men's eyes go to make God's great building!

So various were the requirements of the work on hand. Each man's gift was needed, and each in its place was equally necessary. The jewels on the high-priest's breastplate were no more nor less essential than the wood that made some peg for a curtain, or than the cheap goat's-hair yarn that was woven into the coarse cloth flung over the roof of the Tabernacle to keep the wet out. All had equal consecration, because all made one whole. All was equally precious, if all was given with the same spirit. So there is room for all sorts of work in Christ's great house, where there are not only 'vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth,' and all 'unto honour … meet for the Master's use.' The smallest deed that co-operates to a great end is great. 'The more feeble are necessary.' Every one may find a corner where his special possession will work into the general design. If I have no jewels to give, I can perhaps find some shittim wood, or, if I cannot manage even that, I can at least spin some other person's yarn, even though I have only a distaff, and not a loom to weave it in. Many of us can do work only when associated with others, and can render best service by helping some more highly endowed. But all are needed, and welcomed, and honoured, and rewarded. The owner of all the slaves sets one to be a water-carrier, and another to be his steward. It is of little consequence whether the servant be Paul or Timothy, the Apostle or the Apostle's helper. 'He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do,' said the former about the latter. All who are associated in the same service are on one level.

I remember once being in the treasury of a royal palace. There was a long gallery in which the Crown valuables were stored. In one compartment there was a great display of emeralds, and diamonds, and rubies, and I know not what, that had been looted from some Indian rajah or other. And in the next case there lay a common quill pen, and beside it a little bit of discoloured coarse serge. The pen had signed some important treaty, and the serge was a fragment of a flag that had been borne triumphant from a field where a nation's destinies had been sealed. The two together were worth a farthing at the outside, but they held their own among the jewels, because they spoke of brain-work and bloodshed in the service of the king. Many strangely conjoined things lie side by side in God's jewel-cases. Things which people vulgarly call large and valuable, and what people still more vulgarly call small and worthless, have a way of getting together there. For in that place the arrangement is not according to what the thing would fetch if it were sold, but what was the thought in the mind and the emotion in the heart which gave it. Jewels and camel's hair yarn and gold and silver are all massed together. Wood is wanted for the Temple quite as much as gold and silver and precious stones.

So, whatever we have, let us bring that; and whatever we are, let us bring that. If we be poor and our work small, and our natures limited, and our faculties confined, it does not matter. A man is accepted 'according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.' God does not ask how much we have given or done, if we have given or done what we could. But He does ask how much we have kept back, and takes strict account of the unsurrendered possessions, the unimproved opportunities, the unused powers. He gives much who gives all, though his all be little; he gives little who gives a part, though the part be much. The motive sanctifies the act, and the completeness of the consecration magnifies it. 'Great' and 'small' are not words for God's Kingdom, in which the standard is not quantity but quality, and quality is settled by the purity of the love which prompts the deed, and the consequent thoroughness of self-surrender which it expresses. Whoever serves God with a whole heart will render to Him a whole strength, and will thus bring Him the gifts which He most desires.

The Copies Of Things In The Heavens

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 3. And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail. 4. And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof. 5. And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle. 6. And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 7. And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein. 8. And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate. 9. And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy. 10. And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. 11. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it. 12. And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. 13. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14. And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15. And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. 16. Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he.'—EXODUS xl. 1-16.

The Exodus began on the night after the fourteenth day of the first month. The Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month; that is, one year, less a fortnight, after the Exodus. Exodus xix. 1 shows that the march to Sinai took nearly three months; and if to this we add the eighty days of Moses' seclusion on the mountain, we get about six months as occupied in preparing the materials for the Tabernacle. 'Setting it up' was a short process, done in a day. The time specified was ample to get ready a wooden framework of small dimensions, with some curtains and coverings of woven stuffs. What a glad stir there would be in the camp on that New Year's day, when the visible token of God's dwelling in its midst first stood there! Our present purpose is simply to try to bring out the meaning of the Tabernacle and its furniture. It was both a symbol and a type; that is, it expressed in material form certain great religious needs and truths; and, just because it did so, it pointed onwards to the full expression and satisfaction of these in Christ Jesus and His gifts. In other words, it was a parable of the requisites for, and the blessings of, communion with God.

Note, then, first, the general lesson of the Tabernacle as a whole. Its name declares its meaning, 'the tent of meeting' (Rev. Ver.). It was the meeting-place of God with man, as the name is explained in Exodus xxix. 42, 'where I will meet with you, to speak there unto thee.' It is also named simply 'the dwelling'; that is, of God. It was pitched in the midst of the camp, like the tent of the king with his subjects clustered round him. Other nations had temples, like the solemn structures of Egypt; but this slight, movable sanctuary was a new thing, and spoke of the continual presence of Israel's God, and of His loving condescension in sharing their wandering lives, and, like them, dwelling 'within curtains.' It was a visible representation of a spiritual fact for the then present; it was a parable of the inmost reality of communion between man and God; and it was, therefore, a prophecy both of the full realisation of His presence among men, in the temple of Christ's body, and of the yet future

communion of Heaven, which is set before us by the ‘great voice … saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.’

The threefold division into court of the worshippers, holy place for the priests, and holiest of all, was not peculiar to the Tabernacle. It signifies the separation which, after all nearness, must still exist. God is unrevealed after all revelation; afar off, however near; shrouded in the utter darkness of the inmost shrine, and only approached by the priestly intercessor with the blood of the sacrifice. Like all the other arrangements of the Sanctuary, the division of its parts declares a permanent truth, which has impressed itself on the worship of all nations; and it reveals God’s way of meeting the need by outward rites for the then present, and by the mediation of the great High-Priest in the time to come, whose death rent the veil, and whose life will, one day, make the holiest place in the heavens patent to our feet.

The enumeration of the furniture of the Tabernacle starts from the innermost shrine, and goes outward. It was fit that it should begin with God’s special abode. The ‘holy of holies’ was a tiny chamber, closed in from light, the form, dimensions, materials, and furniture of which were all significant. It measured ten cubits, or fifteen feet, every way, thereby expressing, in its cubical form and in the predominance of the number ten, stability and completeness. It will be remembered that the same cubical form is given to the heavenly city, in the Apocalypse, for the same reason. There, in the thick darkness, unseen by mortals except for the one approach of the high-priest on the day of atonement, dwelt the ‘glory’ which made light in the darkness, and flashed on the gold which covered all things in the small shrine.

Our lesson does not speak of cherubim or mercy-seat, but specifies only the ark of the testimony. This was a small chest of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and containing the two tables of the law, which were called the testimony, as bearing witness to Israel of God’s will concerning their duty, and as therein bearing witness, too, of what He is. Nor must the other part of the witness-bearing of the law be left out of view,—that it testifies against the transgressors of itself. The ark was the centre-point of the divine revelation, the very throne of God; and it is profoundly significant that its sole contents should be the tables of stone. Egyptian arks contained symbols of their gods, degrading, bestial, and often impure; but the true revelation was a revelation, to the moral sense, of a Being who loves righteousness. Other faiths had their mysteries, whispered in the inmost shrine, which shunned the light of the outer courts; but here the revelation within the veil was the same as that spoken on the house-tops. Our lesson does not refer to the ‘mercy seat,’ which covered the ark above, and spoke the need for, and the provision of, a means whereby the witness of the law against the worshipper’s sins should be, as it were, hid from the face of the enthroned God. The veil which is referred to in verse 3 was that which hung between the holy of holies and the holy place. It did not ‘cover the ark,’ as the Authorised Version unfortunately renders, but ‘screened’ it, as the Revised Version correctly gives it. It blazed with colour and embroidered figures of cherubim. No doubt, the colours were symbolical; but it is fancy, rather than interpretation, which seeks meanings beyond splendour in the blue and purple and crimson and white which were blended in its gorgeous folds. What is it which hangs, in ever-shifting hues, between man and God? The veil of creation, embroidered by His own hand with beauty and life, which are symbolised in the cherubim, the types of the animate creation. The two divisions of the Tabernacle, thus separated by the veil, correspond to earth and heaven; and that application of the symbol is certainly intended, though not exclusively.

We step, then, from the mystery of the inner shrine out to the comparatively inferior sacredness of the ‘holy place,’ daily trodden by the priests. Three articles stand in it: the table for the so-called shew-bread, the great lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. Of these, the altar was in the midst, right in the path to the holiest place; and on the right, looking to the

veil, the table of shew-bread; while on the left was the lampstand. These three pieces of furniture were intimately connected with each other, and represented various aspects of the spiritual character of true worshippers. The holy place was eminently the people's, just as the most holy place was eminently God's. True, only the priests entered it; but they did so on behalf of the nation. We may expect, therefore, to find special reference to the human side of worship in its equipments; and we do find it. Of the three articles, the altar of incense was in idea, as in locality, the centre; and we consider it first, though it stands last in our list, suggesting that, in coming from the most holy place, the other two would be first encountered. The full details of its construction and use are found in Exodus xxx. Twice a day sweet incense was burned on it, and no other kind of sacrifice was permitted; but once a year it was sprinkled, by the high priest, with expiatory blood. The meaning is obvious. The symbolism of incense as representing prayer in frequent in Scripture, and most natural. What could more beautifully express the upward aspirations of the soul, or the delight of God in these, than the incense sending up its wreaths of fragrant smoke? Incense gives no fragrance nor smoke till it is kindled; and the censer has to be constantly swung to keep up the glow, without which there will be no 'odour of a sweet smell.' So cold prayers are no prayers, but are scentless, and unapt to rise. The heart must be as a coal of fire, if the prayer is to come up before God with acceptance. Twice a day the incense was kindled; and all day long, no doubt, it smouldered, 'a perpetual incense before the Lord.' So, in the life of true communion, there should be daily seasons of special devotion, and a continual glow. The position of the altar of incense was right in the line between the altar of burnt offering, in the outer court, and the entrance to the holiest place; by which we are taught that acceptable prayer follows on reconciliation by sacrifice, and leads into 'the secret place of the Most High.' The yearly atonement for the altar taught that evil imperfection cleaves to all our devotion, which needs and receives the sprinkling of the blood of the great sacrifice.

The great seven-branched candlestick, or lampstand, stood on the right of the altar, as the priest looked to the most holy place. Its meaning is plain. It is an emblem of the Church as recipient and communicative of light, in all the applications of that metaphor, to a dark world. As the sacred lamps streamed out their hospitable rays into the desert all the night, so God's servants are lights in the world. The lamps burned with derived light, which had to be fed as well as kindled. So we are lighted by the touch of the great Aaron, and His gentle hand tends the smoking wick, and nourishes it to a flame. We need the oil of the Spirit to sustain the light. The lamp was a clustered light, representing in its metal oneness the formal and external unity of Israel. The New Testament unity is of a better kind. The seven candlesticks are made one because He walks in the midst, not because they are welded on to one stem.

Consistency of symbolism requires that the table of shew-bread should, like the altar and the candlestick, express some phase of true worship. Its interpretation is less obvious than that of the other two. The name means literally 'bread of the face'; that is, bread presented to, and ever lying before, God. There are two explanations of the meaning. One sees in the offering only a devout recognition of God as the author of material blessing, and a rendering to Him of His gifts of outward nourishment. In this case, the shew-bread would be anomalous, a literality thrust into the midst of symbolism. The other explanation keeps up the congruity, by taking the material bread, which is the result of God's blessing on man's toil, as a symbol of the spiritual results of God's blessing on man's spiritual toil, or, in other words, of practical righteousness or good works, and conceives that these are offered to God, by a strong metaphor, as acceptable food. It is a bold representation, but we may quote 'I will sup with him' as proof that it is not inadmissible; and it is not more bold than the declaration that our obedience is 'an odour of a sweet smell.' So the three pieces of furniture in the holy place spoke of the true Israel, when cleansed by sacrifice and in communion with God, as instant in

prayer, continually raying out the light derived from Him, and zealous of good works, well-pleasing to God.

We pass outwards, through another veil, and stand in the court, which was always open to the people. There, before the door of the Tabernacle, was the altar of burnt offering. The order of our chapter brings us to it last, but the order of worship brought the worshipper to it first. Its distinctive character was that on it the blood of the slain sacrifices was offered. It was the place where sinful men could begin to meet with God, the foundation of all the communion of the inner sanctuary. We need not discuss mere details of form and the like. The great lesson taught by the altar and its place, is that reconciliation is needed, and is only possible by sacrifice. As a symbol it taught every Israelite what his own conscience, once awakened, endorsed, that sin must be expiated before the sinner and God can walk in concord. As prophecy, it assured those whose hearts were touched with longing, that God would Himself 'provide the lamb for the burnt offering,' in some way as yet unknown. For us it is an intended prefiguration of the great work of Jesus Christ. 'We have an altar.' We need that altar at the beginning of our fellowship with God, as much as Israel did. A Christianity which does not start from the altar of burnt offering will never get far into the holy place, nor ever reach that innermost shrine where the soul lives and adores, silent before the manifest God between the cherubim.

The laver, or basin, was intended for the priests' use, in washing hands and feet before ministering at the altar or entering the tabernacle. It teaches the necessity for purity, in order to priestly service.

Thus these three divisions of the Tabernacle and its court set forth the stages in the approach of the soul to God, beginning with the reconciling sacrifice and cleansing water, advancing to closer communion by prayer, impartation of light received, and offering of good works to God, and so entering within the veil into secret sweetnesses of union with God, which attains its completeness only when we pass from the holy place on earth to the most holy in the heavens.

The remainder of the text can only be glanced at in a sentence or two. It consists of two parts: the consecration of the Tabernacle and its vessels by the anointing oil which, when applied to inanimate objects, simply devoted them to sacred uses, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons. A fuller account is given in Leviticus viii., from which we learn that it was postponed to a later period, and accompanied with a more elaborate ritual than that prescribed here. That consists of three parts: washing, as emblematic of communicated purity; robing, and anointing,—the last act signifying, when applied to men, their endowment with so much of the divine Spirit as fitted them for their theocratic functions. These three things made the 'sanctifying,' or setting apart for God's service, of Aaron and his sons. He is consecrated alone, in order that his primacy may be clearly indicated. He is consecrated by Moses as the higher; then the sons are consecrated with the same ceremonial, to indicate the hereditary priesthood, and the equality of Aaron's successors with himself. 'They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death,' and provision for their brief tenure of office was embodied in the consecration of the sons by the side of the father. Their priesthood was only 'everlasting' by continual succession of short-lived holders of the office. But the prediction which closes the text has had a fulfilment beyond these fleeting, shadowy priests, in Him whose priesthood is 'everlasting' and 'throughout all generations.' because 'He ever liveth to make intercession' (Heb. vii. 25).

The Book Of Leviticus

The Burnt Offering A Picture And A Prophecy

'And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. 3. If his offering be a burnt-sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. 4. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him. 5. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 6. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. 7. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: 8. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: 9. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.' —LEV. i. 1-9.

In considering the Jewish sacrificial system, it is important to distinguish the symbolical from the typical value of the sacrifices. The former could scarcely be quite unnoticed by the offerers; but the latter was only gradually made plain, was probably never very generally seen, and is a great deal clearer to us, in the light of Christ, the Antitype, than it could ever have been before His coming. As symbols, the sacrifices expressed great eternal truths as to spiritual worship and communion, its hindrances, requisites, manner, and blessings. They were God's picture-book for these children in religious development. As types, they shadowed the work of Jesus Christ and its results.

The value of the sacrifices in either aspect is independent of modern questions as to their Mosaic origin; for at whatever period the Priest's Code was promulgated, it equally bears witness to the ruling ideas of the offerings, and, in any case, it was long before Christ came, and therefore its prophecy of Him is as supernatural, whether Moses or Ezra were its author. I make this remark, not as implying that the new theory is not revolutionary, but simply as absolving a student of the religious significance of the sacrificial system from entering here on questions of date.

The 'burnt offering' stands first in Leviticus for several reasons. It was derived from patriarchal times; it was offered twice daily, besides frequently on other occasions; and in its significance it expressed the complete consecration which should be the habitual state of the true worshipper. Its name literally means 'that which ascends,' and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God. Very beautiful is the variety of material which was permitted. The poor man's pair of pigeons went up with as sweet an odour as the rich man's young bull. God delights in the consecration to Him of ourselves and our powers, no matter whether they be great or small, if only the consecration be thorough, and the whole being be wrapped in the transforming blaze.

It is worth while to try to realise the strange and to our eyes repulsive spectacle of the burnt offering, which is veiled from us by its sacred associations. The worshipper leads up his

animal by some rude halter, and possibly resisting, to the front of the Tabernacle, the courts of which he dared not tread, but which was to him the dwelling-place of God. There by the altar he stands, and, first pressing his hand with force on the victim's head, he then, with one swift cut, kills it, and as the warm blood spouts from the mangled throat, the attendant priest catches it in a basin, and, standing at the two diagonally opposite corners of the altar in turn, dashes, with one dexterous twist, half of the contents against each, so as to wet two sides of the altar with one throw, and the other two with the other. The offerer then flays the reeking carcase, tossing the gory hide to the priest as his perquisite, and cuts up the sacrifice according to a fixed method. His part of the work is done, and he stands by with bloody hands while the priests arrange the pieces on the pile on the altar; and soon the odour of burning flesh and the thick smoke hanging over the altar tell that the rite is complete. What a scene it must have been when, as on some great occasions, hundreds of burnt offerings were offered in succession! The place and the attendants would look to us liker shambles and butchers than God's house and worshippers.

Now, if we inquire into the significance of the offering, it turns on two points—expiation and burning. The former it has in common with other bloody sacrifices, though it presents features of its own, even in regard to expiation. But the latter is peculiar to it, and must therefore be taken to be its special teaching. The stages in the whole process are five: the presentation, laying on of hands, slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning of the whole carcase. The first three are alike in this and other sacrifices, the fourth is modified here, and the last is found here only. Each has its lesson. The offerer has himself to bring the animal to the door of the Tabernacle, that he may show his willing surrender of a valuable thing. As he stands there with his offering, his thoughts would pass into the inner shrine, where God dwelt; and he would, if he were a true worshipper, feel that while God, on His part, already dwelt in the midst of the people, he, on the other hand, can only enter into the enjoyment of His presence by sacrifice. The offering was to be 'a male without blemish'; for bodily defect symbolising moral flaw could not be tolerated in the offerings to a holy God, who requires purity, and will not be put off with less than a man's best, be it ox or pigeon. 'The torn and the lame and the sick,' which Malachi charged his generation with bringing, are neither worthy of God to receive nor of us to offer. When he pressed his hand on the head of the sacrifice, what was the worshipper meant to think? In all other instances where hands are laid on, some transference or communication of gifts or qualities is implied; and it is natural to suppose that the same meaning attaches to the act here, with such modifications as the case requires. We find that it was done in other bloody sacrifices, accompanied with confession. Nothing is said of confession here; but we cannot dismiss the idea that the offerer laid his sins on the victim by that striking act, especially as the very next clause says 'it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The atonement was made, as we shall see, by the application of the blood to the altar; but the possibility of the victim's blood atoning for the offerer depended on his having laid his hands on its head. We may perhaps go farther than 'transference of sins.' Might we not widen the expression, and say 'identification,' or, to use a word which has become so worn by religious controversy that it slips through our fingers unnoticed, 'substitution'? Did not the offerer say in effect, by that act, 'This is I? This animal life shall die, as I ought to die. It shall go up as a sweet savour to Jehovah, as my being should.'

The animal invested with this representative character is next to be slain by the offerer, not by the priest, who only performed that part of the ritual in the case of national or public sacrifices. That was distinctly a vicarious death; and, as inflicted by the hand of the person represented by the animal, he thereby acknowledged that its death was the wages of his sin, and allowed the justice of his condemnation, while he presented this innocent life—innocent

because not that of a moral being—as his substitute. So far the worshipper's part goes. But now, when the act of expiation is to be symbolically represented, and, so far as outward sacrifice could, is to be accomplished, another actor appears. The priest comes forward as mediator between God and man, and applies the blood to the altar. The difference between the sprinkling of the blood, in the burnt offerings and in the other sacrifices, which had expiation for their principal object, in some of which it was smeared on the horns of the altar, and, in the most solemn of all, was carried into the holiest place, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, suggests that the essential character of the burnt offering was not expiatory, though expiation was the foundation on which alone the essential character could be reared. The application of the blood was the formal act by which atonement was made. The word rendered 'to make atonement' means 'to cover'; and the idea conveyed is that the blood, which is the life of the sacrifice, covers the sins of the offerer, so as to make them powerless to dam back the love or to precipitate the wrath of God.

With this act the expiatory portion of the ritual ends, and we may here pause to look back for a moment on it as a whole. We have pointed out the double bearings of the Mosaic ritual as symbolical and as typical or prophetic. In the former aspect, the emphatic teaching of this rite is that 'the wages of sin is death,' that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission,' that God has appointed sacrifice as the means of entering into fellowship with Him, and that substitution and vicarious penalty are facts in His government. We may like or dislike these thoughts; we may call them gross, barbarous, immoral, and the like, but, at all events, we ought not to deny that they are ingrained in the Mosaic sacrificial system, which becomes unmeaning elaboration of empty and often repulsive ceremonies, if they are not recognised as its very centre. Of course, the meaning of the sacrifices was hidden from many a worshipper. They became opaque instead of transparent, and hid the great truth which they were meant to reveal. All forms labour under that disadvantage; but that they were significant in design, and largely so to devout hearts in effect, admits of no reasonable doubt. That which they signified was chiefly the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of innocent life, which stood in the place of the guilty. Of course, too, their benefit was symbolical, and the blood of bulls and goats could never put away sin; but, under the shelter of the outward forms, a more spiritual insight gradually grew up, such as breathes in many a psalm, and such as, we cannot doubt, filled the heart of many a worshipper, as he stood by the bleeding sacrifice on which his own hands had laid the burden that had weighed so heavy on himself. How far the prophetic aspect of the sacrifices was discerned, is a more difficult question. But this at least we know—that the highest level of evangelical prophecy, in Isaiah's wonderful fifty-third chapter, is reached from this vantage-ground. It is the flower of which these ordinances are the root. We need not enlarge upon the prophetic aspect of the sacrifice. The mere negative sinlessness of the victim points to the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot,' on whom, as Isaiah says, in language dyed through and through with sacrificial references, 'the Lord hath made to meet the iniquity of us all,' and who Himself makes 'His soul an offering for sin.' The modern tendency to bring down the sacrificial system to a late date surely sins against the sacred and all-explaining law of evolution, in the name of which it is attempted, inasmuch as it is an unheard-of thing for the earlier stages of a religion to be less clogged with ceremonial than the later. Psalmist and prophet first, and priest afterwards, is not the order of development.

The remaining part of the ritual was, as we have pointed out, peculiar to the burnt offering. In it alone the whole of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar, with the exceptions of the skin, which was given to the priest, and of the contents of the intestines. Hence it was sometimes called 'a whole burnt offering.' The meaning of this provision may be apprehended if we note that the word rendered 'burn,' in verse 9, is not that which simply implies destruction by fire, but is a peculiar word, reserved for sacrificial burnings, and meaning 'to cause to ascend in

smoke or vapour.' The gross flesh was, as it were, refined into vapour and odour, and went up to God as 'a sweet savour.' It expressed, therefore, the transformation of the sinful human nature of the worshipper, by the refining power of the fire of God, into something more ethereal and kindred with the heaven to which it rose. Or, to put the thought in plainer words, on the basis of expiation, the glad surrender of the whole being is possible and will ensue; and when a man yields himself in joyful self-surrender to the God who has forgiven his sins, then the fire of the divine Spirit is shed abroad in his heart, and kindles a flame which lays hold on all the gross, earthly elements of his being, and changes them into fire, kindred with itself, which aspires, in ruddy tongues of upward-leaping light, to the God to whom the heart has been surrendered, and to whom the whole being tends.

This is the purpose of expiation; this is the summit of all religion. One man has realised to the full, in his life, what the burnt offering taught as the goal for all worshippers. Jesus has lived in the constant exercise of perfect self-surrender, and in the constant unmeasured possession of 'the Spirit of burning,' with which He has come to baptize us all. If we look to Him as our expiation, we should also find in Him the power to yield ourselves 'living sacrifices,' and draw from Him the sacred and refining fire, which shall transform our grossness into His likeness, and make even us 'acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.'

Strange Fire

'And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. 2. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. 4. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. 5. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. 6. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons. Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. 7. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses. 8. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 9. Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; 10. And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; 11. And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.'—LEV. x. 1-11.

This solemn story of sin and punishment is connected with the preceding chapter by a simple 'and.' Probably, therefore, Nadab and Abihu 'offered strange fire,' immediately after the fire from Jehovah had consumed the appointed sacrifice. Their sin was aggravated by the time of its being committed. But a week had passed since the consecration of their father and themselves as priests. The first sacrifices had just been offered, and here, in the very blossoming time, came a vile canker. If such licence in setting aside the prescriptions of the newly established sacrificial order asserted itself then, to what lengths might it not run when the first impression of sanctity and of God's commandment had been worn by time and custom? The sin was further aggravated by the sinners being priests, who were doubly obliged to punctilious adherence to the instituted ritual. If they set the example of contempt, would not the people better (or, rather, worsen) their instruction?

Unquestionably, their punishment was awfully severe. But we shall entirely misconceive their sin if we judge it by our standards. We are not dependent on forms as Israel was, but the spiritual religion of Christianity was only made possible by the externalism of the older system. The sweet kernel would not have softened and become juicy without the shelter of the hard shell. Scaffolding is needed to erect a building; and he is not a wise man who either despises or would keep permanently standing the scaffold poles.

We draw a broad distinction between positive commandments and moral or religious obligations. But in the Mosaic legislation that distinction does not exist. There, all precepts are God's uttered will, and all disobedience is rebellion against Him. Nor could it be otherwise at the stage of development which Israel had reached.

What, then, was the crime of these two rash sons of Aaron? That involves two questions: What did they do? and What was the sin of doing it? The former question may be answered in various ways. Certainly the designation of 'strange fire' seems best explained by the usual supposition that it means fire not taken from the altar. The other explanations, which make

the sin to have been offering at an unauthorised time, or offering incense not compounded according to the prescription, give an unnatural meaning to the phrase. It was the ‘fire’ which was wrong,—that is, it was ‘fire which they had kindled,’ caught up from some common culinary hearth, or created by themselves in some way.

What was their sin in thus offering it? Plainly, the narrative points to the essence of the crime in calling it ‘fire which He had not commanded.’ So this was their crime, that they were tampering with the appointed order which but a week before they had been consecrated to conserve and administer; that they were thus thrusting in self-will and personal caprice, as of equal authority with the divine commandment; that they were arrogating the right to cut and carve God’s appointments, as the whim or excitement of the moment dictated; and that they were doing their best to obliterate the distinction on the preservation of which religion, morality, and the national existence depended; namely, the distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. To plough that distinction deep into the national consciousness was no small part of the purpose of the law; and here were two of its appointed witnesses disregarding it, and flying in its face. The flash of holy fire consuming the sacrifices had scarcely faded off their eyeballs when they thus sinned.

They have had many successors, not only in Israel, while a ritual demanding punctilious conformity lasted, but in Christendom since. Alas! our censers are often flaming with ‘strange fire.’ How much so-called Christian worship glows with self-will or with partisan zeal! When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into His presence with hot, eager desires which we have not subordinated to His will, we are burning ‘strange fire which He has not commanded.’ The only fire which should kindle the incense in our censers, and send it up to heaven in fragrant wreaths, is fire caught from the altar of sacrifice. God must kindle the flame in our hearts if we are to render these else cold hearts to Him.

‘The prayers I bring will then be sweet indeed If Thou the Spirit give, by which I pray.’

The swift, terrible punishment does indeed bear marks of the severity of that earlier stage of revelation. But it was not disproportioned to the offence, and it was not the cruelty of a martinet who avenged ceremonial lapses with penalties which should have been kept for moral offences. The surface of the sin was ceremonial impropriety: the heart of it was flouting Jehovah and His law. It was better that two men should die, and the whole nation perish not, as it would have done if their example had been followed. It is mercy to trample out the first sparks beside a powder-barrel.

There is a very striking parallel between verse 2 and the last verse of the preceding chapter. In both the same expression is used, ‘There came forth fire from before the Lord, and consumed’ (the word rendered *devoured* in verse 2 is the same in Hebrew as *consumed*). So, then, the same divine fire, which had graciously signified God’s acceptance of the appointed sacrifice, now flashed out with lightning-like power of destruction, and killed the two rebel priests. There is dormant potency of destruction in the God who reveals Himself as gracious. The ‘wrath of the Lamb’ is as real as His gentleness. The Gospel is ‘the savour of life unto life’ and ‘of death unto death.’

Moses’ word to the stunned father is of a piece with the severity of the whole incident. No voice of condolence or sympathy comes from him. The brother is swallowed up in the lawgiver. He puts into words the meaning of the terrible stroke, and expects Aaron to acquiesce, though his heart bleeds. What was his interpretation? He saw in it God’s purpose to be ‘sanctified in them that come nigh Him.’ The priests were these. Nadab and Abihu had been consecrated for the purpose of enforcing the truth of God’s holiness. They had done the very opposite, by breaking down the distinction between sacred and common.

But their nearness to God brought with it not only corresponding obligations, but corresponding criminality and penalty, if these obligations were not discharged. If God is not 'sanctified' *by* His servants, He will sanctify Himself *on* them. If His people do not set forth His infinite separation from all evil and elevation above all creatures, He will proclaim these truths in lightning that kills and thunder that roars. It is a universal law which Moses sternly spoke to Aaron instead of comfort, bidding him recognise the necessity of the fearful blow to his paternal heart. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The prohibition to Aaron and his sons to show signs of mourning is as stern as the rest of the story, and serves to insist upon the true point of view from which to regard it. For the official representatives of the divine order of worship to mourn the deaths of its assailants would have seemed to indicate their murmuring at God's judgments, and might have led them to participate in the sin while they lamented its punishment. It is hard to mourn and not to repine. Affection blinds to the ill-desert of its objects. Nadab's and Abihu's stark corpses lying in the forecourt of the sanctuary, and Aaron's dry eyes and undisturbed attire, proclaim the same truths,—the gravity of the dead men's sin, and the righteous judgment of God. But the people might sorrow, for *their* mourning would help to imprint on them more deeply the lessons of the dread event.

While the victims' cousins carried their bodies to their graves in the sand, their father and brothers had to remain in the Tabernacle, because 'the anointing oil of Jehovah is upon you.' That oil, as the symbol of the Spirit, separates those on whom it is poured from all contact with death, from participation in sin, from the weight of sorrow. What have immortality, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost, to do with these dark shadows? Those whom God has called to His immediate service must hold themselves apart from earthly passions, and must control natural affection, if indulging it imperils their clear witness to God's righteous will.

The prohibition (verses 8-11) of wine and strong drink during the discharge of the priestly functions seems to suggest that Nadab and Abihu had committed their sin while in some degree intoxicated. Be that as it may, the prohibition is rested upon the necessity of preserving, in all its depth and breadth, the distinction between common and holy which Nadab and Abihu had broken down. That distinction was to be very present to the priest in his work, and how could he have the clearness of mind, the collectedness and composure, the sense of the sanctity of his office, and ministrations which it requires and gives, if he was under the influence of strong drink?

Nothing has more power to blur the sharpness of moral and religious insight than even a small amount of alcohol. God must be worshipped with clear brain and naturally beating heart. Not the fumes of wine, in which there lurks almost necessarily the tendency to 'excess,' but the being 'filled with the Spirit' supplies the only legitimate stimulus to devotion. Besides the personal reason for abstinence, there was another,—namely, that only so could the priests teach the people 'the statutes' of Jehovah. Lips stained from the wine-cup would not be fit to speak holy words. Words spoken by such would carry no power.

God's servants can never impress on the sluggish conscience of society their solemn messages from God, unless they are conspicuously free from self-indulgence, and show by their example the gulf, wide as between heaven and hell, which parts cleanness from uncleanness. Our lives must witness to the eternal distinction between good and evil, if we are to draw men to 'abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good.'

The First Stage In The Leper's Cleansing

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest: 3. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; 4. Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: 5. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: 6. As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar-wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: 7. And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.'—LEV. xiv. 1-7.

The whole treatment of leprosy is parabolic. Leprosy itself is a 'parable of death.' The horrible loathsomeness, the contagiousness, the non-curableness, etc. So the man was shut out from camp and from sanctuary. There was a double process in the cleansing rite, restoring to each.

I. Sketch the ceremonial. Two birds, one slain over a vessel of water so that its blood drained in. Then the living bird was to be dipped into this water and blood, along with cedar, scarlet, and hyssop, and the man sprinkled seven times and the living bird set loose.

II. The significance. This elaborate symbolism was partly intelligible even then. Two birds, like the two goats on the Atonement Day. Did both in some sense symbolise the man? The first one was not exactly a sacrifice. Its death points to the physical death which was the end of the disease, but also in some sense its death symbolised the death by which cleansing was secured.

(a) The purifying water is made by blood added to it, i.e. cleansing by sacrifice.

'By water and by blood.'

(b) The sevenfold sprinkling. The cedar, symbol of incorruptibility; the scarlet, of full vital energy; the hyssop, of purifying. So the thought was suggested of the communication of cleansing, full health and incorruption, undecaying strength; all physical contrasts to leprosy sevenfold.

(c) The free, glad activity. The freed bird. The restored leper.

The Day Of Atonement

'And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before the Lord, and died; 2. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. 3. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. 4. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. 5. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. 6. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. 7. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 8. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering: 10. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with Him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. 11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself. 12. And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: 13. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: 14. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. 15. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. 16. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. 18. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. 19. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.'—LEV. xvi. 1-19.

The Talmudical treatise on the ritual of the day of atonement is entitled 'Yoma,' *the* day, which sufficiently expresses its importance in the series of sacrificial observances. It was the confession of the incompleteness of them all, a ceremonial proclamation that ceremonies do not avail to take away sin; and it was also a declaration that the true end of worship is not reached till the worshipper has free access to the holy place of the Most High. Thus the prophetic element is the very life-breath of this supreme institution of the old covenant, which therein acknowledges its own defects, and feeds the hopes of a future better thing. We do not here consider the singular part of the ritual of the Day of Atonement which is concerned with the treatment of the so-called 'scapegoat' but confine ourselves to the

consideration of that part of it which was observed in the Tabernacle and was intended to expiate the sins of the priesthood and of the people. The chapter connects the rites of the Day of Atonement with the tragic death of the sons of Aaron, which witnessed to the sanctity of the inner shrine, as not to be trodden but with the appointed offerings by the appointed priest; and so makes the whole a divinely given instruction as to the means by which, and the objects for which, Aaron may enter within the veil.

I. In verses 3-10 we have the preliminaries of the sacrifices and a summary of the rites. First, Aaron was to bathe, and then to robe himself in pure white. The dress is in singular contrast to the splendour of his usual official costume, in which he stood before men as representing God, and evidently signifies the purity which alone fits for entrance into the awful presence. Thus vested, he brings the whole of the animals to be sacrificed to the altar,—namely, for himself and his order, a bullock and a ram; for the people, two goats and a ram. The goats are then taken by him to the door of the tent,—and it is to be observed that they are spoken of as both constituting one sin offering (v. 5). They therefore both belong to the Lord, and are, in some important sense, one, as was recognised by the later Rabbinical prescription that they should be alike in colour, size, and value. The appeal to the lot was an appeal to God to decide the parts they were respectively to sustain in a transaction which, in both parts, was really one. The consideration of the meaning of the ritual for the one which was led away may be postponed for the present. The preliminaries end with the casting of the lots, and in later times, with tying the ominous red fillet on the head of the dumb creature for which so weird a fate was in store.

II. The first part of the ritual proper (vs. 11-14) is the expiation for the sins of Aaron and the priesthood, and his entrance into the most holy place. The bullock was slain in the usual manner of the sin offering, but its blood was destined for a more solemn use. The white-robed priest took a censer of burning embers from the altar before the tent-door, and two hands full of incense, and, thus laden, passed into the Tabernacle. How the silent crowd in the outer court would watch the last flutter of the white robe as it was lost in the gloom within! He passed through the holy place, which, on every day but this, was the limit of his approach; but, on this one day, he lifted the curtain, and entered the dark chamber, where the glory flashed from the golden walls and rested above the ark. Would not his heart beat faster as he laid his hand on the heavy veil, and caught the first gleam of the calm light from the Shechinah? As soon as he entered, he was to cast the incense into the censer, that the fragrant cloud might cover the mercy-seat. Incense is the symbol of prayer, and that curling cloud is a picture of the truth that the purest of men, even the anointed priest, robed in white, who has offered sacrifices daily all the year round, and today has anxiously obeyed all the commands of ceremonial cleanliness, can yet only draw near to God as a suppliant, not entering there as having a right of access, but beseeching entrance as undeserved mercy. The incense did not cover ‘the glory’ that Aaron might not gaze upon it, but it covered him that Jehovah might not look on his sin. It would appear that, between verse 13 and verse 14, Aaron’s leaving the most holy place to bring the blood of the sacrifice must be understood. If so, we can fancy the long-drawn sigh of relief with which the waiting worshippers saw him return, and carry back into the shrine the expiating blood. The ‘most holy place’ would still be filled and its atmosphere thick with the incense fumes when he returned to perform the solemn expiation for himself and the whole priestly order. Once the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and seven times, apparently, on the ground in front of it. The former act was intended, as seems probable, to make atonement for the sins of the priesthood; the latter, to cleanse the sanctuary from the ideal defilements arising from their defective and sinful ministrations.

This completed the part of the ceremonial which belonged immediately to Aaron and the priests. It carries important lessons. Could there be a more striking exhibition of their

imperfect realisation of the idea of the priestly office? Observe the anomaly inherent in the very necessity of the case. Aaron was dressed in the white robes emblematic of purity; he had partaken in the benefit of, and had himself offered, sacrifices all the year round. So far as ritual could go, he was pure, and yet so stained with sin that he dared not enter into the divine presence without that double safeguard of the incense and the blood. The priest who cleanses others is himself unclean, and he and his fellows have tainted the sanctuary by the very services which were meant to atone and to purify. That solemn ritual is intended to teach priest and people alike, that every priest 'taken from among men' fails in his office, and pollutes the temple instead of purifying the worshipper. But the office was God's appointment, and therefore would not always be filled by men too small and sinful for its requirements. There must somewhere and somewhen be a priest who will be one indeed, fulfilling the divine ideal of the functions, and answering the deep human longings which have expressed themselves in all lands, for one, pure with no ceremonial but a real purity, to bring us to God and God to us, to offer sacrifice which shall need no after atonement to expiate its defects, and to stand without incense or blood of sprinkling for himself in the presence of God for us. The imperfections of the human holders of the Old Testament offices, whether priest, prophet, or king, were no less prophecies than their positive qualifications were. Therefore, when we see Aaron passing into the holy place, we see the dim shadow of Christ, who 'needeth not to make atonement' for His own sins, and is our priest 'for ever.'

III. The ritual for the atonement of the sins of the people follows. The two goats had been, during all this time, standing at the door of the Tabernacle. We have already pointed out that they are to be considered as one sacrifice. There are two of them, for the same reason, as has been often remarked, as there were two birds in the ritual of cleansing the leper; namely, because one animal could not represent the two parts of the one whole truth which they are meant to set forth. The one was sacrificed as a sin offering, and the other led away into a solitary land. Here we consider the meaning of the former only, which presents no difficulty. It is a sin offering for the people, exactly corresponding to that just offered for the priests. The same use is made of the blood, which is once sprinkled by Aaron on the mercy-seat and seven times on the ground before it, as in the former case. It is not, however, all employed there, but part of it is carried out into the other divisions of the Tabernacle; and first, the holy place, which the priests daily entered and which is called in verse 16 'the tent of meeting,' and next, the altar of burnt offering in the outer court, are in like manner sprinkled seven times with the blood, to 'hallow' them 'from the uncleanness of the children of Israel' (verse 19). The teaching of this rite, in its bearing upon the people, is similar to that of the previous priestly expiation. The insufficiency of sacrificial cleansing is set forth by this annual atonement for sins which had all been already atoned for. The defects of a ritual worship are proclaimed by the ritual which cleanses the holy places from the uncleanness contracted by them from the worshippers. If the altar, the seat of expiation, itself needed expiation, how imperfect its worth must be! If the cleansing fountain is foul, how shall it be cleansed, or how shall it cleanse the offerers? The bearing of the blood of expiation into the most holy place, where no Israelite ever entered, save the high priest, taught that the true expiation could only be effected by one who should pass into the presence of God, and leave the door wide open for all to enter. For surely the distance between the worshippers and the mercy-seat was a confession of imperfection; and the entrance there of the representative of the sinful people was the holding out of a dim hope that in some fashion, yet unknown, the veil would be rent, and true communion be possible for the humble soul. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us where we are to look for the realities of which these ceremonies were the foreshadowings. The veil was rent at the crucifixion. Christ has gone into 'the secret place of the Most High,' and if we love Him, our hearts have gone with Him, and our lives are 'hid with Him, in God.'

‘The Scapegoat’

‘And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited….’-LEV. xvi. 22.

The import of the remarkable treatment of this goat does not depend on the interpretation of the obscure phrase rendered in the Authorised Version ‘for the scapegoat.’ Leaving that out of sight for the moment, we observe that the two animals were one sacrifice, and that the transaction with the living one was the completion of that with the slain. The sins of the congregation, which had been already expiated by the sacrifice, were laid by the high priest on the head of the goat, which was then sent away into the wilderness that he might ‘bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited’ (v. 22). Nothing depends on the fate of the goat, though, in after times, it was forced over a precipice and so killed. The carrying away of expiated sin, and not the destruction of unexpiated sinners, is the meaning of the impressive rite, and, had it been possible, the same goat that was sacrificed would have been sent into the desert. As that could not be done, an ideal unity was established between the two: the one sacrificed represented the fact of expiation, the one driven away represented the consequences of expiation in the complete removal of sin. The expiation was made ‘within the veil’; but a visible token of its completeness was given to help feeble faith, in the blessed mystery of the unseen propitiation. What was divided in the symbol between the twin goats is all done by the one Sacrifice, who has entered into the holiest of all, at once Priest and Sacrifice, and with His own blood made expiation for sin, and has likewise carried away the sin of the world into a land of forgetfulness, whence it never can return.

The clear meaning of the rite is thus obtained, whatever be the force of the difficult phrase already referred to. ‘Scapegoat’ is certainly wrong. But it may be questioned whether the Revised Version is right in retaining the Hebrew word untranslated, and, by putting a capital letter to it, marking it as a proper name (‘for Azazel’). The word occurs only here, so that we have no help from other passages. It seems to come from a root meaning ‘to drive away,’ and those who take it to be a proper name, generally suppose it to refer to some malignant spirit, or to Satan, and interpret it as meaning ‘a fiend whom one drives away,’ or, sometimes, ‘who drives away.’ The vindication of such an interpretation is supposed to lie in the necessity of finding a complete antithesis in the phrase to the ‘for Jehovah’ of the previous clause in verse 8. But it is surely sacrificing a good deal to rhetorical propriety to drag in an idea so foreign to the Pentateuch, and so opposed to the plain fact, that both goats were one sin offering (v. 5), in order to get a pedantically correct antithesis. In the absence of any guidance from usage, certainty as to the meaning of the word is unattainable. But there seems no reason, other than that of the said antithesis, against taking it to mean removal or dismissal, rather than ‘a remover.’ The Septuagint translates it in both ways: as a person in verse 8, and as ‘sending away’ in verse 10. If the latter meaning be adopted, then the word just defines the same purpose as is given more at length in verse 22, namely, the carrying away of the sins of the congregation. The logical imperfection of the opposition in verse 8 would then be simply enough solved by the fact that while both goats were ‘for the Lord,’ one was destined to be actually offered in sacrifice, and the other to be ‘for dismissal.’ The incomplete contrast testifies to the substantial unity of the two, and needs no introduction, into the most sacred rite of the old covenant, of a ceremony which looks liker demon-worship than a parable of the great expiation for a world’s sins.

The question for us is, What spiritual ideas are contained in this Levitical symbolism? There is signified, surely, the condition of approach to God. Remember how the Israelites had

impressed on their minds the awful sanctity of ‘within the veil.’ The inmost shrine was trodden once a year only by the high priest, and only after anxious lustrations and when clothed in pure garments, he entered ‘with sacrifice and incense lest he die.’ This ritual was for a gross and untutored age, but the men of that age were essentially like ourselves, and we have the same sins and spiritual necessities as they had.

The two goats are regarded as *one* sacrifice. They are a ‘sin offering.’ Hence, to show how unimportant and non-essential is the distinction between them, the ‘lot’ is employed; also, while the one is being slain, the other stands before the ‘door of the Tabernacle.’ This shows that both are parts of one whole, and it is only from the impossibility of presenting both halves of the truth to be symbolised in one that two are taken. The one which is slain represents the sacrifice for sin. The other represents the effects of that sacrifice. It is never heard of more. ‘The Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world.’ ‘As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.’

I. The perfect removal of all sin is thus symbolised.

Notice (1) the vivid consciousness of sin which marked Judaism.

Was it exaggerated or right?

The same consciousness is part of all of us, but how overlaid! how stifled!

That consciousness once awakened has in it these elements—a bitter sense of sin as mine, involving guilt; despair as to whether I can ever overcome it; and fearful thoughts of my relation to God which conscience itself brings.

(2) The futility of all attempts to remove these fears.

False religions have next to nothing to say about forgiveness. Sacrifices and lustrations they have, but no assurance of absolution. Systems of philosophy and morals have nothing to say but that the universe goes crashing on, and if you have broken its laws you must suffer. That is all, or only the poor cheer of ‘Well! you have fallen, get up and go on again!’ So men often drug themselves into forgetfulness. They turn away from the unwelcome subject, and forget it at the price of all moral earnestness and often of all happiness; a lethargic sleep or a gaiety, as little real as that of the Girondins singing in their prison the night before being led out to the guillotine.

It is only God’s authoritative revelation that can ensure the cure, only He can assure us of pardon, and of the removal of all barriers between ourselves and His love. Only His word can ensure, and His power can effect, the removal of the consequences of our sins. Only His word can ensure, and His power effect, the removal of the power of evil on our characters.

(3) Still the question, Can guilt ever be cancelled? often assumes a fearful significance. Doubtless much seems to say that it cannot be.

(a) The irrevocableness of the past.

(b) The rigid law of consequences in this world.

(c) The indissoluble unity of an individual life and moral nature, confirmed by the experience of failure in all attempts at reformation of self.

(d) The consciousness of disturbed relations with God, and the prophecy of judgment. All this that ancient symbol suggested. The picture of the goat going away, and away, and away, a lessening speck on the horizon, and never heard of more is the divine symbol of the great fact that there is full, free, everlasting forgiveness, and on God’s part, utter forgetfulness. ‘Though

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.' 'I will remember them no more at all for ever.'

II. The bearing away of sin is indissolubly connected with sacrifice. Two goats were provided, of which one was offered for a sin offering, indicating that sacrifice came first; then the removal of sin was symbolised by the sending away of the second goat. There is an evident reference to this sequence in the words 'without shedding of blood there is no remission.' The two goats represent Christ's work; the one in its essence, the other in its effect.

The one teaches that sacrifice is a necessary condition of pardon. Forgiveness was not given because the offerer confessed his guilt or because 'God was merciful,' but because the goat had been slain as a sin offering. There is deep spiritual truth for us in this symbolism. We do not need to enter on the philosophy of atonement, but simply to rest on the fact—that the only authority on which we can be sure of forgiveness at all indissolubly associates the two things, sacrifice and pardon. We have no reason to believe in forgiveness except from the Bible record and assurance.

Was the Mosaic ritual a divinely appointed thing? If so, its testimony is conclusive. But even if it were only the embodiment of human aspirations and wants, it would be a strong evidence of the necessity of some such thing as forgiveness.

The shallow dream that God's forgiveness can be extended without a sacrifice having been offered does not exalt but detracts from the divine character. It invariably leads to an emasculated abhorrence of evil, and detracts from the holiness of God, as well as introduces low thoughts of the greatness of forgiveness and of the infinite love of God.

III. The bearing away of sin is associated with man's laying of his sins on the sacrifice appointed by God.

We have seen that the two goats must be regarded as together making one whole. The one which was slain made 'atonement … because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins,' but that expiation was not actually effective till Aaron had 'laid his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, … and put them on the head of the live goat, and sent him away into the wilderness.' The sacrifice of the slain goat did not accomplish the pardon or removal of the people's sins, but made it possible that their sins should be pardoned and removed.

Then the method by which that possibility is realised is the laying hands on the scapegoat and confessing the sins upon it. The sins which are actually forgiven, by virtue of the atonement made for all sins, are those which it bears away to the wilderness.

This answers, point for point, to repentance and faith. By these the possibility is turned into an actuality for as many as believe on Christ.

Christ has died for sin. Christ has made atonement by which all sin may be forgiven; whether any shall actually be forgiven depends on something else. It is conceivable that though Christ died, no sin might be pardoned, if no man believed. His blood would not, even then, have been shed in vain, for the purpose of it would have been fully effected in providing a way by which any and all sin could be forgiven. So that the whole question whether any man's sin is pardoned turns on this, Has he laid his hand on Christ? Faith is only a condition of forgiveness, not a cause, or in itself a power. There was no healing in the mere laying of the hand on the head of the goat.

It was not faith which was the reason for forgiveness, but God's love which had provided the sacrifice.

God's will is not a bare will to pardon, nor a bare will to pardon for Christ's sake, but for Christ's sake to pardon them who believe. 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' 'Through this Man is preached the remission of sins.'

The Consecration Of Joy

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 34. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. 35. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 37. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38. Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. 39. Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. 41. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43. That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. 44. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.' —LEV. xxiii. 33-44.

These directions for the observance of the great festival at the close of harvest are singularly arranged. Verses 33-36 give part of the instructions for the Feast, verses 37 and 38 interrupt these with a summary of the contents of the chapter, and verses 39 to the end pick up the broken thread, and finish the regulations for the feast. Naturally, this apparent afterthought has been pointed out as clear evidence of diversity of authorship. But a reasonable explanation may be given on the hypothesis of the unity of the section, by observing that verses 33-36 deal only with the sacrificial side of the feast, as worship proper, and thus come into line with the previous part of the chapter, which is occupied with an enumeration of the annual 'feasts of the Lord' (v. 4). It was natural, therefore, that, when the list had been completed by the sacrificial prescriptions for the last of the series, the close of the catalogue should be marked, in verses 37, 38, and that then the other parts of the observances connected with this feast, which are not sacrificial, nor, properly speaking, worship, should be added. There is no need to invoke the supposition of two authors, and a subsequent stitching together, in order to explain the arrangement. The unity is all the more probable because, otherwise, the first half would give the name of the feast as that of 'tabernacles,' and would not contain a word to account for the name.

We need not, then, include the separating wedge, in verses 37, 38, in our present consideration. The ritual of the feast is broadly divided by it, and we may consider the two portions separately. The first half prescribes the duration of the feast as seven days (the perfect number), with an eighth, which is named, like the first, 'an holy convocation,' on which no work was to be done, but is also called 'a solemn assembly,' or rather, as the Revised Version reads, in margin, 'a closing festival,' inasmuch as it closed, not only that particular feast, but the whole series for the year. The observances enjoined, then, are the public assembly on the first and eighth days, with cessation from labour, and a daily offering. We learn more about the offering from Numbers xxix. 12 *et seq.*, which appoints a very

peculiar arrangement. On each day there was to be, as on other feast days, one goat for a sin offering; but the number of rams and lambs for the burnt offering was doubled, and, during the seven days of the feast, seventy bullocks were offered, arranged in a singular diminishing scale,—thirteen on the first day, and falling off by one a day till the seventh day, when seven were sacrificed. The eighth day was marked as no part of the feast proper, by the number of sacrifices offered on it, dropping to one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs. No satisfactory account of this regulation has been suggested. It may possibly have meant no more than to mark the first day as the chief, and to let the worshippers down gradually from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

The other half of the regulations deals with the more domestic aspect of the festival. Observe, as significant of the different point of view taken in it, that the first and eighth days are there described, not as 'holy convocations,' but as 'sabbaths,' or, as the Revised Version gives it better, 'a solemn rest.' Observe, also, that these verses connect the feast with the ingathering of the harvest, as does Exodus xxiii. 16. It is quite possible that Moses grafted the more commemorative aspect of the feast on an older 'harvest home'; but that is purely conjectural, however confidently affirmed as certain. To tumble down cartloads of quotations about all sorts of nations that ran up booths and feasted in them at vintage-time does not help us much. The 'joy of harvest' was unquestionably blended with the joy of remembered national deliverance, but that the latter idea was superadded to the former at a later time is, to say the least, not proven. Would it matter very much if it were? Three kinds of trees are specified from which 'the fruit,' that is branches with fruit on them, if the tree bore fruit, were to be taken: palms, 'thick trees,' that is thick foliaged, which could give leafy shade, and willows of the brook, which the Rabbis say were used for binding the others together. Verse 40 does not tell what is to be done with these branches, but the later usage was to carry some of them in the hand as well as to use them for booths. The keynote of the whole feast is struck in verse 40: 'Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God.' The leafy spoils come into view here as tokens of jubilation, which certainly suggests their being borne in the hand; but they were also meant to be used in building the booths in which the whole nation was to live during the seven days, in commemoration of God's having made them 'dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.' This is all that is enjoined by Moses. Later additions to the ceremonial do not concern us here, however interesting some of these are. The true intention of the feast is best learned from the original simple form. What, then, was its intention? It was the commemoration of the wilderness life as the ground of rejoicing 'before the Lord.' But we must not forget that, according to Leviticus, it was appointed while the wilderness life was still present, and so was not to be observed then. Was it, then, a dead letter, or had the appointment a message of joy even to the weary wanderers who lived in the veritable booths, which after generations were to make a feast of mimicking? How firm the confidence of entering the land must have been, which promulgated such a law! It would tend to hearten the fainting courage of the pilgrims. A divinely guaranteed future is as certain as the past, and the wanderers whom He guides may be sure of coming to the settled home. All words which He speaks beforehand concerning that rest and the joyful worship there are pledges that it shall one day be theirs. The present use of the prospective law was to feed faith and hearten hope; and, when Canaan was reached, its use was to feed memory and brighten godly gladness.

The feast of tabernacles was the consecration of joy. Other religions have had their festivals, in which wild tumult and foul orgies have debased the worshippers to the level of their gods. How different the pure gladness of this feast 'before the Lord'! No coarse and sensuous delights of passion could live before the 'pure eyes and perfect witness' of God. In His 'presence' must be purity as well as 'fullness of joy.' If this festival teaches us, on the one hand, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of godliness who do not find it full of

gladsomeness, it teaches us no less, on the other, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of joy, who look for it anywhere but 'before the Lord.' The ritual of the feast commanded gladness. Joy is a duty to God's children. There were mourners in Israel each year, as the feast came round, who would rather have shrunk into a corner, and let the bright stream of merriment flow past them; but they, too, had to open their heavy hearts, and to feel that, in spite of their private sorrows, they had a share in the national blessings. No grief should unfit us for feeling thankful joy for the great common gift of 'a common salvation.' The sources of religious joy, open to all Christians, are deeper than the fountains of individual sorrow, deep as life though these sometimes seem.

The wilderness life came into view in the feast as a wandering life of privation and change. The booths reminded of frail and shifting dwellings, and so made the contrast with present settled homes the sweeter. They were built, not of such miserable scrub as grew in the desert, and could scarcely throw shade enough to screen a lizard, but of the well-foliaged branches of trees grown by the rivers of water, and so indicated present abundance. The remembrance of privations and trials past, of which the meaning is understood, and the happy results in some degree possessed, is joy. Prosperous men like to talk of their early struggles and poverty. This feast teaches that such remembrance ought always to trace the better present to God, and that memory of conquered sorrows and trials is wholesome only when it is devout, and that the joy of present ease is bracing, not when it is self-sufficient, but when it is thankful. The past, rightly looked at, will yield for us all materials for a feast of tabernacles; and it is rightly looked at only when it is all seen as God's work, and as tending to settled peace and abundance. Therefore the regulations end with that emphatic seal of all His commands, to impress which on our hearts is the purpose of all His dealings with us as with Israel, 'I am the Lord your God.'

III. We may note our Lord's allusions to the feast. There are probably two, both referring to later additions to the ceremonies. One is in John vii. 37. We learn from the Talmud that on each of the seven days (and according to one Rabbi on the eighth also) a priest went down to Siloam and drew water in a golden pitcher, which he brought back amid the blare of trumpets to the altar, and poured into a silver basin while the joyous worshippers chanted the 'Great Hallel' (Psa. cxiii.-cxviii.), and thrice waved their palm branches as they sang. We may venture to suppose that this had been done for the last time; that the shout of song had scarcely died away when a stir in the crowd was seen, and a Galilean peasant stood forth, and there, before the priests with their empty vessels, and the hushed multitude, lifted up His voice, so as to be heard by all, and cried, saying: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.' What increased force is given to the extraordinary self-assertion of such words, if we picture this as the occasion of their utterance! Leviticus gives no preeminence to any one day, but John's expression, 'that great day of the feast,' may well have been warranted by later developments.

The other allusion is less certain, though it is probable. It is found in the saying at John viii. 12: 'I am the Light of the world,' etc. The Talmud gives a detailed account of the illuminations accompanying the feast. Four great golden lamps were set up in the court, each tended by four young priests. 'There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the lights of the water-drawing.' Bands of grave men with flashing torches danced before the people, while Levites 'accompanied them with harps, psalteries, cymbals, and numberless musical instruments,' and another band of Levites standing on the fifteen steps which led to the women's court, chanted the fifteen so-called 'songs of degrees,' and yet others marched through the courts blowing their trumpets as they went. It must have been a wild scene, dangerously approximating to the excitement of heathen nocturnal festivals, and our Lord

may well have sought to divert the spectators to higher thoughts. But the existence of the allusion is doubtful.

We have one more allusion to the feast, considered as a prophecy of the true rest and joy in the true Canaan. The same John, who has preserved Christ's references, gives one of his own in Revelation vii. 9, when he shows us the great multitude out of every nation 'with palms in their hands.' These are not the Gentile emblems of victory, as they are often taken to be. There are no heathen emblems in the Apocalypse, but all moved within the circle of Jewish types and figures. So we are to think of that crowd of 'happy palmers' as joyously celebrating the true feast of tabernacles in the settled home above, and remembering, with eyes made clear by heaven, the struggles and fleeting sorrows of the wilderness. The emblem sets forth heaven as a festal assembly, as the ingathering of the results of the toils of earth, as settled life after weary pilgrimage, as glad retrospect of the meaning and triumphant possession of the issues of God's patient guidance and wise discipline. Here we dwell in 'the earthly house of this tabernacle'; there, in a 'building of God … eternal.' Here we are agitated by change, and wearied by the long road; there, changeless but increasing joy will be ours, and the backward look of thankful wonder will enhance the sweetness of the blessed present, and confirm the calm and sure hope of an ever-growing glory stretching shoreless and bright before us.

Sojourners With God

'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.' —LEV. xxv. 23.

The singular institution of the Jubilee year had more than one purpose. As a social and economical arrangement it tended to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Every fiftieth year the land was to revert to its original owners, the lineal descendants of those who had 'come in with the conqueror,' Joshua. Debts were to be remitted, slaves emancipated, and so the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty were to be somewhat levelled, and the nation carried back to its original framework of a simple agricultural community of small owners, each 'sitting under his own vine and fig-tree' and, like Naboth, sturdily holding the paternal acres.

As a ceremonial institution it was the completion of the law of the Sabbath. The seventh day proclaimed the need for weekly rest from labour, and as was the sabbath in the week, so was the seventh year among the years—a time of quiet, when the land lay fallow and much of the ordinary labour was suspended. Nor were these all; when seven weeks of years had passed, came the great Jubilee year, charged with the same blessed message of Rest, and doubtless showing dimly to many wearied and tearful eyes some gleams of a better repose beyond.

Besides these purposes, it was appointed to enforce, and to make the whole fabric of the national wealth consciously rest upon, this thought contained in our text. The reason why the land was not to pass out of the hauls of the representatives of those to whom God had originally given it, was that He had not really given it to them at all. It was not theirs to sell—they had only a beneficiary occupation. While they held it, it was still His, and neither they, nor any one to whom they might sell the use of it for a time, were anything more than tenants at will. The land was His, and they were only like a band of wanderers, squatting for a while by permission of the owner, on his estate. Their camp-fires were here today, but to-morrow they would be gone. They were 'strangers and sojourners.' That may sound sad, but all the sadness goes when we read on—'with Me.' They are God's guests, so though they do not own a foot of soil, they need not fear want.

All this is as true for us. We can have no better New Year's thoughts than those which were taught by the blast of the silver trumpets that proclaimed liberty to the slaves, and restored to the landless pauper his alienated heritage.

I. Here is the lesson of God's proprietorship and our stewardship.

'The land is Mine' was of course true in a special sense of the territory which God gave by promise and miracle, which was kept by obedience, and lost by rebellion. But it is as really true about our possessions, and that not only because of our transient stay here. It would be as true if we were to live in this world for ever. It will be as true in heaven. Length of time makes no difference in this tenure. Undisturbed possession for ever so long does not constitute ownership here. God is possessor of all, by virtue of His very nature, by His creation and preservation of us and of all things. So that when we talk about 'mine' and 'thine,' we are only speaking a half truth. There is a great sovereign 'His' behind both. So then let us take that thought with us for use, as we pass into another year. What lessons does it give?

It should nurture constant thankfulness. To-day looking back over whatever dark, dreary, sunless days, we all have bright ones too. Does any thought of God as the Fountain of all our

joys and goods rise in our souls? Have we learned to associate a divine hand and a Father's will with them? Do we congratulate ourselves on our own cleverness, tact, and skill, saying, 'mine hand hath done it,' or do we hug ourselves on our own good fortune, and burn incense to chance and 'circumstances'?—or, sadder still, are we generously grateful to every human friend that helps us, and unthankful only to God—or does the glad thought come, to gild the finest gold of our possessions with new brilliance and worth, and to paint and perfume the whitest lily of our joys with new delightsomeness, 'All things come of Thee'; 'Thou makest us drink of the river of Thy pleasures'? Blessed are they who, by the magic glass of a thankful heart, see all things in God, and God in all things. To them life is tenfold brighter, as a light plunged in oxygen flames more intensely than in common air. The darkest night is filled with light, and the loneliest place blazes with angel faces, and the stoniest pillar is soft, to him who sees everywhere the ladder that knits earth with heaven, and to whom all His blessings are as the messengers that descend by it on errands of mercy, whose long shining ranks lead up the eye and the heart to the loving God from whom they come.

Here too is the ground for constant thankful submission. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' We have no right to murmur, however we may regret, if the Landowner takes back a bit of the land which He has let us occupy. It was the condition of our occupation that He should be at liberty to do so whenever He saw that it would be best for us. He does not give us our little patches for His advantage, but for ours, nor does He take them away at His own whim, but 'for our profit.' We get more than full value for all the work and capital we have expended, and His only reason for ever disturbing us is that we may be driven to claim a better inheritance in Himself than we can find even in the best of His gifts. So He sometimes gives, that we may be led by our possessions to think lovingly of Him; and He sometimes takes, that we may be led, in the hour of emptiness and loss, to recognise whose hand it was that pulled up the props round which our poor tendrils clung. But the opposite actions have the same purpose, and like the up-and-down stroke of a piston, or the contrary motion of two cogged wheels that play into each other, are meant to impel us in one direction, even to the heart of God who is our home. A landowner stops up a private road one day in a year, in order to assert his right, and to remind the neighbourhood that he could stop it altogether if he liked. So God reminds us by our losses and sorrows, of what we are so apt to forget, and what it is such a joy to us to remember—His possession of them all. Blessed be God! He teaches us in that fashion far seldomer than in the other. Let joy teach us the lesson, and we shall the less need 'the sternest' teacher 'and the best,' even sorrow. Better to learn it by gladness than by tears; better to see it written in 'laughing flowers' than in desolate gardens and killing frost.

So, too, there should be a constant sense of responsibility in the use of all which we have. All is His, and He has given all to us, for a purpose. So, plainly, we are but stewards, or trustees, and are bound to employ everything, not according to our own inclination or notion of what is right, but according to what, in the exercise of our best and most impartial judgment, we believe to be the owner's will. Trusteeship means that we take directions as to the employment of the property from its owner. It means too that we employ it not for our own satisfaction and well-being alone, though that is included, and is a part of His purpose who 'delights in the prosperity of His servants.' Thoughts of others, thoughts of the owner's claims, and of bringing back to Him all that He has given to us, increased by our diligence, must be uppermost in our minds, if we are to live nobly or happily here. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' And this applies to all we have in mind, body, and estate. A thoughtful expenditure and use of all His gifts, on principles drawn from our knowledge of His will, and for objects not terminating with self, is the duty that corresponds to the great fact of God's ownership of all. If we use His gifts to minister to our own vanity or

frivolity, or love of ease, or display; if an ‘intolerable deal’ of all we have is used for ourselves, and a poor ha’porth’ for others; if our gifts are grudging; if we possess without sense of responsibility, and enjoy without thankfulness, and lose with murmuring; if our hearts are more set on material prosperity than on love and peace, knowledge and purity, noble lives and a Father God; if higher desires and hopes are dying out as we ‘get on’ in the world, and religious occupations which used to be pleasant are stale; then for all our outward Christianity the stern old woe applies, ‘Your riches are corrupted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you,’ and we need the shrill note of the trumpet of Jubilee to be blown in our ears, ‘The land is Mine.’

II. We have the teaching of the transiency of our stay here.

‘Ye are strangers and sojourners’—pilgrims who make a brief halt in a foreign country. The image has in it an allusion to the nomad life of Abraham and his son and grandson, as well as to the desert-wanderings of the people, and suggests the thought, ‘You are homeless wanderers, not having where to lay your heads, as truly when you have been settled for generations on your ancestral lands, as when you plodded wearily in the wilderness.’ It is a universal truth, ever acknowledged and forgotten, wholesome though sometimes sad to feel, and preached to even frivolous natures by the change in our calendar which a New Year brings.

How vividly this word of our text brings out the contrast between the permanence of the external world and our brief stay in it!

In Israel there would be few vineyards or olive-grounds held by the same man at two, and none at three, successive jubilees. The hoary twisted olives yielded their black berries, say, to Simeon, the son of Joseph, to-day, as they did fifty years ago to Joseph, the son of Reuben, and as they will do fifty years hence to Judas, the son of Simeon. So is it with us all. There is nothing more pathetic than the thought of how generations come and go, and empires rise and fall, while the scene on which they play their brief parts remains the same.

‘The mountains look on Marathon, And Marathon looks on the sea.’

to-day as they did more than two millenniums ago, only the grass was for a while a little ranker on the plain. Olivet lifts the same outline against the pale morning twilight as when David went up its slope a weeping exile. The pebble that we kick out of our path had thousands of years of existence ere we were born, and may lie there unaltered to all appearance for centuries after we are dead. ‘One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.’

And how much more lasting our possessions are than their possessors! Where are the strong hands that clutched the rude weapons that lie now quietly ticketed in our museums? How dim and dark the bright brave eyes that once flashed through the bars of these helmets, hanging just a little rusted, over the tombs in Westminster Abbey! Other men will live in our houses, read our books, own our mills, use our furniture, preach in our pulpits, sit in our pews: we are but lodgers in this abiding nature, ‘like a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night,’ and to-morrow morning vacates his rooms for a new arrival, and goes away unregretted and is forgotten in an hour.

The constant change and progression of life are enforced, too, in this metaphor.

The old threadbare emblem of a journey which is implied in the text suggests how, moment by moment, we hurry on and how everything is slipping past us, as fields and towns do to a traveller in a train. Only our journey is smooth and noiseless, like the old-fashioned canal boat travelling, where, if you shut your eyes, you could not tell that you were moving. We

glide on and never know it, and so gradually and silently is the scene ‘changed by still degrees,’ that it is only now and then that men have any vivid consciousness that the ‘fashion of this world is’ ever ‘in the act of passing,’ like the canvas of a panorama ever winding and unwinding on its twin rollers with slow, equable motion. It needs an effort of attention and will to discern the movement, and it is worth while to make the effort, for that clear and poignant sense of the constant flux and mutation of all things around us, and of the ebbing away of our own lives, is fundamental to all elevation of thought, to all nobleness of deed, to all worthy conception of duty and of joy. Everything that is, stands poised, like Fortune, on a rolling ball. The solid earth is a movable sphere, for ever spinning on its axis and rushing on its path among the stars. Ever some star is sinking in mist, or dipping below the horizon; ever new constellations are climbing to the zenith. A long, patient discipline is needed to keep fresh in our hearts the sense of this transiency. Let us set ourselves consciously to deepen our convictions of it, and amidst all the illusions of these solid-seeming shows of things, keep firm hold of the assurance that they are but fleeting shadows that sweep across the solemn mountain’s side, and that only God and the doing of His will lasts. So shall our life pierce down with its seeking roots to the abiding ground of all Being, and, looking to the ‘things that are eternal,’ we shall be able to make what is but for a moment contribute to the everlasting ennobling of our character and enrichment of our life yonder.

Surely these words, too, tell of the true home.

‘Ye are strangers’—because your native land is elsewhere. It is not merely the physical facts of death and change that make us strangers here, but the direction of our desires, and the true affinities of our nature. If by these we belong to heaven and God, then here we shall feel that we have not where to lay our heads, and shall ‘dwell in tabernacles’ because ‘we look for the city.’

What a contrast between the perishable tents of the wilderness and the rock-built mansions of that city. And how short this phase of being must look when seen from above! You remember how long a year, a week, seemed to you when a child—what do the first ten years of your life look to you now? What must the earthly life of Abel, the first who died, look to him even now, when he contrasts its short twenty or thirty years with the thousands since? and, after thousands and thousands more, how it will dwindle! So to us, if we reach that safe shore, and look back upon the sea that brought us thither, as it stretches to the horizon, miles of billows once so terrible will seem shrunken to a line of white foam.

Cherish, then, constant consciousness of that solemn eternity, and let your eyes be ever directed to it, like a man who sees some great flush of light on the horizon, and is ever turning from his work to look. Use the transient as preparation for the eternal, the fleeting days as those which determine the undying ‘Day’ and its character. Keep your cares and interests in the present rigidly limited to necessary things. Why should travellers burden themselves? The less luggage, the easier marching. The accommodation and equipment in the desert do not matter much. The wise man will say, ‘Oh, it will do. I shall soon be home.’ ‘Ye are strangers and sojourners.’

III. We have here also the teaching of trust.

Some of us think that such thoughts as the preceding are sad. Why should they be so? They need not be. Our text adds a little word which takes all the sadness out of them. ‘With Me’; that gives the true notion of our earthly life. We are strangers indeed, passing through a country which is not ours, but whilst we are sojourners, we are ‘sojourners’ with the king of the land. In the antique hospitable times, the chief of the tribe would take the travellers to his own tent, and charge himself with their safety and comfort. So we are God’s guests on our

travels. He will take care of us. The visitor has no need to trouble himself about the housekeeping, he may safely leave that with the master of the house. If the king has taken us in charge, we may be quite sure that no harm will come to us in his country. So for ourselves and for those we love, and for all the wide interests of church and world, there are peace and strength in the thought that we are the guests of God here, 'strangers and sojourners with *Him*.' Will He invite us to His table and let us hunger? Will He call us to be His guests, and then, like some traitorous Arab sheikh, break the laws of hospitality and harm His too-confiding guests? Impossible for evermore. So we are safe, and our bread shall be given us, for we are sojourners with God.

True, we are strangers, and in our constant movement we lose many of the companions of our march, and the track of the caravan may be traced by the graves on either side. But, since we are 'with Him,' we have companionship even when most solitary, and even in a strange land shall not be lonely. Seek then to cultivate as a joy and strength that consciousness that the Lord of all the land is ever with you, Whoever goes, He abides. Whatever rushes past us like a phantasmagoria, He passes not. Whatever and whoever change, He changes never. Where thou goest, He will go. He will be 'thy shield at thy right hand,' and thy 'keeper from all evil.' So, looking forward to the unknown days of another New Year, we may be of good cheer.

So will it be while we live; and if this year we should die—well, the King of this land, where we are strangers, is the King of the other land beyond the sea, where we are at home. So we shall only be the nearer to Him for the change. Death the separator shall but unite us to the King, whose presence indeed fills this subject-province of His empire with all its good, but who dwells in more resplendent 'beauty,' and is felt in greater nearness in the other 'land that is very far off.' Whether here or there, we may have God with us, if we will. With Him for our Host and companion, let us peacefully go on our road, while the life of strangers and sojourners shall last. It will bring us to the fatherland where we shall be at home with the King, and find in Him our 'sure dwelling, and quiet resting-place, and peaceful habitation for ever.'

God’s Slaves

‘For they are My servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen.’ —LEV. xxv. 42.

This is the basis of the Mosaic legislation as to slavery. It did not suppress but regulated that accursed system. Certainly Hebrew slavery was a very different thing from that of other nations. In the first place, no Jew was to be a slave. To that broad principle there were exceptions, such as the case of the man who voluntarily gave himself up to his creditor. But even he was not to be treated as a slave, but as a ‘hired servant,’ and at the jubilee was to be set free. There were also other regulations of various kinds in other circumstances on which we do not need to dwell. The slaves of alien blood were owned and used, but under great mitigations and restrictions.

Of course we have here an instance of the incompleteness of the Mosaic law,—or rather we may more truly say of its completeness, regard being had to the state of the world at the time. All social change hangs together. Institutions cannot be altered at a blow, without altering the stage of civilisation, of which they are the expression. ‘Raw haste’ is ‘half-sister to delay.’ What is good and necessary for one era is out of place in another. So God works slowly, and lets bad things die out, by changing the atmosphere in which they flourish.

All servitude to men was an infraction of God’s rights over Israel. God was the Israelites’ ‘Master’; they were His ‘slaves.’ He was so, because He had ‘broken the bands of their yoke, and set them free.’ There is, then, here—

I. The ground of God’s rights. ‘I brought you forth.’

II. Our servitude because of our redemption. ‘Ye are My servants.’

III. Our consequent freedom from all other masters. ‘Ye shall not be sold as bondmen.’

The Kinsman Redeemer

'After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him.'—LEV. xxv. 48.

There are several of the institutions and precepts of the Mosaic legislation which, though not prophetic, nor typical, have yet remarkable correspondences with lofty Christian truth. They may be used as symbols, if only we remember that we are diverting them from their original purpose.

How singularly these words lend themselves to the statement of the very central truths of Christianity—a slavery which is not necessarily perpetual and a redemption effected by a kinsman!

That institution of the 'Goel' is of a very remarkable kind, and throws great light on Christian verities. I wish, in dealing with it, to guard against any idea that it was meant to be prophetic or typical.

I. The kinsman redeemer under the old law.

The strength of the family tie in the Israelitish polity was great. The family was the unit—hence there were certain duties devolving on the nearest male relative. These, so far as we are at present concerned, were three.

(a) The redemption of a slave. The Mosaic legislation about slavery was very remarkable. It did not nominally prohibit it, but it fenced it round and modified it, so as to make it another thing.

Israelites were allowed to hold Gentile slaves, but under careful restrictions. Israelites were allowed to sell themselves as slaves. If the sale was to Israelites, the slavery was ended in six years or at the jubilee, whichever period came first—unless the slave had his ear bored to the doorpost to intimate his contentment in service (Exod. xxi. 5,6). This is not slavery in our sense of the word, but only a six years' engagement. If sold to a heathen in Israel, then the Goel had to redeem him; and the reason for this was that all Israelites belonged to God.

(b) The redemption of an inheritance.

This was the task of the kinsman-goel. The land belonged to the tribe. Pauperism was thus kept off. There could be no 'submerged tenth.' The theocratic reason was, 'the land shall not be sold at all for ever for it is Mine!'

(c) The avenging of murder. Blood feuds were thus checked, though not abolished. The remarkable institution of 'cities of refuge' gave opportunity for deliberate investigation into each case. If wilful murder was proved, the murderer was given up to the Goel for retribution; if death had been by misadventure, the slayer was kept in the city of refuge till the high-priest's decease.

This is the germ of the figure of the Redeemer-Kinsman in later Scripture. Notice how higher ideas began to gather round the office. The prophets felt that in some way God was their 'Goel.' In Isaiah the application of the name to Him is frequent and, we might almost say, habitual. So in Psalm xlix. 7, 'None can be Goel to his brother'; verse 15, 'God will be Goel to my soul from the power of the grave.'

Job xix. 25, 'I know that my Goel liveth….'

II. Our Kinsman-Redeemer.

The New Testament metaphor of ‘Redemption’ or buying back with a ransom is distinctly drawn from the Hebrew Goel’s office.

Christ is the Kinsman. The brotherhood of Christ with us was voluntarily assumed, and was for the purpose of redeeming His brethren.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer from slavery,—a slavery which is voluntary. The soul is self-delivered to evil and sin; but blessed be God! this slavery is terminable. The kinship of Christ was needful for our redemption. ‘It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ He thus gave His life a ‘ransom’ for many. Note the objective value of His atonement, and its subjective power as setting us free.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer of our inheritance. God is the inheritance here. The manhood of Jesus brings God back to us for our—(1) Knowledge; (2) Love; (3) Possession. Heaven is our inheritance hereafter. His manhood secures it for us. ‘I go to prepare a place for you.’ ‘An inheritance incorruptible.’ ‘The redemption of the purchased possession.’

The Kinsman-Avenger of blood. It is only in a modified sense that we can transfer this part of the Goel’s office to Jesus. The old Kinsman-Avenger of blood avenged it by shedding the shedder’s blood in retribution. But that was not the kind of vindication (for Goel means also Vindicator) for which Job looked when he used the expression. Resurrection to the vision of God was to come to him ‘at the last,’ by the standing of his Goel on the earth, and that was to be the true avenging of his death, and his vindication. The great murderer Death is to die, and his victims are to be wrested from him, and their death be proved to be the means of their fuller life. ‘Precious shall their blood be in His sight,’ and when their slayer is slain they will live for ever, partakers of their Kinsman-Redeemer’s glory, because they had been partakers of His death, and His blood had been precious in their sight. Let us cling to our Kinsman-Redeemer in all our life that He may give us freedom and an inheritance among His brethren, and, closing our eyes in death, we may commend our spirits to the ‘Angel that redeemed us from all evil,’ and be sure that He will ‘redeem’ our ‘souls from the power of the grave.’

The Old Store An The New

'Ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.' LEV. xxvi. 10.

This is one of the blessings promised to obedience. No doubt it, like the other elements of that 'prosperity' which 'is the blessing of the Old Testament,' presupposes a supernatural order of things, in which material well-being was connected with moral good far more closely and certainly than we see to be the case. But the spirit and heart of the promise remain, however the form of it may have passed away. It is a picturesque way of saying that the harvest shall be more than enough for the people's wants. All through the winter, and the spring, and the ripening summer, their granaries shall yield supplies. There will be no season of scarcity such as often occurs in countries whose communications are imperfect, just before harvest, when the last year's crop is exhausted, and it is hard to get anything to live on till this year's is ready. But when the new wheat comes in they will have still much of the old, and will have to 'bring it forth' to empty their barns, to make room for the fresh supplies which the blessing of God has sent before they were needed. The same idea of superabundant yield from the fields is given under another form in a previous verse of this chapter (ver. 5): 'Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, and ye shall eat your bread to the full': which reminds one of the striking prophecy of Amos: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed.' So rapid the growth, and so large the fruitfulness, that the gatherer shall follow close on the heels of the sower, and will not have accomplished his task before it is again time to sow. The prophet clearly has in his mind the old promise of the law, and applies it to higher matters, even to the fields white to harvest, where 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.' In the same way we may take these words, and gather from them better promises and larger thoughts than they originally carried.

There is in them a promise as to the fullness of the divine gifts, which has a far wider reach and nobler application than to the harvests and granaries of old Palestine.

We may take the words in that aspect, first, as containing God's pledge that these outward gifts shall come in unbroken continuity. And have they not so come to us all, for all these long years? Has there ever been a gap left yawning? has there ever been a break in the chain of mercies and supplies? has it not rather been that 'one post ran to meet another,' that before one of the messengers had unladed all his budget, another's arrival has antiquated and put aside his store? True, we are often brought very low; there may not be much in the barn but sweepings, and a few stray grains scattered over the floor. We may have but a handful of meal in the barrel, and be ready to dress it 'that we may eat it, and die.' But it never really comes to that. The new ever comes before the old is all eaten up; or if it be delayed even beyond that time, it comes before the hunger reaches inanition. It may be good that we should have to trust Him, even when the storehouse is empty; it may be good for us to know something of want, but that discipline comes seldom, and is never carried very far. For the most part He anticipates wants by gifts, and His good gifts overlap each other in our outward lives as slates on a roof, or scales on a fish.

We wonder at the smooth working of the machinery for feeding a great city; and how, day by day, the provisions come at the right time, and are parted out among hundreds of thousands of homes. But we seldom think of the punctual love, the perfect knowledge, the profound wisdom which cares for us all, and is always in time with its gifts. It was that quality of punctuality extended over a whole universe which seemed so wonderful to the Psalmist: 'The

eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.' God's machinery for distribution is perfect, and its very perfection, with the constancy of the resulting blessings, robs Him of His praise, and hinders our gratitude. By assiduity He loses admiration.

'Things grown common lose their dear delight.' 'If in His gifts and benefits He were more sparing and close-handed,' said Luther, 'we should learn to be thankful.' But let us learn it by the continuity of our joys, that we may not need to be taught it by their interruption; and let us still all tremulous anticipation of possible failure or certain loss by the happy confidence which we have a right to cherish, that His mercies will meet our needs, continuous as they are, and be strung so close together on the poor thread of our lives that no gap will be discernible in the jewelled circle.

May we not apply that same thought of the unbroken continuity of God's gifts to the higher region of our spiritual experience? His supplies of wisdom, love, joy, peace, power, to our souls are always enough and more than enough for our wants. If ever men complain of languishing vitality in their religious emotions, or of a stinted supply of food for their truest self, it is their own fault, not His. He means that there should be no parentheses of famine in our Christian life. It is not His doing if times of torpor alternate with seasons of quick energy and joyful fullness of life. So far as He is concerned the flow is uninterrupted, and if it come to us in jets and spurts as from an intermittent well, it is because our own fault has put some obstacle to choke the channel and dam out His Spirit from our spirits. We cannot too firmly hold, or too profoundly feel, that an unbroken continuity of supplies of His grace—unbroken and bright as a sunbeam reaching in one golden shaft all the way from the sun to the earth—is His purpose concerning us. Here, in this highest region, the thought of our text is most absolutely true; for He who gives is ever pouring forth His own self for us to take, and there is no limit to our reception but our capacity and our desire; nor any reason for a moment's break in our possession of love, righteousness, peace, but our withdrawal of our souls from beneath the Niagara of His grace. As long as we keep our poor vessels below that constant downpour they will be full. It is all our own blame if they are empty. Why should Christian people have these dismal times of deadness, these parentheses of paralysis? as if their growth must be like that of a tree with its alternations of winter sleep and summer waking? In regard to outward blessings we are, as it were, put upon rations, and 'that He gives' us we 'gather.' There He sometimes does, in love and wisdom, put us on very short allowance, and even now and then causes 'the fields to yield no meat.' But never is it so in the higher region. There He puts the key of the storehouse into our own hands, and we may take as much as we will, and have as much as we take. There the bread of God is given for evermore, and He wills that in uninterrupted abundance 'the meek shall eat and be satisfied.'

The source is full to overflowing, and there are no limits to the supply. The only limit is our capacity, which again is largely determined by our desire. So after all His gifts there is more yet unreceived to possess. After all His Self-revelation there is more yet unspoken to declare. Great as is the goodness which He has 'wrought before the sons of men for them that trust in Him,' there are far greater treasures of goodness 'laid up' in the deep mines of God 'for them that fear Him.' Bars of uncoined treasure and ingots of massy gold lie in His storehouses, to be put into circulation as soon as we need, and can use, them. Hence we have the right to look for an endless increase in our possession of God; and from the consideration of an Infinite Spirit that imparts Himself, and of finite but indefinitely expansible spirits that receive, the certainty arises of an endless life for us of growing glory; a heaven of ceaseless advance, where in constant alternation desire shall widen capacity, and capacity increase fruition, and fruition lead in, not satiety, but quickened appetite and deeper longing.

But we may also see in this text the prescription of a duty as well as the announcement of a promise. There is direction here as to our manner of receiving God's gifts, as well as large assurance as to His manner of bestowing them. It is His to substitute the new for the old. It is ours gladly to accept the exchange, a task not always easy or pleasant.

No doubt there is a natural love of change deep in us all, but that is held in check by its opposite, and all poetry and human life itself are full of the sadness born of mutation. Our Lord laid bare a deep tendency, when He said, 'No man having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new; because he saith the old is better.' We cling to what is familiar, in the very furniture of our houses; and yet we are ever being forced to accept what is strange and new, and, like some fresh article in a room, is out of harmony with the well-worn things that we have seen standing in their corners for years. It takes some time for the raw look to wear off, and for us to 'get used to it,' as we say. So is it, though often for deeper reasons, in far more important things. A man, for instance, has been engaged in some kind of business for years, and at last God shows him, by clear indications, that he must turn to something else. How slow he is to see it, how reluctant to do it! How he cleaves to the 'old store'! How he shrinks from clearing out the barn, to bring in the new! Or a household has been going on for many days unbroken, and at last a time comes when some of its members have to pass out into new circumstances; a son to push his way in the world, a daughter to brighten another fireside. It is hard for the parents to enter fully into the high hopes of their children, and to accept the new condition, without many vain longings for the old days that can never come back any more. So, all through our lives, wisdom and faith say, 'Bring forth the old because of the new.' Accept cheerfully the law of constant change under which God's love has set us. Do not let the pleasant bonds of habit tie down your hearts so tightly to the familiar possessions that you shrink from the introduction of fresh elements. Be sure that the new comes from the same loving hand which sent the old in its season, and that change is meant to be progress. Do not confine yourselves within any mill-horse round of associations and occupations. Front the vicissitudes of life, not merely with brave patience, but with happy confidence, for they all come from Him whose love is older than your oldest blessings, and whose mercies, new every morning, express themselves afresh through every change. Welcome the new, treasure the old, and in both see the purpose of that loving Father who, Himself unchanged, changeth all things, and

'… fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

In higher matters than these our text may give us counsel as to our duty. 'God hath more light yet to break forth from His holy word.' We are bound to welcome new truth, so soon as to our apprehensions it has made good its title, and not to refuse it lodgment in our minds because it needs the displacement of their old contents. In the regions of our knowledge and of our Christian life, most chiefly, are we under solemn obligations to 'bring forth the old store because of the new'; if we would not be unfaithful to God's great educational process that goes on through all our lives. It is often difficult to adjust the relations of our last lesson with our previous possessions. There is always a temptation to make too much of a new truth, and to fancy that it will produce more change in our whole mental furniture than it really will do. No man is less likely to come to the knowledge of the truth than he who is always deep in love with some new thought, 'the Cynthia of the minute,' and ever ready to barter 'old lamps for new ones.' But all these things admitted, still it remains true that we are here to learn, that our education is to go on all our days, and that here on earth it can only be carried out by our parting with the old store, which may have become musty by long lying in the granaries, to make room for the new, just gathered in the ripened field. The great central truths of God in Christ are to be kept for ever; but we shall come to grasp them in their fullness only by joyfully welcoming every fresh access of clearer light which falls upon them; and gladly

laying aside our inadequate thoughts of God's permanent revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, to house and garner in heart and spirit the fuller knowledge which it may please Him to impart.

So the law for life is thankful enjoyment of the old store, and openness of mind and freedom of heart which permit its unreluctant surrender when newer harvests ripen. And the highest form of the promise of our text will be when we pass into another world, and its rich abundance is poured out into our laps. Blessed are they who can willingly put away the familiar blessings of earth, and stretch out, willingly emptied, expectant hands to meet the 'new store' of Heaven!

Emancipated Slaves

'I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.'—LEV. xxvi. 13.

The history of Israel is a parable and a prophecy as well as a history.

The great central word of the New Testament has been drawn from it, viz. 'redemption,' *i.e.* a buying out of bondage.

The Hebrew slaves in Egypt were 'delivered.' The deliverance made them a nation. God acquired them for Himself, and they became His servants.

The great truths of the gospel are all there.

Henceforth the fact of their deliverance became the basis of all His appeals to them; the ground of His law; the reason for their obedience. In the previous context it has shaped the institution of slavery. Here it is the foundation of a general exhortation to obedience. The emphatic picture of the men stooping beneath the yoke, and then straightening themselves up, erect, illustrates the joyful freedom which Christ gives. That freedom is our subject.

I. Jesus gives freedom from the slavery of sin.

Freedom consists in power to follow unhindered the law of our being. So sin is slavery because it is contrary to that law.

When Jesus promised freedom through the truth, the Jews indignantly spurned the offer with the proud boast, which the presence of a Roman garrison in Jerusalem should have made to stick in their throats: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' A like hardy shutting of eyes to plain facts characterises the attitude of multitudes to the Christian view of man's condition. Jesus answered the Jews by the deep saying: 'He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.' A man fancies himself showing off his freedom by throwing off the restraints of morality or law, and by 'doing as he likes,' but he is really showing his servitude. Self-will looks like liberty, but it is serfdom. The libertine is a slave. That slavery under sin takes two forms. The man who sins is a slave to the power of sin. Will and conscience are meant to guide and impel us, and we never sin without first coercing or silencing them and subjecting them to the upstart tyranny of desires and senses which should obey and not command. The 'beggars' are on horseback, and the 'princes' walking. There is a servile revolt, and we know what horrors accompany that.

But that slavery under sin is shown also by the terrible force with which any sin, if once committed, appeals to the doer to repeat it. It is not only in regard to sensual sins that the awful insistence of habit grips the doer, and makes it the rarest thing that evil once done is done only once.

But he who sins is also a slave to the guilt of sin. True, that sense of guilt is for the most part and in most men dormant, but the snake is but hibernating, and often wakes and stings at most unexpected moments. 'The deceitfulness of sin' lies to the sinner, so that for the most part he 'wipes his mouth, saying I have done no harm,' but some chance incident may at any time, and certainly something will at some time, dissipate the illusion, as a stray sunbeam might scatter a wisp of mist and show startled eyes the grim fact that had always been there. And even while not consciously felt, guilt hampers the soul's insight into divine realities,

clips its wings so that it cannot soar, paralyses its efforts after noble aims, and inclines it to ignoble grovelling as far away from thoughts of God and goodness as may be.

Christ makes the man bound and tied by the cords of his sins lift himself up and stand erect. By His death He brings forgiveness which removes guilt and the consciousness of it. By His inbreathed life He gives a new nature akin to His own, and brings into force a new motive, even transforming love, which is stronger than the death with which sin has cursed its doers. 'The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Jesus gives freedom from a slavish relation to God.

Apart from Him, God, if recognised at all, is for the most part thought of as 'austere, reaping where He did not sow,' and His commandments as grievous. Men may sullenly recognise that they cannot resist, but they do not submit. They may obey in act, but there is no obedience in their wills, nor any cheerfulness in their hearts. The elder brother in the parable could say, 'Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment,' but his service had been joyless, and he never remembered having received gifts that made him 'merry with his friends.'

But from all such slavish, and therefore worthless, obedience, and all such reluctant, and therefore unreal, submission, Jesus liberates those who believe on Him and abide in His word. He declares God as our loving Father, and through Him we have authority to become sons of God. He 'sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,' and that makes us to be no more slaves but sons. Sullen obedience becomes glad choice, and it is the inmost desire, and the deepest delight, of the loving child to do always the things that please the loving Father. 'I ought' and 'I will' coalesce, and so there is no slavery, but perfect freedom, in recognising and bowing to the great 'I must' which sweetly rules the life.

III. Christ gives deliverance from servility to men.

We need not touch on the historical connection, plain as that is, between modern conceptions of individual freedom and the influence of Christ's teaching. Modern democracy is rooted in Christ, though it is often unaware of its genesis, and blindly attacks the force to which it owes its existence.

Because all men are redeemed by Christ, because by that redemption all stand in the same relation to Him, because all have equal access to Him, and are taught and guided by His Spirit, because 'we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' therefore class prerogatives and subject classes fade away, and there is 'neither bond nor free,' but 'all are one in Christ Jesus.'

But there are other ways in which men tyrannise over men and in which Christ's redemption sets us free.

There is the undue authority of favourite teachers and examples.

There is the tyranny of public opinion.

There is undue regard to human approbation.

There is the sway of priestcraft.

How does Christianity deliver from these? It makes Christ's law our unconditional duty. It makes His approbation our highest joy. It gives legitimate scope to the instinct of loyalty, submission, and imitation, and of subjection to authority. It reduces to insignificance men's judgment, and all their loud voices to a babble of nothings. 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment.' It brings the soul into direct communion with God, and sweeps away all intermediaries.

‘Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.’

So personal independence and individuality of character are the result of Christianity. ‘I have made you go upright.

IV. Christ gives us freedom from the power of circumstances.

Most men are made by these. We need not here enter on questions of the influence of their environment on all men’s development.

But Christ gives us—

(a) A great aim for our lives high above these.

(b) A foothold in Him outside of them. We are not the slaves of our circumstances, but their masters.

(c) The power to utilise them.

So Christians are ‘free’ in all senses of the word.

The great Act of Emancipation has been passed for us all. Only Christ has rule over us, and we have our perfect freedom in His service. We have been sitting in the prison-house, and He has come and declared ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim liberty to the captives.’

The Book Of Numbers

The Warfare Of Christian Service

'All that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle.' NUM. iv. 23.

These words occur in the series of regulations as to the functions of the Levites in the Tabernacle worship. The words 'to perform the service' are, as the margin tells us, literally, to 'war the warfare.' Although it may be difficult to say why such very prosaic and homely work as carrying the materials of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial vessels was designated by such a term, the underlying suggestion is what I desire to fix upon now—viz., that work for God, of whatever kind it be, which Christian people are bound to do, and which is mainly service for men for God's sake, will never be rightly done until we understand that it is a *warfare*, as well as a work.

The phrase on which I am commenting occurs again and again in the regulations as to the Levitical service, and is applied, not only as in my text to those who were told off to bear the burdens on the march, but also to the whole body of Levites, who did the inferior services in connection with the ritual worship. They were not, as it would appear, sacrificing priests, but they belonged to the same tribe as these, and they had sacred functions to discharge. So we come to this principle, that Christian service is to be looked at as warfare.

Now, that is a principle which ought to be applied to all Christians. For there is no such thing as designating a portion of Christ's Church to service which others have not to perform. The distinction of 'priest' and 'layman' existed in the Old Testament; it does not exist under the New Covenant, and there is no obligation upon any one Christian man to devote himself for Christ's sake to Christ's service and man's help (which is Christ's service), that does not lie equally upon all Christian people. The function is the same for all; the methods of discharging it may be widely different. Within the limits of the priestly tribe there may still be those whose office it is to carry the vessels, and those whose office it is to act more especially as ministering priests; but they are all 'of the tribe of Levi.' We, if we are Christian people at all, are all bound to do this work of 'the tabernacle,' and war this warfare.

It is important that we Christian people should elevate our thoughts of our duties in the world to the height of this great metaphor. The metaphor of the Christian life as being a 'warfare' is familiar enough, but that is not exactly the point which I wish to dwell upon now. When we speak about 'fighting the good fight of faith,' we generally mean our wrestle and struggle with our own evils and with the things that hinder us from developing a Christlike character, and 'growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' But it is another sort of warfare about which I am now speaking, the warfare which every Christian man has to wage who flings himself into the work of diminishing the world's miseries and sins, and tries to make people better, and happier because they are better. That is a fight, and will always be so, if it is rightly done.

I. Think of the foes.

Speaking generally, society is constituted upon a non-Christian basis. We talk about 'Christian' nations. There is not one on the face of the earth. There is not a nation whose institutions and maxims and politics and the practices of its individual members are ruled and moulded predominantly by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So every man that has come into personal touch with that Lord, and has felt that His commandments are the supreme authority in his own individual life, when he goes out into society, comes full tilt against a whole host of things that are in pronounced antagonism, or in real though unacknowledged contradiction,

to the principles by which a Christian has to live for himself, and to commend to his brethren. So we have to fight. There are two things to be done—the imparting of good which will increase the sum of the world's happiness, and the destruction of evil, which will subtract some of the world's sorrows. The latter is always a conflict, for there are arrayed in defence of the evil vested interests, and the influence of habit, and the lowered vitality and sensitiveness of conscience which has come from breathing the polluted atmosphere which evil has vitiated. So that if we set ourselves, in humble, quiet, out-and-out dependence on Jesus Christ and submission to His will, to lead other people to submit to His will, there is nothing in the world more certain than that we shall find against us, starting up, as it were, out of the mist and taking form suddenly, a whole host of enemies. So we Christian men, as individuals, as members of a community and able to bring some influence to bear upon the conscience of society, have to fight against popular social evils, and to war for righteousness' sake.

There is another foe. There is nothing that men dislike more than being lifted up into a clearer atmosphere and made to see truths which they do not see or care for. When we first become Christians we are all hot to go and teach and preach; and we fancy that we have only to stand up, with a Bible in our hand, and read two or three texts, and our fellows will grasp them as gladly as we have done. But soon we find out that it is not so easy to draw men to Christ as we thought it would be. We have to fight against gravitation and unwillingness, when we would lift a poor brother into the liberty and the light that we are in. We have to struggle with the men that we are trying to help. We have to war, in order to bring 'the peace of God which passes understanding' into their hearts.

But the worst of all our foes, in doing Christian service, is our own miserable selves, with our laziness, and our vanity, and our wondering what A, B, and C will think about us, and the mingling of impure motives with nobler ones, and our being angry with people because they are so insensible, not so much to Christ's love as to our words and pleadings. Unless we can purge all that devil's leaven out of ourselves, we have little chance of working 'the work of the tabernacle,' or warring the warfare of God. Ah! brethren, to do anything for this world of unbelief and sin, of which we ourselves are part, is a struggle. And I know of no work that needs more continual putting a firm heel upon self, in all its subtle manifestations, than the various forms of Christian service. Not only we preachers, but Sunday-school teachers, mothers in their nurseries, teaching their children, and all of us, if we are trying to do anything for men, for Christ's sake, must feel, if we are honest with ourselves and about our work, that the first condition of success in it is to fight down self, and that only then, being emptied of ourselves, are we ready to be filled with the Spirit, by which we are made mighty to pull down the strongholds of sin.

II. The weapons of this warfare.

There are two great passages in the New Testament, both of which deal with the Christian life under this metaphor of warfare. One of these is the detailed description of the Christian armour in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There we have described the equipment for that phase of the fight of the Christian life which has to do mainly with the perfecting of the individual character. But somewhat different is the armour which is to be worn, when the Christian man goes out into the world to labour and to wage war there for Jesus Christ. We may turn, then, rather to the other of the two passages in question for the descriptions of the equipment, armour, and weapons of the Christian in his warfare for the spread of truth and goodness in the world. The passage to which I refer is in 2 Cor. vi. What are the weapons that Paul specifies in that place? I venture to alter their order, because he seems to have put them down just as they came into his mind, and we can put some kind of logical sequence into them. 'By

the Word of God'—that is the first one. 'By the Holy Ghost,' which is otherwise given as 'by the power of God,' is the next. Get your minds and hearts filled with the truth of the Gospel, and dwell in fellowship with God, baptized with His Holy Spirit; and then you will be clothed 'as with a vesture down to your heels' with the power of God. These are the divine side, the weapons given us from above—'the Word of God' which is 'the sword of the Spirit,' and the indwelling Holy Ghost manifesting Himself in power. Then follow a series of human qualities which, though they are 'the fruit of the Spirit,' are yet not produced in us without our own co-operation. We have to forge and sharpen these weapons, though the fire in which they are forged is from above, and the metal of which they are made is given from heaven, like meteoric iron. These are 'kindness, long-suffering, love unfeigned.' We have to dismiss from our minds the ordinary characteristics of warfare in thinking of that which Christians are to wage. Like the old Knights Templars, we must carry a sword which has a cross for its hilt, and must be clad in gentleness, and long-suffering, and unfeigned love. 'The wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' You cannot bully people into Christianity, you cannot scold them into goodness. There must be sweetness in order to attract, and he imperfectly echoes the music of the voice that came from 'the lips into which grace was poured,' whose words are harsh and rough, and who preaches the Gospel as if he were thundering damnation into people's ears.

Brethren, whatever be our warfare against sin, we must never lose our tempers. Harsh words break no bones indeed, but neither do they break hearts. A character like Jesus Christ—that is the victorious weapon. Let a man go and live in the world with these weapons that I have been naming, the truth of God in his heart, the Holy Spirit in his spirit, the power that comes therefrom animating his deadness and strengthening his weakness, and himself an emblem and an embodiment of the redeeming love of Christ—and though he spoke no word he would be sure to preach Christ; and though he struck no blow he would be a formidable antagonist to the hosts of evil, and the icebergs of sin and godlessness would run down into water before his silent and omnipotent shining. These are the weapons.

III. Note the temper, or disposition, of the Christian warrior-servant.

Courage goes without saying. If a man expects to be beaten, and to do nothing by his Christian witness but clear his conscience, he deserves nothing else than what he will get—viz. that his expectation will be fulfilled and he *will* do nothing else *but* clear his conscience, and that imperfectly. That is why so many preachers and Sunday-school teachers never see any conversions in their congregation or classes—because they do not expect any; because they go to their work without the enthusiastic boldness which would give power to their utterances.

I suppose concentration, too, goes without saying. When a man is on the battlefield with the swords whirling about his head, and the bayonets an inch from his breast, he does not go dreaming of scenes a hundred miles off, or think anything else than the one thing, how to keep a whole skin and wound an enemy. If Christian men will do their work in the dawdling, half-interested, and half-indifferent way in which so many of us promenade through our Christian service as if it was a review and not a fight, they are not likely to bring back many trophies of victory. You must put your whole selves into the battle. I said we must subdue ourselves ere we begin to fight. That is no contradiction to what I am saying now, for, as we all know, there is a distinction between the two selves in us—the self-centred self, which is to be crucified, and the God-centred self, which is to be nourished. You must put your whole selves into the battle.

There must, too, be discipline. One difference between a mob and an army is that the mob has as many wills as there are heads in it, and the army has only one will, that of the commander.

He says to one man ‘Go!’ and he goes, and gets shot; and to another one ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to a third one ‘Do this!’ and, no matter what it is, straightway he goes and does it. So if we are soldiers we have to take orders from headquarters, and to be sure that we pay no attention to any other commands. Suppose a man is set at a certain post by his captain, and a corporal comes and says, ‘You go and do this other thing; never mind your post, I will look after that,’ to obey that is mutiny. If Jesus Christ tells you to do anything, and any others say ‘Do not do it just yet!’ neglect them, and obey Him. If your own heart says, ‘Stop a little while and try something other and easier before you tackle that task,’ be sure of the Captain’s voice, and then, whatever happens, obey, and obey at once. Warfare is a diabolical thing, but there is a divine beauty in one aspect of it—

Their’s not to make reply, Their’s not to reason why, Their’s but to do—

even if it mean ‘to die.’ Thus let us wage warfare.

IV. The Relieving Guard.

This metaphor of warfare is used in the Book of Job, in a passage where our English Version does not show it. So I venture to substitute the right translation for the one in the Authorised Version, ‘All the days of my warfare will I wait till my change comes.’ The guard will be relieved some day, and the private that has been tramping up and down in the dark or the snow, perhaps within rifle’s length of the enemy, will shoulder his gun and go into the comfortable guardhouse, and hang up his knapsack, and fling off his dirty boots, and sit down by the fire, and make himself comfortable. There is a ‘heavenly manner of relieving guard.’ Soon it will be the end of the sentry’s time, and then, as one of those that had done a good day’s work, and a long one, said with a sigh of relief, ‘I have fought a good fight.’ Henceforth the helmet is put off, which is ‘the hope of salvation,’ and the crown is put on, which is salvation in its fullness. ‘All the days of my warfare will I wait’—till my Captain relieves the guard.

The Guiding Pillar

'So it was alway: the cloud covered [the tabernacle] by day, and the appearance of fire by night.'—Num. ix. 16.

The children of Israel in the wilderness, surrounded by miracle, had nothing which we do not possess. They had some things in an inferior form; their sustenance came by manna, ours comes by God's blessing on our daily work, which is better. Their guidance came by this supernatural pillar; ours comes by the reality of which that pillar was nothing but a picture. And so, instead of fancying that men thus led were in advance of us, we should learn that these, the supernatural manifestations, visible and palpable, of God's presence and guidance were the beggarly elements: 'God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect.'

With this explanation of the relation between the miracle and symbol of the Old, and the reality and standing miracle of the New, Covenants, let us look at the eternal truths, which are set before us in a transitory form, in this cloud by day and fiery pillar by night.

I. Note, first, the double form of the guiding pillar.

The fire was the centre, the cloud was wrapped around it. The former was the symbol, making visible to a generation who had to be taught through their senses, the inaccessible holiness and flashing brightness and purity of the divine nature; the latter tempered and veiled the too great brightness for feeble eyes.

The same double element is found in all God's manifestations of Himself to men. In every form of revelation are present both the heart and core of light, which no eye can look upon, and the merciful veil which, because it veils, unveils; because it hides, reveals; makes visible because it conceals; and shows God because it is 'the hiding of His power.' So, through all the history of His dealings with men, there has ever been what is called in Scripture language the 'face,' or the 'name of God'; the aspect of the divine nature on which the eye can look; and manifested through it, there has always been the depth and inaccessible abyss of that Infinite Being. We have to be thankful that in the cloud is the fire, and that round the fire is the cloud. For only so can our eyes behold and our hands grasp the else invisible and remote central Sun of the universe. God hides to make better known the glories of His character. His revelation is the flashing of the uncreated and intolerable light of His infinite Being through the encircling clouds of human conceptions and words, or of deeds which each show forth, in forms fitted to our apprehension, some fragment of His lustre. After all revelation, He remains unrevealed. After ages of showing forth His glory, He is still 'the King invisible, whom no man hath seen at any time nor can see.' The revelation which He makes of Himself is 'truth and is no lie.' The recognition of the presence in it of both the fire and the cloud does not cast any doubt on the reality of our imperfect knowledge, or of the authentic participation in the nature of the central light, of the sparkles of it which reach us. We know with a real knowledge what we know of Him. What He shows us is Himself, though not His whole self.

This double aspect of all possible revelation of God, which was symbolised in comparatively gross external form in the pillar that led Israel on its march, and lay stretched out and quiescent, a guarding covering above the Tabernacle when the weary march was still, recurs all through the history of Old Testament revelation by type and prophecy and ceremony, in which the encompassing cloud was comparatively dense, and the light which pierced it relatively faint. It reappears in both elements in Christ, but combined in new proportions, so

as that ‘the veil, that is to say, His flesh,’ is thinned to transparency and all aglow with the indwelling lustre of manifest Deity. So a light, set in some fair alabaster vase, shines through its translucent walls, bringing out every delicate tint and meandering vein of colour, while itself diffused and softened by the enwrapping medium which it beautifies by passing through its purity. Both are made visible and attractive to dull eyes by the conjunction. ‘He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father,’ and he that hath seen the Father in Christ hath seen the man Christ, as none see Him who are blind to the incarnate deity which illuminates the manhood in which it dwells.

But we have to note also the varying appearance of the pillar according to need. There was a double change in the pillar according to the hour, and according as the congregation was on the march or encamped. By day it was a cloud, by night it glowed in the darkness. On the march it moved before them, an upright pillar, as gathered together for energetic movement; when the camp rested it ‘returned to the many thousands of Israel’ and lay quietly stretched above the Tabernacle like one of the long-drawn, motionless clouds above the setting summer sun, glowing through all its substance with unflashing radiance reflected from unseen light, and ‘on all the glory’ (shrined in the Holy Place beneath) was ‘a defence.’

Both these changes of aspect symbolise for us the reality of the Protean capacity of change according to our ever-varying needs, which for our blessing we may find in that ever-changing, unchanging, divine Presence which will be our companion, if we will.

It was not only by a natural process that, as daylight declined, what had seemed but a column of smoke in the fervid desert sunlight, brightened into a column of fire, blazing amid the clear stars. But we may well believe in an actual admeasurement of the degree of light, correspondent to the darkness and to the need for certitude and cheering sense of God’s protection, which the defenceless camp would feel as they lay down to rest.

When the deceitful brightness of earth glistens and dazzles around us, our vision of Him may be ‘a cloudy screen to temper the deceitful ray’; and when ‘there stoops on our path, in storm and shade, the frequent night,’ as earth grows darker, and life becomes greyer and more sombre, and verges to its eventide, the pillar blazes brighter before the weeping eye, and draws nearer to the lonely heart. We have a God who manifests Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, and in flaming fire by night.

II. Note the guidance of the pillar.

When it lifts the camp marches; when it glides down and lies motionless the march is stopped, and the tents are pitched. The main point which is dwelt upon in this description of the God-guided pilgrimage of the wandering people is the absolute uncertainty in which they were kept as to the duration of their encampment, and as to the time and circumstances of their march. Sometimes the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle many days; sometimes for a night only; sometimes it lifted in the night. ‘Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up they journeyed.’ So never, from moment to moment, did they know when the moving cloud might settle, or the resting cloud might soar. Therefore, absolute uncertainty as to the next stage was visibly represented before them by that hovering guide which determined everything, and concerning whose next movement they knew absolutely nothing.

Is not that all true about us? We have no guiding cloud like this. So much the better. Have we not a more real guide? God guides us by circumstances, God guides us by His word, God guides us by His Spirit, speaking through our common-sense and in our understandings, and,

most of all, God guides us by that dear Son of His, in whom is the fire and round whom is the cloud. And perhaps we may even suppose that our Lord implies some allusion to this very symbol in His own great words, 'I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' For the conception of 'following' the light seems to make it plain that our Lord's image is not that of the sun in the heavens, or any such supernal light, but that of some light which comes near enough to a man to move before him, and behind which he can march. So, I think, that Christ Himself laid His hand upon this ancient symbol, and in these great words said in effect, 'I am that which it only shadowed and foretold.' At all events, whether in them He was pointing to our text or no, we must feel that He is the reality which was expressed by this outward symbol. And no man who can say, 'Jesus Christ is the Captain of my salvation, and after His pattern I march; at the pointing of His guiding finger I move; and in His footsteps, He being my helper, I try to tread,' need feel or fancy that any possible pillar, floating before the dullest eye, was a better, surer, or diviner guide than he possesses. They whom Christ guides want none other for leader, pattern, counsellor, companion, reward. This Christ is our Christ 'for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death' and beyond it. The pillar that we follow, which will glow with the ruddy flame of love in the darkest hours of life—blessed be His name!—will glide in front of us through the 'valley of the shadow of death,' brightest then when the murky midnight is blackest. Nor will the pillar which guides us cease to blaze, as did the guide of the desert march, when Jordan has been crossed. It will still move before us on paths of continuous and ever-increasing approach to infinite perfection. They who here follow Christ afar off and with faltering steps shall there 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

In like manner, the same absolute uncertainty which was intended to keep the Israelites (though it failed often to do so) in the attitude of constant dependence, is the condition in which we all have to live, though we mask it from ourselves. That we do not know what lies before us is a commonplace. The same long tracts of monotonous continuance in the same place and doing the same duties befall us that befell these men. Years pass, and the pillar spreads itself out, a defence above the unmoving sanctuary. And then, all in a flash, when we are least thinking of change, it gathers itself together, is a pillar again, shoots upwards, and moves forwards; and it is for us to go after it. And so our lives are shuttlecocked between uniform sameness which may become mechanical monotony, and agitation by change which may make us lose our hold of fixed principles and calm faith, unless we recognise that the continuance and the change are alike the will of the guiding God, whose will is signified by the stationary or moving pillar.

III. That leads me to the last thing that I would note—viz. the docile following of the Guide.

In the context, the writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar indicated, immediate prompt obedience followed. He says so over and over and over again. 'As long as the cloud abode they rested, and when the cloud tarried long they journeyed not'; and 'when the cloud was a few days on the Tabernacle they abode'; and 'according to the commandment they journeyed'; and 'when the cloud abode until the morning they journeyed'; and 'whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried they journeyed not, but abode in their tents.' So, after he has reiterated the thing half a dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative—'at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed.' Obedience was prompt; whensoever and for whatsoever the signal was given, the men were ready. In the night, after they had had their tents pitched for a long period, when only the watchers' eyes were open, the pillar lifts, and in an instant the alarm is given, and all the camp is in a bustle. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives. We are to be as ready for every

indication of God's will as they were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey, and therefore quick to perceive, the slightest sign of motion in the resting, or of rest in the moving, pillar which regulates our march and our encamping.

What do we need in order to cultivate and keep such a disposition? We need perpetual watchfulness lest the pillar should lift unnoticed. When Nelson was second in command at Copenhagen, the admiral in command of the fleet hoisted the signal for recall, and Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and said, 'I do not see it.' That is very like what we are tempted to do. When the signal for unpleasant duties that we would gladly get out of is hoisted, we are very apt to put the telescope to the blind eye, and pretend to ourselves that we do not see the fluttering flags. We need still more to keep our wills in absolute suspense, if His will has not declared itself. Do not let us be in a hurry to run before God. When the Israelites were crossing the Jordan, they were told to leave a great space between themselves and the guiding ark, that they might know how to go, because they had 'not passed that way heretofore.' Impatient hurrying at God's heels is apt to lead us astray. Let Him get well in front, that you may be quite sure which way He desires you to go, before you go. And if you are not sure which way He desires you to go, be sure that He does not at that moment desire you to go anywhere.

We need to hold the present with a slack hand, so as to be ready to fold our tents and take to the road, if God will. We must not reckon on continuance, nor strike our roots so deep that it needs a hurricane to remove us. To those who set their gaze on Christ, no present, from which He wishes them to remove, can be so good for them as the new conditions into which He would have them pass. It is hard to leave the spot, though it be in the desert, where we have so long encamped that it has come to feel like home. We may look with regret on the circle of black ashes on the sand where our little fire glinted cheerily, and our feet may ache, and our hearts ache more, as we begin our tramp once again, but we must set ourselves to meet the God-appointed change cheerfully, in the confidence that nothing will be left behind which it is not good to lose, nor anything met which does not bring a blessing, however its first aspect may be harsh or sad.

We need, too, to cultivate the habit of prompt obedience. It is usually reluctance which puts the drag on. Slow obedience is often the germ of incipient disobedience. In matters of prudence and of intellect, second thoughts are better than first, and third thoughts, which often come back to first ones, better than second; but in matters of duty, first thoughts are generally best. They are the instinctive response of conscience to the voice of God, while second thoughts are too often the objections of disinclination, or sloth, or cowardice. It is easiest to do our duty when we are at first sure of it. It then comes with an impelling power which carries us over obstacles as on the crest of a wave, while hesitation and delay leave us stranded in shoal water. If we would follow the pillar, we must follow it at once.

A heart that waits and watches for God's direction, that uses common-sense as well as faith to unravel small and great perplexities, and is willing to sit loose to the present, however pleasant, in order that it may not miss the indications which say, 'Arise, this is not your rest,' fulfils the conditions on which, if we keep them, we may be sure that He will guide us by the right way, and bring us at last to 'the city of habitation.'

Hobab

'And Moses said unto Hobab … Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.'—NUM. x. 29.

There is some doubt with regard to the identity of this Hobab. Probably he was a man of about the same age as Moses, his brother-in-law, and a son of Jethro, a wily Kenite, a Bedouin Arab. Moses begs him to join himself to his motley company, and to be to him in the wilderness 'instead of eyes.' What did Moses want a man for, when he had the cloud? What do we want common-sense for, when we have God's Spirit? What do we want experience and counsel for, when we have divine guidance promised to us? The two things work in together. The cloud led the march, but it was very well to have a man that knew all about the oases and the wells, the situation of which was known only to the desert-born tribes, and who could teach the helpless slaves from Goshen the secrets of camp life. So Moses pressed Hobab to change his position, to break with his past, and to launch himself into an altogether new and untried sort of life.

And what does he plead with him as the reason? 'We will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.' Probably Hobab looked rather shy at the security, for I suppose he was no worshipper of Jehovah, and he said, 'No; I had rather go home to my own people and my own kindred and my father's house where I fit in, and keep to my own ways, and have something a little more definite to lay hold of than your promise, or the promise of your Jehovah that lies behind it. These are not solid, and I am going back to my tribe.' But Moses pressed and he at last consented, and the following verses suggest that the arrangement was made satisfactorily, and that the journeyings began prosperously. In the Book of Judges we find traces of the presence of Hobab's descendants as incorporated among the people of Israel. One of them came to be somebody, the Jael who struck the tent-peg through the temples of the sleeping Sisera, for she is called 'the wife of Heber the *Kenite*.' Probably, then, in some sense Hobab must have become a worshipper of Jehovah, and have cast in his lot with his brother-in-law and his people. I do not set Hobab up as a shining example. We do not know much about his religion. But it seems to me that this little glimpse into a long-forgotten and unimportant life may teach us two or three things about the venture of faith, the life of faith, and the reward of faith.

I. The venture of faith.

I have already said that Hobab had nothing in the world to trust to except Moses' word, and Moses' report of God's Word. 'We will do you good; God has said that He will do good to us, and you shall have your share in it.' It was a grave thing, and, in many circumstances, would have been a supremely foolish thing, credulous to the verge of insanity, to risk all upon the mere promise of one in Moses' position, who had so little in his own power with which to fulfil the promise; and who referred him to an unseen divinity, somewhere or other; and so drew bills upon heaven and futurity, and did not feel himself at all bound to pay them when they fell due, unless God should give him the cash to do it with. But Hobab took the plunge, he ventured all upon these two promises—Moses' word, and God's word that underlay it.

Now that is just what we have to do. For, after all talking about reasons for belief, and evidences of religion, and all the rest of it, it all comes to this at last—will you risk everything on Jesus Christ's bare word? There are plenty of reasons for doing so, but what I wish to bring out is this, that the living heart and root of true Christianity is neither more nor less than the absolute and utter reliance upon nothing else but Christ, and therefore on His

word. He did not even condescend to give reasons for that reliance, for His most solemn assurance was just this, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you.’ That is as much as to say, ‘If you do not see in Me, without any more argument, reason enough for believing Me, you do not see Me at all.’

Christ did not argue—He asserted, and in default of all other proof, if I might venture to say so, He put His own personality into the scales and said, ‘There, that will outweigh everything.’ So no wonder that ‘they were astonished at His doctrine,’—not so much at the substance of it as at the tone of it, ‘for He taught them *with authority*.’

But what right had He to teach them with authority? What right has He to present Himself there in front of us and proclaim, ‘I say unto you, and there is an end of it’? The heart and essence of Christian faith is doing, in a far sublimer fashion, precisely what this wild Arab did, when he uprooted himself from the conditions in which his life had grown up, and flung himself into an unknown future, on bare trust in a bare word. Jesus Christ asks us to do the same by Him. Whether His word comes to us revealing, or commanding, or promising, it is absolute, and, for His true followers, ends all controversy, all hesitation, all reluctance. When He commands it is ours to obey and live. And when He promises it is for us to twine all the tendrils of our expectations round that faithful word, and by faith to make ‘the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.’ The venture of faith takes a *word* for the most solid thing in the universe, and the Incarnate Word of God for the basis of all our hope, the authority for all our conduct, ‘the Master-light of all our seeing.’

II. Hobab suggests to us, secondly—

The sort of life that follows the venture of faith. The hindrances to his joining Moses were plainly put by himself. He said in effect, ‘I will not come; I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred. Why should I attach myself to a horde of strangers, and go wandering about the desert for the rest of my life, looking out for encampments for them, when I can return to where I have been all my days; and be surrounded by the familiar atmosphere of friends and relatives?’ But he bethought himself that there was a nobler life to live than that, and because he was stirred by the impulse of reliance on Moses and his promise, and perhaps by some germ of reliance on Moses’ God, he finally said, ‘The die is cast. I choose my side. I will break with the past. I turn my back on kindred and home. Here I draw a broad line across the page, and begin over again in an altogether new kind of life. I identify myself with these wanderers; sharing their fortunes, hoping to share their prosperity, and taking their God for my God.’ He had perhaps not been a nomad before, for there still are permanent settlements as well as nomad encampments in Arabia, as there were in those days, and he and his relatives, from the few facts that we know of them, seem to have had a fixed home, with a very narrow zone of wandering round it. So Hobab, an old man probably, if he was anything like the age of his connection by marriage, Moses, who was eighty at this time, makes up his mind to begin a new career.

Now that is what we have to do. If we have faith in Christ and His promise, we shall not say, ‘I am going back to my kindred and to my home.’ We shall be prepared to accept the conditions of a wanderer’s life. We shall recognise and feel, far more than we ever have done, that we are indeed ‘pilgrims and sojourners’ here. Dear Christian friends, we have no business to call ourselves Christ’s men, unless the very characteristic of our lives is that we are drawn ever forward by the prospect of future good, and unless that future is a great deal more solid and more operative upon us, and tells more on our lives, than this intrusive, solid-seeming present that thrusts itself between us and our true home. That is a sure saying. The Christian obligation to live a life of detachment, even while diligent in duty, is not to be brushed aside as pulpit rhetoric and exaggeration, but it is the plainest teaching of the New

Testament. I wish it was a little more exemplified in the daily life of the people who call themselves Christians.

If I am not living for the unseen and the future, what right have I to say that I am Christ's at all? If the shadows are more than the substance to me; if this condensed vapour and fog that we call reality has not been to our apprehension thinned away into the unsubstantial mist that it is, what have the principles of Christianity done for us, and what worth is Christ's word to us? If I believe Him, the world is—I do not say, as the sentimental poet put it, 'but a fleeting show, for man's illusion given';—but as Paul puts it, a glass which may either reveal or obscure the realities beyond; and according as we look at, or look through, 'the things seen and temporal,' do we see, or miss, 'the things unseen and eternal.' So, then, the life of faith has for its essential characteristic—because it is a life of reliance on Christ's bare word—that future good is consciously its supreme aim. That will detach us, as it did Hobab, from home and kindred, and make us feel that we are 'pilgrims and sojourners.'

III. Lastly, our story suggests to us—

The rewards of faith.

'Come with us,' says Moses; 'we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee what goodness the Lord shall do unto us.' He went, and neither he nor Moses ever saw the land, or at least never set their feet on it. Moses saw it from Pisgah, but probably Hobab did not even get so much as that.

So he had all his tramping through the wilderness, and all his work, for nothing, had he? Had he not better have gone back to Midian, and made use of the present reality, than followed a will-of-the-wisp that led him into a bog, if he got none of the good that he set out expecting to get? Then, did he make a mistake? Would he have been a wiser man if he had stuck to his first refusal? Surely not. It seems to me that the very fact of this great promise being given to this old—dare I call Hobab a 'saint'?—to this old saint, and never being fulfilled at all in this world, compels us to believe that there was some gleam of hope, and of certainty, of a future life, even in these earliest days of dim and partial revelation.

To me it is very illuminative, and very beautiful, that the dying Jacob bursts in his song into a sudden exclamation, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!' It is as if he had felt that all his life long he had been looking for what had never come, and that it could not be that God was going to let him go down to the grave and never grasp the good that he had been waiting for all his days. We may apply substantially the same thoughts to Hobab, and to all his like, and may turn them to our own use, and argue that the imperfections of the consequences of our faith here on earth are themselves evidences of a future, where all that Christ has said shall be more than fulfilled, and no man will be able to say, 'Thou didst send me out, deluding me with promises which have all gone to water and have failed.'

Hobab dying there in the desert had made the right choice, and if we will trust ourselves to Christ and His faithful word, and, trusting to Him, will feel that we are detached from the present and that it is but as the shadow of a cloud, whatever there may be wanting in the results of our faith here on earth, there will be nothing wanting in its results at the last. Hobab did not regret his venture, and no man ever ventures his faith on Christ and is disappointed. 'He that believeth shall not be confounded.'

The Hallowing Of Work And Of Rest

'And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. 36. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.'—Num. x. 35, 36.

The picture suggested by this text is a very striking and vivid one. We see the bustle of the morning's breaking up of the encampment of Israel. The pillar of cloud, which had lain diffused and motionless over the Tabernacle, gathers itself together into an upright shaft, and moves, a dark blot against the glittering blue sky, the sunshine masking its central fire, to the front of the encampment. Then the priests take up the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence, and fall into place behind the guiding pillar. Then come the stir of the ordering of the ranks, and a moment's pause, during which the leader lifts his voice—'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee.' Then, with braced resolve and confident hearts, the tribes set forward on the day's march.

Long after those desert days a psalmist laid hold of the old prayer and offered it, as not antiquated yet by the thousand years that had intervened. 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered,' prayed one of the later psalmists; 'let them that hate Him flee before Him.' We, too, in circumstances so different, may take up the immortal though ancient words, on which no dimming rust of antiquity has encrusted itself, and may, at the beginnings and the endings of all our efforts and of each of our days, and at the beginning and ending of life itself, offer this old prayer—the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the incipiency of our efforts, and the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the completion of our work and in the rest that remaineth.

I. So, then, if we put these two petitions together, I think we shall see in them first, a pattern of that realisation of, and aspiration after, the divine Presence, which ought to fill all our lives.

'Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.'

But was not that moving pillar the token that God had risen? And was not the psalmist who reiterated Moses' prayer asking for what had been done before he asked it? Was not the ark the symbol of the divine Presence, and was not its movement after the pillar a pledge to the whole host of Israel that the petition which they were offering, through their leader's lips, was granted ere it was offered? Yes. And yet the present God would not manifest His Presence except in response to the desire of His servants; and just because the ark was the symbol, and that moving column was the guarantee of God's being with the host as their defence, therefore there rose up with confidence this prayer, 'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered.'

That twofold attitude, the realisation of, and therefore the aspiration after, the divine gifts, which are given before they are desired, but are not appropriated and brought into operation in our lives unless they are desired, is precisely the paradox of the Christian life. Having, we long for, and longing, we have, and because we possess God we pray, 'Oh! that we might possess Thee.' The more we long, the more we receive. But unless He gave Himself in anticipation of our longing, there would be neither longing nor reception. Only on condition of our desiring to have Him does He flow into our lives, victorious and strength-giving, and the more we experience that omnipotent might and calming, guiding nearness, the more assuredly we shall long for it.

Let us then, dear brethren, blend these two things together, for indeed they are inseparable one from the other, and there can be no real experience in any depth of the one of them without the other. Blessed be God! there need be no long interval of waiting between sowing the seed of supplication and reaping the harvest of fruition. That process of growth and reaping goes on with instantaneous rapidity. 'Before they call I will answer,' for pillar and ark were there ere Moses opened his lips; and 'while they are yet speaking I will hear,' for, in response to the cry, the host moved triumphantly, guarded through the wilderness. So it may be, and ought to be, with each of us.

In like manner, coupling these two petitions together, and taking them as unitedly covering the whole field of life in their great antitheses of work and rest, effort and accomplishment, beginning and ending, morning and evening, we may say that here is an example, to be appropriated in our own lives, of that continuous longing and realisation which will encircle all life as with a golden ring, and make every part of it uniform and blessed. To begin, continue, and end with God is the secret of joyful beginning, of patient continuance, and of triumphant ending. There is no reason in heaven, though there are hosts of excuses on earth, why there should not be, in the case of each of us, an absolutely continuous and uninterrupted sense of being with God. O brethren! that is a stage of Christian experience high above the one on which most of us stand. But that is our fault, and not the necessity of our condition. Let us lay this to heart, that it is possible to have the pillar always guiding our march, and possible to have it stretching, calm and motionless, over all our hours of rest.

II. Now, if, turning from the lessons to be drawn from these two petitions, taken in conjunction, we look at them separately, we may say that we have here an example of the spirit in which we should set ourselves, day by day, and at each new epoch and beginning, be it greater or smaller, to every task.

There are truths that underlie that first prayer, 'Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered,' which are of perennial validity, and apply to us as truly as to these warriors of God in the wilderness long centuries ago. The first of them is that the divine Presence is the source of all energy, and of successful endeavour after, and accomplishment of, any duty. The second of them is that that presence is, as I have been saying, granted, in its operative power, only on condition of its being sought. And the third of them is that I have a right to identify my enemies with God's only on condition that I have made His cause mine. When Moses prayed, 'Let Thine enemies be scattered,' he meant by these the hostile nomad tribes that might ring Israel round, and come down like a sandstorm upon them at any moment. What right had he to suppose that the people whose lances and swords threatened the motley host that he was leading through the wilderness were God's enemies? Only this right, that his host had consented to be God's soldiers, and that they having thus made His enemies theirs, He, on His part, was sure to make their enemies His. We are often tempted to identify our foes with God's, without having taken the preliminary step of having so yielded ourselves to be His servants and instruments for carrying forward His will, as that our own wills have become a vanishing quantity, or rather have been ennobled and greatened in proportion as they have been moulded in submission to His. We must take God's cause for ours, in all the various aspects of that phrase. And that means, first of all, that we make our own perfecting into the likeness of Jesus Christ the main aim of our own lives and efforts. It means, further, the putting ourselves bravely and manfully on the side of right and truth and justice, in all their forms. Above all, it means that we give ourselves to be God's instruments in carrying on His great purposes for the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ. If we do these things, whatever obstacles may arise in our paths, we may be sure that these are God's antagonists, because they are antagonists to God's work in and by us.

Only in so far as they are such, can you pray, ‘Let them flee before Thee!’ Many of the things that we call our enemies come to us disguised, and are mistaken by our superficial sight, and we do not know that they are friends. ‘All things work together for good to them that love God.’ And, when we desire His Presence, the hindrances to doing His will—which are the only real enemies that we have to fight—will melt away before His power, ‘as wax melteth’ before the ardours of the fire; and, for the rest, the distresses, the difficulties, the sorrows, and all the other things that we so often think are our foes, we shall find out to have been our friends. Make God’s cause yours, and He will make your cause His.

That applies to the great things of life, and to the little things. I begin my day’s work some morning, perhaps wearied, perhaps annoyed with a multiplicity of trifles which seem too small to bring great principles to bear upon them. But do you not think there would be a strange change wrought in the petty annoyances of every day, and in the small trifles of which all our lives, of whatever texture they are, must largely be composed, if we began each day and each task with that old prayer, ‘Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered’? Do you not think there would come a quiet into our hearts, and a victorious peace to which we are too much strangers? If we carried the assurance that there is One that fights for us, into the trifles as well as into the sore struggles of our lives, we should have peace and victory. Most of us will not have many large occasions of trial and conflict in our career; and, if God’s fighting for us is not available in regard to the small annoyances of home and daily life, I know not for what it is available. ‘Many littles make a mickle,’ and there are more deaths in skirmishes than in the field of a pitched battle. More Christian people lose their hold of God, their sense of His presence, and are beaten accordingly, by reason of the little enemies that come down on them, like a cloud of gnats in a summer evening, than are defeated by the shock of a great assault or a great temptation, which calls out their strength, and sends them to their knees to ask for help from God.

So we may learn from this prayer the spirit of expectance of victory which is not presumption, and of consecration, which alone will enable us to pass through life victorious. ‘Be of good cheer,’ said the Master, as if in answer to this prayer in its Christian form—’I have overcome the world.’ We turn to the helmed and sworded Figure that stands mysteriously beside us whilst we are all unaware of His coming, and the swift question that Joshua put rises to our lips, ‘Art Thou for us or for our adversaries?’ The reply comes, ‘Nay! but as Captain of the Lord’s host am I come up.’ That is Christ’s answer to the prayer, ‘Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.’

III. Lastly, we have here a pattern of the temper for hours of repose.

‘When the ark rested, he said, “Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.”‘ As I said at the beginning of these remarks, the pillar of cloud seems to have taken two forms, braced together upright when it moved, diffused and stretched as a shelter and a covering over the host of Israel when it and they were at rest. In like manner, that divine Presence is Protean in its forms, and takes all shapes, according to the moment’s necessities of the Christian trusting heart. When we are to brace ourselves for the march it condenses itself into an upright and moving guide. When we lay ourselves down with relaxed muscles for repose, it softly expands itself and ‘covers our head’ in the hours of rest, ‘as in the day of battle.’

Ah! brother, we have more need of God in times of repose than in times of effort. It is harder to realise His Presence in the brief hours of relaxation than even in the many hours of strenuous toil. Every one who goes for a holiday knows that. You have only to look at the sort of amusements that most people fly to when they have not anything to do, to see that there is quite as much, if not more, peril to communion of soul with God in times when the

whole nature is somewhat relaxed, and the strings are loosened, like those of a violin screwed down a turn or two of the peg, than there is in times of work.

So let us take special care of our hours of repose, and be quite sure that they are so spent as that we can ask when the day's work is done, and we have come to slippered ease, in preparation for nightly rest, 'Return, O Lord, unto Thy waiting servant.' Work without God unfits for rest with Him. Rest without God unfits for work for Him.

We may take these two petitions as tests of the allowableness of any occupation, or of any relaxation. Dare I ask Him to come with me into that field of work? If I dare not, it is no place for me. Dare I ask Him to come with me into this other chamber of rest? If I dare not, I had better never cross its threshold. Take these two prayers, and where you cannot pray them, do not risk yourself.

But the highest form of the contrast between the two waits still to be realised. For life as a whole is a fight, and beyond it there is the 'rest that remaineth,' where there will be not merely God's 'return unto the thousands of Israel,' but the realisation of His fuller presence, and of deeper rest, which shall be wondrously associated with more intense work, though in that work there will be no conflict. The two petitions will flow together then, for whilst we labour we shall rest; and whilst we rest we shall labour, according to the great sayings, 'they rest from their labours,' and yet 'they rest not day nor night.'

Moses Despondent

'I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.' NUM. xi. 14.

Detail the circumstances.

The leader speaks the truth in his despondency. He is pressed with the feeling of his incapacity for his work. We may take his words here as teaching us what men need in him who is to be their guide, and how impossible it is to find what they need in mere men.

I. What men need in their guide.

These Israelites were wandering in the wilderness; they were without natural supplies for their daily necessities; they had a long hard journey before them, an unknown road, at the terminus of which was a land where they should rest. We have precisely the same necessities as those which Moses despairingly said that they had.

Like them, we wander hungry, and need a Leader who can satisfy our desires and evermore give us bread for our souls even more than for our bodies. We need One to whom we can 'weep,' as the Israelites did to Moses, and not weep in vain. We need One who can do for us what Moses felt that the Israelites needed, and that he could not give them, when he almost indignantly put to God the despairing question, 'Can I carry them in my bosom as a nursing father beareth the sucking child?' Our weakness, our ignorance, our heart-hunger, cry out for One who can 'bear all this people alone.' who in his single Self has resources of strength, wisdom, and sufficiency to meet not only the wants of one soul but those of the world. For He who can satisfy the poorest single soul must be able to satisfy all men.

II. The impossibility of finding this in men.

Moses' experience here is that of all leaders and great men. He is overwhelmed with the work; feels his own utter impotence; has himself to be strengthened; loathes his work; longs for release from it. See how he confesses

His human dependence. His incapacity to do and be what is needed. His impatience with the people. His longing to be rid of it all.

That is a true picture of the experience of the best of men—a true picture of the limitations of the noblest leaders.

But it is not only the leaders who confess their inadequacy, but the followers feel it, for even the most enthusiastic of them come sooner or later to find that their Oracle had not learned all wisdom, nor was fit to be taken as sole guide, much less as sole defence or satisfaction. He who looks to find all that he needs in men must take many men to find it, and no multiplicity of men will bring him what he seeks. The Milky Way is no substitute for the sun. Our hearts cry out for One great light, for One spacious home. Endless strings of pearls do not reach the preciousness of One pearl of price.

III. The failures of human leaders prophesy the true Leader.

Moses was prophetic of Christ by his failures as by his successes. He could not do what the people clamoured to have done, and what he in the mood of despair in which the text shows him, sadly owned that he could not. In that very confession he becomes an unconscious prophet. For that he should have so vividly set forth the qualifications of a leader of men, as defined by the people's cries, and should have so bitterly felt his incapacity to supply them, is

a witness, if there is a God at all, that somewhere the needed Ideal will be realised in ‘a Leader and Commander of the people,’ God-sent and ‘worthy of more glory than Moses.’

The best service that all human leaders, helpers or lovers, can do us, is to confess their own insufficiency, and to point us to Jesus.

All that men need is found in Him and in Him alone. All that men have failed, and must always fail, to be, He is. Those eyes are blessed that ‘see no man any more save Jesus only.’ We need One who can satisfy our desires and fill our hungry souls, and Jesus speaks a promise, confirmed by the experience of all who have tested it when He declares: ‘He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger.’ We need One who will dry our tears, and Jesus, when He says ‘Weep not,’ wipes them away and stanches their sources, giving ‘the oil of joy for mourning.’ We need One who can hold us up in our journey, and minister strength to fainting hearts and vigour to weary feet, and Jesus ‘strengthens us with might in the inner man.’ We need One who will bring us to the promised land of rest, and Jesus brings many sons to glory, and wills that they be ‘with Him where He is.’ So let us turn away from the multiplicity of human insufficiencies to Him who is our one only help and hope, because He is all-sufficient and eternal.

Afraid Of Giants

'And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain; 18. And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; 19. And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; 20. And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes. 21. So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. 22. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23. And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. 24. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. 25. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. 26. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 27. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and, moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. 29. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south; and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. 30. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. 31. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 33. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.' —NUM. xiii. 17-33.

We stand here on the edge of the Promised Land. The discussion of the true site of Kadesh need not concern us now. Wherever it was, the wanderers had the end of their desert journey within sight; one bold push forward, and their feet would tread on their inheritance. But, as is so often the case, courage oozed out at the decisive moment, and cowardice, disguised as prudence, called for 'further information,'—that cuckoo-cry of the faint-hearted. There are three steps in this narrative: the despatch of the explorers, their expedition, and the two reports brought back.

I. We have the despatch and instructions of the explorers. A comparison with Deuteronomy i. shows that the project of sending the spies originated in the people's terror at the near prospect of the fighting which they had known to be impending ever since they left Egypt. Faith finds that nearness diminishes dangers, but sense sees them grow as they approach. The people answered Moses' brave words summoning them to the struggle with this feeble petition for an investigation. They did not honestly say that they were alarmed, but defined the scope of the exploring party's mission as simply to 'bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities into which we shall come.' Had they not the pillar

blazing there above them to tell them that? The request was not fathomed in its true faithlessness by Moses, who thought it reasonable and yielded. So far Deuteronomy goes; but this narrative puts another colour on the mission, representing it as the consequence of God's command. The most eager discoverer of discrepancies in the component parts of the Pentateuch need not press this one into his service, for both sides may be true: the one representing the human feebleness which originated the wish; the other, the divine compliance with the desire, in order to disclose the unbelief which unfitted the people for the impending struggle, and to educate them by letting them have their foolish way, and taste its bitter results. Putting the two accounts together, we get, not a contradiction, but a complete view, which teaches a large truth as to God's dealings; namely, that He often lovingly lets us have our own way to show us by the issues that His is better, and that daring, which is obedience, is the true prudence.

The instructions given to the explorers turn on two points: the eligibility of the country for settlement, and the military strength of its inhabitants. They alternate in a very graphic way from the one of these to the other, beginning, in verse 18, with the land, and immediately going on to the numbers and power of the inhabitants; then harking back again, in verse 19, to the fertility of the land, and passing again to the capacity of the cities to resist attack; and finishing up, in verse 20, with the land once more, both arable and forest. The same double thought colours the parting exhortation to 'be bold,' and to 'bring of the produce of the land.' Now the people knew already both points which the spies were despatched to find out. Over and over again, in Egypt, in the march, and at Sinai, they had been told that the land was 'flowing with milk and honey,' and had been assured of its conquest. What more did they want? Nothing, if they had believed God. Nothing, if they had been all saints,—which they were not. Their fears were very natural. A great deal might be said in favour of their wish to have accurate information. But it is a bad sign when faith, or rather unbelief, sends out sense to be its scout, and when we think to verify God's words by men's confirmation. Not to believe Him unless a jury of twelve of ourselves says the same thing, is surely much the same as not believing Him at all; for it is not He, but they, whom we believe after all.

There is no need to be too hard on the people. They were a mob of slaves, whose manhood had been eaten out by four centuries of sluggish comfort, and latterly crushed by oppression. So far as we know, Abraham's midnight surprise of the Eastern kings was the solitary bit of fighting in the national history thus far; and it is not wonderful that, with such a past, they should have shrunk from the prospect of bloodshed, and caught at any excuse for delay at least, even if not for escape. 'We have all of us one human heart,' and these cowards were no monsters, but average men, who did very much what average men, professing to be Christians, do every day, and for doing get praised for prudence by other average professing Christians. How many of us, when brought right up to some task involving difficulty or danger, but unmistakably laid on us by God, shelter our distrustful fears under the fair pretext of 'knowing a little more about it first,' and shake wise heads over rashness which takes God at His word, and thinks that it knows enough when it knows what He wills?

II. We have the exploration (verses 21-25). The account of it is arranged on a plan common in the Old Testament narratives, the observation of which would, in many places, remove difficulties which have led to extraordinary hypotheses. Verse 21 gives a general summary of what is then taken up, and told in more detail. It indicates the completeness of the exploration by giving its extreme southern and northern points, the desert of Zin being probably the present depression called the Arabah, and 'Rehob as men come to Hamath' being probably near the northern Dan, on the way to Hamath, which lay in the valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon. The account then begins over again, and tells how the spies went up into 'the South.' The Revised Version has done wisely in printing this word with a capital,

and thereby showing that it is not merely the name of a cardinal point, but of a district. It literally means ‘the dry,’ and is applied to the arid stretch of land between the more cultivated southern parts of Canaan and the northern portion of the desert which runs down to Sinai. It is a great chalky plateau, and might almost be called a steppe or prairie. Passing through this, the explorers next would come to Hebron, the first town of importance, beside which Abraham had lived, and where the graves of their ancestors were. But they were in no mood for remembering such old stories. Living Anaks were much more real to them than dead patriarchs. So the only thing mentioned, besides the antiquity of the city, is the presence in it of these giants. They were probably the relics of the aboriginal inhabitants, and some strain of their blood survived till late days. They seem to have expelled the Hittites, who held Mamre, or Hebron, in Abraham’s time. Their name is said to mean ‘long-necked,’ and the three names in our lesson are probably tribal, and not personal, names. The whole march northward and back again comes in between verses 22 and 23; for Eshcol was close to Hebron, and the spies would not encumber themselves with the bunch of grapes on their northward march. The details of the exploration are given more fully in the spies’ report, which shows that they had gone up north from Hebron, through the hills, and possibly came back by the valley of the Jordan. At any rate, they made good speed, and must have done some bold and hard marching, to cover the ground out and back in six weeks. So they returned with their pomegranates and figs, and a great bunch of the grapes for which the valley identified with Eshcol is still famous, swinging on a pole,—the easiest way of carrying it without injury.

III. We have next the two reports. The explorers are received in a full assembly of the people, and begin their story with an object-lesson, producing the great grape cluster and the other spoils. But while honesty compelled the acknowledgment of the fertility of the land, cowardice slurred that over as lightly as might be, and went on to dilate on the terrors of the giants and the strength of the cities, and the crowded population that held every corner of the country. Truly, the eye sees what it brings with it. They really had gone to look for dangers, and of course they found them. Whatever Moses might lay down in his instructions, they had been sent by the people to bring back reasons for not attempting the conquest, and so they curtly and coldly admit the fertility of the soil, and fling down the fruit for inspection as undeniably grown there, but they tell their real mind with a great ‘nevertheless.’ Their report is, no doubt, quite accurate. The cities were, no doubt, some of them walled, and to eyes accustomed to the desert, very great; and there were, no doubt, Anaks at Hebron, at any rate, and the ‘spies’ had got the names of the various races and their territories correctly. As to these, we need only notice that the Hittites were an outlying branch of the great nation, which recent research has discovered, as we might say, the importance and extent of which we scarcely yet know; that the Jebusites held Jerusalem till David’s time; that the ‘Amorites,’ or ‘Highlanders,’ occupied the central block of mountainous country in conjunction with the two preceding tribes; and that the ‘Canaanites,’ or ‘Lowlanders,’ held the lowlands east and west of that hilly nucleus, namely, the deep gorge of the Jordan, and the strip of maritime plain. A very accurate report may be very one-sided. The spies were not the last people who, being sent out to bring home facts, managed to convey very decided opinions without expressing any. A grudging and short admission to begin with, the force of which is immediately broken by sombre and minute painting of difficulty and danger, is more powerful as a deterrent than any dissuasive. It sounds such an unbiassed appeal to common-sense, as if the reporter said, ‘There are the facts; we leave you to draw the conclusions.’ An ‘unvarnished account of the real state of the case,’ in which there is not a single misstatement nor exaggeration, may be utterly false by reason of wrong perspective and omission, and, however true, is sure to act as a shower-bath to courage, if it is unaccompanied with a word of cheer. To begin a perilous enterprise without fairly facing its risks and difficulties is folly. To look at *them* only is no less folly, and is the sure precursor of defeat. But when on the one

side is God's command, and on the other such doleful discouragements, they are more than folly, they are sin.

It is bracing to turn from the creeping prudence which leaves God out of the account, to the cheery ring of Caleb's sturdy confidence. His was 'a minority report,' signed by only two of the 'Commission.' These two had seen all that the others had, but everything depends on the eyes which look. The others had measured themselves against the trained soldiers and giants, and were in despair. These two measured Amalekites and Anaks against God, and were jubilant. They do not dispute the facts, but they reverse the implied conclusion, because they add the governing fact of God's help. How differently the same facts strike a man who lives by faith, and one who lives by calculation! Israel might be a row of ciphers, but with God at the head they meant something. Caleb's confidence that 'we are well able to overcome' was religious trust, as is plain from God's eulogium on him in the next chapter (Num. xiv. 24). The lessons from it are that faith is the parent of wise courage; that where duty, which is God's voice, points, difficulties must not deter; that when we have God's assurance of support, they are nothing. Caleb was wise to counsel going up to the assault 'at once,' for there is no better cure for fear than action. Old soldiers tell us that the trying time is when waiting to begin the fight. 'The native hue of resolution' gets 'sicklied o'er' with the paleness that comes from hesitation. Am I sure that anything is God's will? Then the sooner I go to work at doing it, the better for myself and for the vigour of my work.

This headstrong rashness, as they thought it, brings up the other 'spies' once more. Notice how the gloomy views are the only ones in their second statement. There is nothing about the fertility of the land, but, instead, we have that enigmatical expression about its 'eating up its inhabitants.' No very satisfactory explanation of this is forthcoming. It evidently means that in some way the land was destructive of its inhabitants, which seems to contradict their former reluctant admission of its fertility. Perhaps in their eagerness to paint it black enough, they did contradict themselves, and try to make out that it was a barren soil, not worth conquering. Fear is not very careful of consistency. Note, too, the exaggerations of terror. 'All the people' are sons of Anak now. The size as well as the number of the giants has grown; 'we were in our own sight as grasshoppers.' No doubt they were gigantic, but fear performed the miracle of adding a cubit to their stature. When the coward hears that 'there is a lion without,'—that is, in the open country,—he immediately concludes, 'I shall be slain in the streets,' where it is not usual for lions to disport themselves.

Thus exaggerated and one-sided is distrust of God's promises. Such a temper is fatal to all noble life or work, and brings about the disasters which it foresees. If these cravens had gone up to fight with men before whom they felt like grasshoppers, of course they would have been beaten; and it was much better that their fears should come out at Kadesh than when committed to the struggle. Therefore God lovingly permitted the mission of the spies, and so brought lurking unbelief to the surface, where it could be dealt with. Let us beware of the one-eyed 'prudence' which sees only the perils in the path of duty and enterprise for God, and is blind to the all-sufficient presence which makes us more than conquerors, when we lean all our weight on it. It is well to see the Anakim in their full formidableness, and to feel that we are 'as grasshoppers in our own sight' and in theirs, if the sight drives us to lift our eyes to Him who 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof,' however huge and strong, 'are as grasshoppers.'

Weighed, And Found Wanting

'And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 2. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron; and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3. And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 4. And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt 5. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. 6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. 7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. 8. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. 10. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.' —NUM. xiv. 1-10.

Terror is more contagious than courage, for a mob is always more prone to base than to noble instincts. The gloomy report of the spies jumped with the humour of the people, and was at once accepted. Its effect was to throw the whole assembly into a paroxysm of panic, which was expressed in the passionate Eastern manner by wild, ungoverned shrieking and tears. What a picture of a frenzied crowd the first verse of this chapter gives! That is not the stuff of which heroes can be made. Weeping endured for a night, but to such weeping there came no morning of joy. When day dawned, the tempest of emotion settled down into sullen determination to give up the prize which hung within reach of a bold hand, ripe and ready to drop. It was one of the moments which come once at least in the lives of nations as of individuals, when a supreme resolve is called for, and when to fall beneath the stern requirement, and refuse a great attempt because of danger, is to pronounce sentence of unworthiness and exclusion on themselves. Not courage only, but belief in God, was tested in this crucial moment, which made a turning-point in the nation's history. Our text brings before us with dramatic vividness and sharpness of contrast, three parties in this decisive hour—the faithless cowards, the faithful four, and the All-seeing presence.

I. Note the faithless cowards. The gravity of the revolt here is partly in its universality, which is emphasised in the narrative at every turn: '*all* the congregation' (v. 1), '*all* the children of Israel,' the *whole* congregation' (v. 2), '*all* the assembly of the congregation' (which implies a solemn formal convocation), '*all* the company' (v, 7), '*all* the congregation,' '*all* the children of Israel' (v. 10). It was no sectional discontent, but full-blown and universal rebellion. The narrative draws a distinction between the language addressed to Moses, and the whisperings to one another. Publicly, the unanimous voice suggested the return to Egypt as an alternative for discussion, and put it before Moses; to one another they muttered the proposal, which no man had yet courage to speak out, of choosing a new leader, and going back, whatever became of Moses. That could only mean murder as well as mutiny. The whispers would soon be loud enough.

In the murmurs to Moses, observe the distinct and conscious apostacy from Jehovah. They recognise that God 'has brought' them there, and they slander Him by the assertion that His malignant, deliberate purpose was to kill them all, and make slaves of their wives and

children. That was how they read the past, and thought of Him! He had enticed them into His trap, as a hunter might some foolish animal, by dainties strewed along the path, and now they were in the toils, and their only chance of life was to break through. Often, already, had they raised that mad cry—'back to Egypt!' but there had never been such a ring of resolve in it, nor had it come from so many throats, nor had any serious purpose to depose Moses been entertained. If we add the fact that they were now on the very frontier of Canaan, and that the decision now taken was necessarily final, we get the full significance of the incident from the mere secular historian's point of view. But its bearing on the people's relation to Jehovah gives a darker colouring to it. It is not merely faint-hearted shrinking from a great opportunity, but it is wilful and deliberate rejection of His rule, based upon utter distrust of His word. So Scripture treats this event as the typical example of unbelief (Psa. xcv.; Heb. iii. and iv.). So regarded, it presents, as in a mirror, some of the salient characteristics of that master sin. Bad as it is, it is not out of the range of possibility that it should be repeated, and we need the warning to 'take heed lest any of us should fall after the same example of unbelief.'

We may learn from it the essentials of faith and its opposite. The trust which these cowards failed to exercise was reliance on Jehovah, a personal relation to a Person. In externals and contents, their trust was very unlike the New Testament faith, but in object and essence it was identical. They had to trust in Jehovah; we, in 'God manifest in the flesh.' Their creed was much less clear and blessed than ours, but their faith, if they had had it, would have been the same. Faith is not the belief of a creed, whether man-made or God-revealed, but the cleaving to the Person whom the creed makes known. He may be made known more or less perfectly; but the act of the soul, by which we grasp Him, does not vary with the completeness of the revelation. That act was one for 'the world's grey fathers' and for us. In like manner, unbelief is the same black and fatal sin, whatever be the degree of light against which it turns. To depart from the living God is its essence, and that is always rebellion and death.

Note the short memory and churlish unthankfulness of unbelief. It has been often objected to the story of the Exodus, that such extremity of folly as is ascribed to the Israelites is inconceivable in such circumstances. How could men, with all these miracles in mind, and manna falling daily, and the pillar blazing every night, and the roll of Sinai's thunders scarcely out of their ears, behave thus? But any one who has honestly studied his own heart, and known its capacity for neglecting the plainest indications of God's presence, and forgetting the gifts of His love, will believe the story, and see brethren in these Israelites. Miracles were less wonderful to them, because they knew less about nature and its laws. Any miracles constantly renewed become commonplace. Habit takes the wonder out of everything. The heart that does not 'like to retain God in its knowledge' will find easy ways of forgetting Him, and revolting from Him, though the path be strewed with blessings, and tokens of His presence flame on every side. True, it is strange that all the wonders and mercies of the past two years had made no deeper impression on these people's hearts; but if they had not done so, it is not unnatural that they had made so slight an impression on their wills. Their ingratitude and forgetfulness are inexplicable, as all sin is, for its very essence is that it has no sufficient reason. But neither is inconceivable, and both are repeated by us every day.

Note the credulity of unbelief. The word of Jehovah had told them that the land 'flowed with milk and honey,' and that they were sure to conquer it. They would not believe Him unless they had verification of His promises. And when they got their own fears reflected in the multiplying mirror of the spies' report, they took men's words for gospel, and gave to them a credence without examination or qualification, which they had never given to God. I think that I have heard of people who inveigh against Christians for their slavish acceptance of the

absolute authority of Jesus Christ, and who pin their faith to some man's teaching with a credulity quite as great as and much less warrantable than ours.

Note the bad bargain which unbelief is ready to make. They contemplated a risky alternative to the brave dash against Canaan. There would be quite as much peril in going back as forward. The march from Egypt had not been so easy; but what would it be when there were no Moses, no Jethro, no manna, no pillar? And what sort of reception would wait them in Egypt, and what fate befall them there? In front, there were perils; but God would be with them. They would have to fight their way, but with the joyous feeling that victory was sure, and that every blow struck, and every step marched, brought them nearer triumphant peace. If they turned, every step would carry them farther from their hopes, and nearer the dreary putting on of the old yoke, which 'neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.' They would buy slavery at as dear a price as they would have to pay for freedom and wealth. Yet they elected the baser course, and thought themselves prudent and careful of themselves in doing so. Is the breed of such miscalculators extinct? Far greater hardships and pains are met on the road of departure from God, than any which befall His servants. To follow Him involves a conflict, but to shirk the battle does not bring immunity from strife. The alternatives are not warfare or peace, God's service or liberty. The most prudent self-love would coincide with the most self-sacrificing heroic consecration, and no man can worse consult his own well-being than in seeking escape from the dangers and toil of enlisting in God's army, by running back through the desert to put his neck in chains in Egypt. As Moses said: 'Because then servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies, in hunger, and in thirst, and in want of all things.'

II. The faithful four. Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, are the only Abdiels in that crowd of unbelieving dastards. Their own peril does not move them; their only thought is to dissuade from the fatal refusal to advance. The leader had no armed force with which to put down revolt, and stood wholly undefended and powerless. It was a cruel position for him to see the work of his life crumbling to pieces, and every hope for his people dashed by their craven fears. Is there anywhere a nobler piece of self-abnegation than his prostrating himself before them in the eagerness of his pleading with them for their own good? If anything could have kindled a spark of generous enthusiasm, that passionate gesture of entreaty would have done it. It is like: 'We beseech you, in His stead, be ye reconciled to God.' Men need to be importuned not to destroy themselves, and he will have most success in such God-like work who, as Moses, is so sure of the fatal issues, and so oblivious of all but saving men from self-inflicted ruin, that he sues as for a boon with tears in his voice, and dignity thrown to the winds.

Caleb and Joshua had a different task,—to make one more attempt to hearten the people by repeating their testimony and their confidence. Tearing their dresses, in sign of mourning, they bravely ring out once more the cheery note of assured faith. They first emphatically reiterate that the land is fertile,—or, as the words literally run, 'good exceedingly, exceedingly.' It is right to stimulate for God's warfare by setting forth the blessedness of the inheritance. 'The recompense of the reward' is not the motive for doing His will, but it is legitimately used as encouragement, in spite of the overstrained objection that virtue for the sake of heaven is spurious virtue. If 'for the sake of heaven,' it is spurious; but it is not spurious because it is heartened by the hope of heaven. In Caleb's former report there was no reason given for his confidence that 'we are well able to overcome.' Thus far all the discussion had been about comparative strength, as any heathen soldier would have reckoned it. But the two heroes speak out the great Name at last, which ought to scatter all fears like morning mist. The rebels had said that Jehovah had 'brought us into this land to fall by the

sword.' The two give them back their words with a new turn: 'He will bring us into this land, and give it us.' That is the only antidote to fear. Calculations of comparative force are worse than useless, and their results depend on the temper of the calculator; but, if once God is brought into the account, the sum is ended. When His sword is flung into the scale, whatever is in the other goes up. So Caleb and Joshua brush aside the terrors of the Anaks and all the other bugbears. 'They are bread for us,' we can swallow them at a mouthful; and this was no swaggering boast, but calm, reasonable confidence, because it rested on this, 'the Lord is with us.' True, there was an 'if,' but not an 'if' of doubt, but a condition which they could comply with, and so make it a certainty, 'only rebel not against the Lord, and fear not the people of the land.' Loyalty to Him would give courage, and courage with His presence would be sure of victory. Obedience turns God's 'ifs' into 'verilys.' There, then, we have an outline picture of the work of faith pleading with the rebellious, heartening them and itself by thoughts of the fair inheritance, grasping the assurance of God's omnipotent help, and in the strength thereof wisely despising the strongest foes, and settling itself immovable in the posture of obedience.

III. The sudden appearance of the all-seeing Lord. The bold remonstrance worked the people into a fury, and fidelity was about to reap the reward which the crowd ever gives to those who try to save it from its own base passions. Nothing is more hateful to resolute sinners than good counsel which is undeniably true. But just as the stones were beginning to fly, the 'glory of the Lord,' that wondrous light which dwelt above the ark in the inmost shrine, came forth before all the awestruck crowd. The stones would be dropped fast enough, and a hush of dread would follow the howling rage of the angry crowd. Our text does not go on to the awful judgment which was proclaimed; but we may venture beyond its bounds to point out that the sentence of exclusion from the land was but the necessary consequence of the temper and character which the refusal to advance had betrayed. Such people were not fit for the fight. A new generation, braced by the keen air and scant fare of the desert, with firmer muscles and hearts than these enervated slaves had, was needed for the conquest. The sentence was mercy as well as judgment; it was better that they should live in the wilderness, and die there by natural process, after having had more education in God's loving care, than that they should be driven unwillingly to a conflict which, in their state of mind, would have been but their butchery. None the less, it is an awful condemnation for a man to be brought by God's providence face to face with a great possibility of service and of blessing, and then to show himself such that God has to put him aside, and look for other instruments. The Israelites were excluded from Canaan by no arbitrary decree, but by their own faithless fears, which made their victory impossible. 'They could not enter in because of unbelief.' In like manner our unbelief shuts us out from salvation, because we can only enter in by faith; and the 'rest that remains' is of such a nature that it is impossible for even His love to give it to the unbelieving. 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

Moses The Intercessor

'Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.' —NUM. xiv. 19.

See how in this story a divine threat is averted and a divine promise is broken, thus revealing a standing law that these in Scripture are conditional.

This striking incident of Moses' intercession suggests to us some thoughts as to

I. The ground of the divine forgiveness.

The appeal is not based on anything in the people. God is not asked to forgive because of their repentance or their faith. True, these are the conditions on which His pardon is received by us, but they are not the reasons why it is given by Him. Nor does Moses appeal to any sacrifices that had been offered and were conceived to placate God. But he goes deeper than all such pleas, and lays hold, with sublime confidence, on God's own nature as his all-powerful plea. 'The greatness of Thy mercy' is the ground of the divine forgiveness, and the mightiest plea that human lips can urge. It suggests that His very nature is pardoning love; that 'mercy' is proper to Him, that it is the motive and impulse of His acts. He forgives because He is mercy. That is the foundation truth. It is the deep spring from which by inherent impulse all the streams of forgiveness well up.

What was true when Moses prayed for the rebels is true to-day. Christ's work is the consequence, not the cause, of God's pardoning love. It is the channel through which the waters reach us, but the waters made the channel for themselves.

II. The persistency of the divine pardon.

'As thou hast forgiven … even until now.'

His past is the guarantee of His future. This is true of every one of His attributes. There is no limitation to the divine forgiveness; you cannot exhaust it.

Sometimes there may be long tracts of almost utter godlessness, or times of apathy. Sometimes there may be bursts of great and unsanctified evil after many professions of fidelity, as in David's case. Sometimes there may be but a daily experience in which there is little apparent progress, little consciousness of growing mastery over sin, little of deepening holiness and spiritual power. Be it so! To all such, and to every other form of Christian unfaithfulness, this blessed thought applies.

We are apt to think as if our many pardons in the past made future pardons less likely, whereas the truth is that we have received forgiveness so often in the past that we may be quite sure that it will never fail us in the future. God has established a precedent in His dealings with us. He binds Himself by His past.

As in His creative energy, the forces that flung the whole universe forth were not exhausted by the act, but subsist continually to sustain it, as 'He fainteth not, neither is weary,' so in the works of His providence, and more especially of His grace, there is nothing in the exercise of any of His attributes to exhaust *that* attribute, nothing in the constant appeal which we make to His forgiving grace to weary out that grace. And thus we may learn, even from the unfading glories of the heavens and the undimmed splendours of His creative works, the lesson that, in the holier region of His love, and His pardoning mercy, there is no exhaustion, and that all the past instances of His pardoning grace only make the broader, firmer ground of

certainty as to His continuous present and future forgiveness for all our iniquity. He who has proposed to us the ‘seventy times seven’ as the number of our forgivenesses will not let His own fall short of that tale. Our iniquities may be ‘more than the hairs of our heads,’ but as the psalmist who found his to be so comforted himself with thinking, God’s ‘thoughts which are to usward’ were ‘more than can be numbered.’ There would be a pardoning thought for every sin, and after all sins had been forgiven, there would be ‘multitudes of redemptions’ still available for penitent souls.

There is but one thing that limits the divine pardon, and that is continuous rejection of it.

Whoever seeks to be pardoned *is* pardoned.

III. The manner of the divine forgiveness.

He pardoned, but He also inflicted punishment, and in both He loves equally. The worst, that is the spiritual, consequences (which are the punishments) of sin, namely separation and alienation from God, He removes in the very act of forgiveness, but His pardon does not affect the natural consequences. ‘Thou wast a God that forgavest them and tookest vengeance of their inventions,’ says a psalmist in reference to this very incident. Thank God that He loves us too wisely and well not to let us by experience ‘know that it is a bitter thing to forsake the Lord.’

It is a blessing that He does so, and a sign that we are pardoned, if we rightly use it.

IV. The vehicle of the divine forgiveness.

The Mediator. Moses here may be taken as a dim shadow of Christ.

‘Moses was faithful in all his house’ but Jesus is the true Mediator, whose intercession consists in presenting the constant efficacy of His sacrifice, and to whom God ever says, ‘I have pardoned according to Thy word.’

Trust utterly to Him. You cannot weary out the forgiving love of God. ‘Christ ever liveth to make intercession’; with God is ‘plenteous redemption.’ ‘He shall redeem Israel out of *all* his iniquities.’

Service A Gift

'... I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift.'—NUM. xviii. 7.

All Christians are priests—to offer sacrifices, alms, especially prayers; to make God known to men.

I. Our priesthood is a gift of God's love.

We are apt to think of our duties as burdensome. They are an honour and a mark of God's grace.

1. They are His gift—

(a) The power to do. All capacities and possessions from Him.

(b) The wish to do. 'Worketh in you to will.'

(c) The right to do, through Christ.

2. They are a blessing.

(a) Note the good effects on ourselves—the increase of fellowship with Him, the strengthening of all holy desires.

(b) The future benefits. Apply this to prayer and to effort on behalf of our fellow-men.

II. Our priesthood is to be done as a service—under a sense of obligation to a master, with diligence (an [Greek: ergon], not a [Greek: parergon]).

III. Our priesthood is to be done as a gift to God—to be done joyfully, giving ourselves back to Him: 'Yield yourselves unto God'—'your reasonable service.'

Then only do we really possess ourselves, and 'all things are ours, for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'

The Waters Of Meribah

'Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. 2. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4. And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? 5. And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. 6. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. 7. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 8. Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him. 10. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. 12. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. 13. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them.'—NUM. xx. 1-13.

Kadesh had witnessed the final trial and failure of the generation that came out of Egypt; now we see the first trial and failure of the new generation, thirty-seven years after, on the same spot. Deep silence shrouds the history of these dreary years; but, probably, the congregation was broken up, and small parties roamed over the country, without purpose or hope, while Moses and a few of the leaders kept by the tabernacle. There is a certain emphasis in the phrase of the first verse of this chapter, 'the children of Israel, even the *whole* congregation,' which suggests that this was the first reassembling of the scattered units since the last act of the 'whole congregation.' 'The first month' was, then, the first of the fortieth year, and the gathering was either in obedience to the summons of Moses, who knew that the fixed time had now come, or was the result of common knowledge of the fact. In any case, we have here the first act of a new epoch, and the question to be tried is whether the new men are any better than the old. It is this which gives importance to the event, and explains the bitterness of Moses at finding the old spirit living in the children. It was his trial as well as theirs. He resumed the functions which had substantially been in abeyance for a generation, and by his conduct showed that he had become unfit for the new form which the leadership must take with the invasion of Canaan.

I. We note the old murmurings on the lips of the new generation. The lament of a later prophet fits these hereditary grumblers,—'In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction.' The place where they reassembled might have taught them the sin of unbelief; their parents' graves should have enforced the lesson. But the long years of wandering, and two millions of deaths, had been useless. The weather-beaten but sturdy strength of the four old men, the only survivors, might have preached the wisdom of trust in the God in whose 'favour is life.' But the people 'had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.' The old cuckoo-

cry, which had become so monotonous from their fathers, is repeated, with differences, not in their favour. They do not, indeed, murmur directly against God, because they regard Moses and Aaron as responsible. 'Why,' say they, 'have *ye* brought up the congregation of the Lord?' They seem to use that name with a touch of pride in their relation to God, while destitute of any real obedience, and so they show the first traces of the later spirit of the nation. They have acquired cattle while living in the oases of the wilderness, and they are anxious about them. They acknowledge the continuity of national life in their question, 'Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt?' though most of them had been born in the wilderness. The fear that moved their fathers to unbelief was more reasonable and less contemptible than this murmuring, which ignores God all but utterly, and is ready to throw up everything at the first taste of privation.

It is a signal instance of the solemn law by which the fathers' sins are inherited by the children who prove themselves heirs to their ancestors by repeating their deeds. It is fashionable now to deny original sin, and equally fashionable to affirm 'heredity,' which is the same thing, put into scientific language. There is such a thing as national character persistent through generations, each unit of which adds something to the force of the tendencies which he receives and transmits, but which never are so omnipotent as to destroy individual guilt, however they may lighten it.

Note, too, the awful power of resistance to God's educating possessed by our wills. The whole purpose of these men's lives, thus far, had been to fit them for being God's instruments, and for the reception of His blessing. The desert was His school for body and mind, where muscles and wills were to be braced, and solitude and expectation might be nurses of lofty thoughts, and in the silence God's voice might sound. What better preparation of a hardy race of God-trusting heroes could there have been, and what came of it all? Failure all but complete! The instrument tempered with so much care has its edge turned at the first stroke. The old sore breaks out at the old spot. Man's will has an awful power to thwart God's training; and of all the sad mysteries of this sad mysterious world, this is the saddest and most mysterious, and is the root of all other sadness and mystery,—that a man can set his pin-point of a will against that great Will which gives him all his power, and when God beckons can say, 'I will not,' and can render His most sedulous discipline ineffectual.

Note, too, that trivial things are large enough to hide plain duties and bright possibilities. These men knew that they had come to Kadesh for the final assault, which was to recompense all their hardships. Their desert training should have made them less resourceless and desperate when water failed; but the hopes of conquest and the duty of trust cannot hold their own against present material inconvenience. They even seem to make bitter mockery of the promises, when they complain that Kadesh is 'no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates,' which were the fruits brought by the spies,—as if they had said, 'So this stretch of waterless sand is the fertile land you talked of, is it? This is all that we have got by reassembling here.' Do we not often feel that the drought of Kadesh is more real than the grapes of Eshcol? Are we not sometimes tempted to bitter comparisons of the fair promises with the gloomy realities? Does our courage never flag, nor our faith falter, nor swirling clouds of doubt hide the inheritance from our weary and tear-filled eyes? He that is without sin may cast the first stone at these men; but whoever knows his own weak heart will confess that, if he had been among that thirsty crowd, he would, most likely, have made one of the murmurers.

II. Note God's repetition of His old gift to the new generation. Moses makes no attempt to argue with the people, but casts himself in entreaty before the door of the Tabernacle, as if crushed and helpless in face of this heart-breaking proof of the persistent obstinacy of the old

faults. God's answer recalls the former miracle at Rephidim (Exodus xvii. 1-7) in the early days of the march, when the same cries had come from lips now silent, and the rock, smitten at God's command by the rod which had parted the sea, yielded water. The only differences are that here Moses is bid to speak, not to smite; and that the miracle is to be done before all the congregation, instead of before the elders only. Both variations seem to have the common purpose of enhancing the wonder, and confirming the authority of Moses, to a generation to whom the old deliverances were only hearsay, and many of whom were in contact with the leader for the first time. The fact that we have here the beginning of a new epoch, and a new set of people, goes far to explain the resemblance of the two incidents, without the need of supposing, with many critics, that they are but different versions of one 'legend.' The repetition of scarcity of water is not wonderful; the recurrence of the murmurings is the sad proof of the unchanged temper of the people, and the repetition of the miracle is the merciful witness of the patience of God. His charity 'is not easily provoked, is not soon angry,' but stoops to renew gifts which had been so little appreciated that the remembrance of them failed to cure distrust. Unbelief is obstinate, but His loving purpose is more persistent still. Rephidim should have made the murmuring at Kadesh impossible; but, if it does not, then He will renew the mercy, though it had been once wasted, and will so shape the second gift that it shall recall the first, if haply both may effect what one had failed to do. When need is repeated, the supply is forthcoming, even when it is demanded by sullen and forgetful distrust. We can wear out men's patience, but God's is inexhaustible. The same long-suffering Hand that poured water from the rock for two generations of distrustful murmurers still lavishes its misused gifts on us, to win us to late repentance, 'and upbraideth not' for our slowness to learn the lessons of His mercies.

III. Note the breaking down at last of the long-tried leader's patience. It is in striking contrast with the patience of God. Psalm cvi. 32, 33, describes the sin of Moses as twofold; namely, anger and speaking 'unadvisedly.' His harsh words, so unlike his pleadings on the former occasion of rebellion at Kadesh, have a worse thing than an outburst of temper in them. 'Must *we* fetch you water out of the rock?' arrogates to himself the power of working miracles. He forgets that he was as much an instrument, and as little a force, as his own rod. His angry scolding betrays wounded personal importance, and annoyance at rebellion against his own authority, rather than grief at the people's distrust of God, and also a distinct clouding over of his own consciousness of dependence for all his power on God, and an impure mingling of thoughts of self. The same turbid blending of anger and self-regard impelled his arm to the passionately repeated strokes, which, in his heat, he substituted for the quiet words that he was bidden to speak. The Palestinian Tar gum says very significantly, that at the first stroke the rock dropped blood, thereby indicating the tragic sinfulness of the angry blow. How unworthy a representative of the long-suffering God was this angry man! 'The servant of the Lord must not strive,' nor give the water with which he is entrusted, with contempt or anger in his heart. That gift requires meek compassion in its stewards.

But the failure of Moses' patience was only too natural. The whole incident has to be studied as the first of a new era, in which both leader and led were on their trial. During the thirty-seven years of waiting, Moses had had but little exercise of that part of his functions, and little experience of the people's temper. He must have looked forward anxiously to the result of the desert hardening; he must have felt more remote from and above the children than he did to their parents, his contemporaries who had come with him from Egypt, and so his disappointment must have been proportionately keen, when the first difficulty that rose revealed the old spirit in undiminished force. For forty years he had been patient, and ready to swallow mortifications and ignore rebellion against himself, and to offer himself for his people; but now, when men whom he had seen in their swaddling-clothes showed the same

stiff-necked distrust as had killed their fathers, the breaking-point of his patience was reached. That burst of anger is a grave symptom of lessened love for the sinful murmurers; and lessened love always means lessened power to guide and help. The people are not changed, but Moses is. He has no longer the invincible patience, the utter self-oblivion, the readiness for self-sacrifice, which had borne him up of old, and so he fails. We may learn from his failure that the prime requisite for doing God's work is love, which cannot be moved to anger nor stirred to self-assertion, but meets and conquers murmuring and rebellion by patient holding forth of God's gift, and is, in some faint degree, an echo of His endless long-suffering. He who would serve men must, sleeping or waking, carry them in his heart, and pity their sin. They who would represent God to men, and win men for God, must be 'imitators of God … and walk in love.' If the bearer of the water of life offers it with 'Hear, ye rebels,' it will flow untasted.

IV. Note the sentence on the leader, and the sad memorial name. Moses is blamed for not believing nor sanctifying God. His self-assertion in his unadvised speech came from unbelief, or forgetfulness of his dependence. He who claims power to himself, denies it to God. Moses put himself between God and the people, not to show but to hide God; and, instead of exalting God's holiness before them by declaring Him to be the giver, he intercepted the thanks and diverted them to himself. But was his momentary failure not far too severely punished? To answer that question, we must recur to the thought of the importance of this event as beginning a new chapter, and as a test for both Moses and Israel. His failure was a comparatively small matter in itself; and if the sentence is regarded merely as the punishment of a sin, it appears sternly disproportionate to the offence. Were eighty years of faithful service not sufficient to procure the condonation of one moment's impatience? Is not that harsh treatment? But a tiny blade above-ground may indicate the presence of a poisonous root, needing drastic measures for its extirpation; and the sentence was not only punishment for sin, but kind, though punitive, relief from an office for which Moses had no longer, in full measure, his old qualifications. The subsequent history does not show any withdrawal of God's favour from him, and certainly it would be no very sore sorrow to be freed from the heavy load, carried so long. There is disapprobation, no doubt, in the sentence; but it treats the conduct of Moses rather as a symptom of lessened fitness for his heavy responsibility than as sin; and there is as much kindness as condemnation in saying to the wearied veteran, who has stood at his post so long and has taken up arms once more, 'You have done enough. You are not what you were. Other hands must hold the leader's staff. Enter into rest.'

Note that Moses was condemned for doing what Jesus always did, asserting his power to work miracles. What was unbelief and a sinful obtrusion of himself in God's place when the great lawgiver did it, was right and endorsed by God when the Carpenter of Nazareth did it. Why the difference? A greater than Moses is here, when He says to us, 'What will ye that I should do unto you?'

The name of Meribah-Kadesh is given to suggest the parallel and difference with the other miraculous flow of water. The two incidents are thus brought into connection, and yet individualised. 'Meribah,' which means 'strife,' brands the murmuring as sinful antagonism to God: 'Kadesh,' which means 'holy,' brings both the miracle and the sentence under the common category of acts by which God manifested His holiness to the new generation; and so the double name is a reminder of sin that they may be humble, and of mingled mercy and judgment that they may 'trust and obey.'

The Poison And The Antidote

'And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compare the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 8. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.' —NUM. xxi. 4-9.

The mutinous discontent of the Israelites had some excuse when they had to wheel round once more and go southwards in consequence of the refusal of passage through Edom. The valley which stretches from the Dead Sea to the head of the eastern arm of the Red Sea, down which they had to plod in order to turn the southern end of the mountains on its east side, and then resume their northern march outside the territory of Edom, is described as a 'horrible desert.' Certainly it yielded neither bread nor water. So the faithless pilgrims broke into their only too familiar murmurings, utterly ignoring their thirty-eight years of preservation. 'There is no bread.' No; but the manna had fallen day by day. 'Our soul loatheth this light bread.' Yes; but it was bread all the same. Thus coarse tastes prefer garlic and onions to Heaven's food, and complain of being starved while it is provided. 'There is no water.' No; but the 'rock that followed them' gushed out abundance, and there was no thirst.

Murmuring brought punishment, which was meant for amendment. 'The Lord sent fiery serpents.' That statement does not necessarily imply a miracle. Scripture traces natural phenomena directly to God's will, and often overleaps intervening material links between the cause which is God and the effect which is a physical fact. The neighbourhood of Elath at the head of the gulf is still infested with venomous serpents, 'marked with fiery red spots,' from which, or possibly from the inflammation caused by their poison, they are here called 'fiery.' God made the serpents, though they were hatched by eggs laid by mothers; He brought Israel to the place; He willed the poisonous stings. If we would bring ordinary events into immediate connection with the Divine hand, and would see in all calamities fatherly chastisement 'for our profit,' we should understand life better than we often do.

The swift stroke had fallen without warning or voice to interpret it, but the people knew in their hearts whence and why it had come. Their quick recognition of its source and purpose, and their swift repentance, are to be put to their credit. It is well for us when we interpret for ourselves God's judgments, and need no Moses to urge us to humble ourselves before Him. Conscious guilt is conscious of unworthiness to approach God, though it dares to speak to offended men. The request for Moses' intercession witnesses to the instinct of conscience, requiring a mediator,—an instinct which has led to much superstition and been terribly misguided, but which is deeply true, and is met once for all in Jesus Christ, our Advocate before the throne. The request shows that the petitioners were sure of Moses' forgiveness for their distrust of him, and thus it witnesses to his 'meekness.' His pardon was a kind of pledge of God's. Was the servant likely to be more gracious than the Master? A good man's

readiness to forgive helps bad men to believe in a pardoning God. It reflects some beam of Heaven's mercy.

Moses had often prayed for the people when they had sinned, and before they had repented. It was not likely that he would be slow to do so when they asked him, for the asking was accompanied with ample confession. The serpents had done their work, and the prayer that the chastisement should cease would be based on the fact that the sin had been forsaken. But the narrative seems to anticipate that, after the prayer had been offered and answered, Israelites would still be bitten. If they were, that confirms the presumption that the sending of the serpents was not miraculous. It also brings the whole facts into line with the standing methods of Providence, for the outward consequences of sin remain to be reaped after the sin has been forsaken; but they change their character and are no longer destructive, but only disciplinary. 'Serpents' still 'bite' if we have 'broken down hedges,' but there is an antidote.

The command to make a brazen or copper serpent, and set it on some conspicuous place, that to look on it might stay the effect of the poison, is remarkable, not only as sanctioning the forming of an image, but as associating healing power with a material object. Two questions must be considered separately,—What did the method of cure say to the men who turned their bloodshot, languid eyes to it? and What does it mean for us, who see it by the light of our Lord's great words about it? As to the former question, we have not to take into account the Old Testament symbolism which makes the serpent the emblem of Satan or of sin. Serpents had bitten the wounded. Here was one like them, but without poison, hanging harmless on the pole. Surely that would declare that God had rendered innocuous the else fatal creatures. The elevation of the serpent was simply intended to make it visible from afar; but it could not have been set so high as to be seen from all parts of the camp, and we must suppose that the wounded were in many cases carried from the distant parts of the wide-spreading encampment to places whence they could catch a glimpse of it glittering in the sunshine. We are not told that trust in God was an essential part of the look, but that is taken for granted. Why else should a half-dead man lift his heavy eyelids to look? Such a one knew that God had commanded the image to be made, and had promised healing for a look. His gaze was fixed on it, in obedience to the command involved in the promise, and was, in some measure, a manifestation of faith. No doubt the faith was very imperfect, and the desire was only for physical healing; but none the less it had in it the essence of faith. It would have been too hard a requirement for men through whose veins the swift poison was burning its way, and who, at the best, were so little capable of rising above sense, to have asked from them, as the condition of their cure, a trust which had no external symbol to help it. The singularity of the method adopted witnesses to the graciousness of God, who gave their feebleness a thing that they could look at, to aid them in grasping the unseen power which really effected the cure. 'He that turned himself to it,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'was not saved by the thing which he saw, but by Thee, that art the Saviour of all.'

Our Lord has given us the deepest meaning of the brazen serpent. Taught by Him, we are to see in it a type of Himself, the significance of which could not be apprehended till Calvary had given the key. Three distinct points of parallel are suggested by His use of the incident in His conversation with Nicodemus. First, He takes the serpent as an emblem of Himself. Now it is clear that it is so, not in regard to the saving power that dwells in Him, but in regard to His sinless manhood, which was made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' yet 'without sin.' The symbolism which takes the serpent as the material type of sin comes into view now, and is essential to the full comprehension of the typical significance of the incident.

Secondly, Jesus laid stress on the 'lifting up' of the serpent. That 'lifting up' has two meanings. It primarily refers to the Crucifixion, wherein, just as the death-dealing power was

manifestly triumphed over in the elevation of the brazen serpent, the power of sin is exhibited as defeated, as Paul says, 'triumphing over them in it' (Col. ii. 14,15). But that lifting up on the Cross draws after it the elevation to the throne, and to that, or, rather, to both considered as inseparably united, our Lord refers when He says,' I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

Thirdly, the condition of healing is paralleled. 'When he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.' 'That whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life.' From the serpent no healing power flowed; but our eternal life is '*in* Him,' and *from* Him it flows into our poisoned, dying nature. The sole condition of receiving into ourselves that new life which is free from all taint of sin, and is mighty enough to arrest the venom that is diffused through every drop of blood, is faith in Jesus lifted on the Cross to slay the sin that is slaying mankind, and raised to the throne to bestow His own immortal and perfect life on all who look to Him. The bitten Israelite might be all but dead. The poison wrought swiftly; but if he from afar lifted his glazing eyeballs to the serpent on the pole, a swifter healing overtook the death that was all but conqueror, and cast it out, and he who was borne half unconscious to the foot of the standard went away a sound man, 'walking, and leaping, and praising God.' So it may be with any man, however deeply tainted with sin, if he will trust himself to Jesus, and from 'the ends of the earth' 'look unto' Him 'and be saved,' His power knows no hopeless cases. He *can* cure all. He *will* cure our most ingrained sin, and calm the hottest fever of our poisoned blood, if we will let Him. The only thing that we have to do is to gaze, with our hearts in our eyes and faith in our hearts, on Him, as He is lifted on the Cross and the throne. But we must so gaze, or we die, for none but He can cast out the coursing venom. None but He can arrest the swift-footed death that is intertwined with our very natures.

Balaam

'He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.'—NUM. xxii. 6.

Give a general outline of the history. See Bishop Butler's great sermon.

I. How much knowledge and love of good there may be in a bad man.

Balaam was a prophet:

(a) He knew something of the divine character,

(b) He knew what righteousness was (Micah v. 8).

(c) He knew of a future state, and longed for 'the last end of the righteous.'

He would not break the law of God, and curse by word of mouth:

But yet for all that he wanted to curse. He wanted to do the wrong thing, and that made him bad. And when he durst not do it in one way, he did it in another.

So he is a picture of the universal blending and mixture that there is even in bad men.

It is not knowledge that makes a man good.

It is not aspirations after righteousness. These dwell more or less in all souls.

It is not desire 'to go to heaven'—everybody has that desire.

Perfectly vicious men are devils. There is always the blending.

Many of us are trusting to these vagrant wishes, but my friends, it is not what a man would sometimes like, but what the whole set and tenor of his life tends towards, that makes him. There may be plenty of backwater eddies and cross-currents in the sea, but the tide goes on all the same.

'All these fancies and their whole array One cunning bosom sin blows quite away,'

'Let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Do not trust your convictions; they are powerless in the fight.

II. How men may deceive themselves about their condition, or the self-illusions and compromises of sin.

These convictions will never, by themselves, keep a man from evil, but they may lead men to try to compromise, just as Balaam did. He would go, but he would not, for the life of him, curse; and he evidently thought that he was a hero in firmness and a martyr to duty.

He would not curse in words, but he did it in another way—by means of Baal-peor.

So we find men making compromises between duty and inclination; keeping the letter and breaking the spirit; obeying in some respects and indemnifying themselves for their obedience by their disobedience in others; very devout, attentive to all religious observances, and yet sinning on. And we find such men playing tricks upon themselves, and really deluding themselves into the idea that they are very good men!

This is the great characteristic of sin, its deceitfulness. It always comes as an ‘angel of light,’ like some of those weird stories in which we read about a strange guest at a banquet who discloses a skeleton below the wedding garment!

‘Father of lies.’ ‘*Nihil imbecillius denudato diabolo.*’ The more one sins, the less capable he becomes of discerning evil. Conscience becomes sophisticated, and it is always possible to refine away its judgments.

‘By reason of use have their senses exercised to discern.’ ‘Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.’

III. The absurdity and unreasonableness of unrighteousness.

We look at Balaam, and think, how could a man purpose anything so foolish as to go on seeking for an opportunity to break a law which he knew to be irrevocable!

Yet what did he do but what every sinner does?

All sin is the breach of law which at the very moment of breaking is known to be imperative.

All sin is thus the overbearing of conscience, or the sophistication of conscience, and all sin is the incurring voluntarily of consequences which at the moment are or might be known to be certain, and far overbalancing any fancied ‘wages of unrighteousness.’

Thus all sin is the overbearing of reason or the sophisticating of reason by passion. Men know the absurdity of sin, and yet men will go on sinning. ‘A rogue is a roundabout fool.’ All wrongdoing is a mighty blunder. It is only righteousness which is congruous with a man’s reason, with a man’s conscience, with a man’s highest happiness. ‘The fear of the Lord,’ that is wisdom.

IV. The wages of unrighteousness.

How Balaam’s experiment ended—his death. He tried to make the ‘best of both worlds,’ so he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, and this was how it ended, as it always does, as it always will. How death ends all the illusions, sternly breaks down all the compromises, reveals all the absurdities!

Men are one thing or the other. Learn, then, the lesson that no gifts, no talents, no convictions, no aspirations will avail.

Let this sad figure which looks out upon us with grey streaming hair and uplifted hands from beside the altar on Pisgah speak to us.

How near the haven it is possible to be cast away! Like Bunyan’s way to hell from near the gate of the celestial city.

Balaam said, ‘Let me die the death of the righteous!’ and his death was thus:—’Balaam they slew with the sword,’ and his epitaph is ‘Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,’ got them, and perished!

An Unfulfilled Desire

'... Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'—NUM. xxiii. 10.

'... Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.'—NUM. xiii. 8.

Ponder these two pictures. Take the first scene. A prophet, who knows God and His will, is standing on the mountain top, and as he looks down over the valley beneath him, with its acacia-trees and swift river, there spread the tents of Israel. He sees them, and knows that they are 'a people whom the Lord hath blessed.' Brought there to curse, 'he blesses them altogether'; and as he gazes upon their ordered ranks and sees somewhat of the wondrous future that lay before them, his mind is filled with the thought of all the blessedness of that righteous nation, and the sigh of longing comes to his lips, 'May I be with them in life and death; may I have no higher honour, no calmer end, than to lie down and die as one of the chosen people, with memories of a divine hand that has protected me all through the past, and quiet hopes of the same hand holding me up in the great darkness!' A devout aspiration, a worthy desire!

Look at the other picture. Midian has seduced Israel to idolatry and its constant companion, sensual sin. The old lawgiver has for his last achievement to punish the idolater. 'Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, afterwards thou shalt be gathered to thy people.' So each tribe gives its contingent to the fight, and under the fierce and prompt Phinehas, whose javelin had already smitten one of the chief offenders, they go forth. Fire and sword, devastation and victory, mark their track. The princes of Midian fall before the swift rush of the desert-born invaders. And—sad, strange company!—among them is the 'man who saw the vision of the Almighty, and knew the knowledge of the Most High'! he who had taught Moab the purest lessons of morality, and Midian, alas! the practice of the vilest profligacy; he who saw from afar 'the sceptre arise out of Israel and the Star from Jacob'; he who longed to 'die the death of the righteous'! The onset of the avenging host, with the 'shout of a king' in their midst; the terror of the flight, the riot of havoc and bloodshed, and, finally, the quick thrust of the sharp Israelite sword in some strong hand, and the grey hairs all dabbled with his blood—these were what the man came to who had once breathed the honest desire, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his'!

I. There is surely a solemn lesson for us all here—as touching the danger of mere vague religious desires and convictions which we do not allow to determine our conduct.

Balaam had evidently much knowledge. Look at these points—

(a) His knowledge of the covenant-name of God.

(b) His knowledge of a pure morality and a spiritual worship far beyond sacrificial notions, and in some respects higher than the then Old Testament standpoint.

(c) The knowledge (which is implied in the text) of a future state, which had gone far into the background, even if it had not been altogether lost, among the Israelites. Is it not remarkable that the religious ideas of this man were in advance of Israel's at this time; that there seems to have lingered among these 'outsiders' more of a pure faith than in Israel itself?

What a lesson here as to the souls led by God and enlightened by Him beyond the pale of Judaism!

But all this knowledge, of what use was it to Balaam? He knows about God: does he seek to serve Him? He preaches morality to Moab, and he teaches Midian to 'teach the children of

Israel to commit fornication.' He knows something of the blessedness of a 'righteous man's' death, and perhaps sees faintly the shining gates beyond—but how does it all end? What a gulf between *knowledge* and *life*!

What is the use of correct ideas about God? They may be the foundations of holy thoughts, and they are meant to be so. I am not setting up emotion above principle, or fancying that there can be religion without theology; but for what are all our thoughts about God given us?

(a) That they may influence our hearts.

(b) That they may subdue our wills.

(c) That they may mould our practical life.

If they do not do that—then *what* do they do?

They constitute a positive hindrance—like the dead lava-blocks that choke the mouth of a crater, or the two deposits on the bottom of a boiler, soot outside and crust inside, which keep the fire from getting at the water. They have lost their power because they are so familiar. They are weakened by not being practised. The very organs of intelligence are, as it were, ossified. Self-complacency lays hold on the possession of these ideas and shields itself against all appeals with the fact of possessing them. Many a man mistakes, in his own case, the knowledge of the truth for obedience to the truth. All this is seen in everyday life, and with reference to all manner of convictions, but it is most apparent and most fatal about Christian truth. I appeal to the many who hear and know all about 'the word,' What more is needed? That you should do what you know ('Be not hearers only'); that you should yield your whole being to Christ, the living Word.

II. Balaam is an example of convictions which remain inefficacious.

It was not without some sense of his own character, and some forebodings of what was possibly brooding over him, that he uttered these words of the text. But they were transitory emotions, and they passed away.

I suppose that every man who hears the gospel proclaimed is, at some time or other, conscious of dawning thoughts which, if followed, would lead him to decision for Christ. I suppose that every man among us is conscious of thoughts visiting him many a time when he least expects them, which, if honestly obeyed, would work an entire revolution in his life.

I do not wish to speak as if unbelieving men were the only people who were unfaithful to their consciences, but rather to deal with what is a besetting sin of us all, though it reaches its highest aggravation in reference to the gospel.

Such stings of conviction come to us all, but how are they deadened?

(a) By simple neglect. Pay no attention to them; do not do anything in consequence, and they will gradually disappear. The voice unheard will cease to speak. Non-obedience to conscience will in the end almost throttle conscience.

(b) By angry rejection.

(c) By busy occupation with the outer world.

(d) By sinful occupation with it.

Then consider that such dealing with our convictions leaves us far worse men than before, and if continued will end in utter insensibility.

What should we do with such convictions? Reverently follow them. And in so doing they will grow and increase, and lead us at last to God and peace.

Special application of all this to our attitude towards Christian truth.

III. Balaam is an instance of wishes that are never fulfilled.

He wished to die ‘as the righteous.’ How did he die? miserably; and why?

(1) Because his wish was deficient in character.

It was *one* among a great many, feeble and not predominant, occasioned by circumstances, and so fading when these disappeared. Like many men’s relation to the gospel who would *like* to be Christians, and are not. These vagrant wishes are nothing; mere ‘catspaws’ of wind, not a breeze. They are not real, even while they last, and so they come to nothing.

(2) Because it was partially wrong in its object.

He was willing to die the death, but not to live the life, of the righteous; like many men who would be very glad to ‘go to heaven when they die,’ but who will not be Christians while they live.

Now, God forbid that I should say that his wish was wrong! But only it was not enough. Such a wish led to no action.

Now, God hears the faintest wish; He does not require that we should will strongly, but He does require that we should desire, and that we should act according to our desires.

Let the close be a brief picture of a righteous death. And oh! if you feel that it is blessed, then let that desire lead you to Christ, and all will be well. Remember that Bunyan saw a byway to hell at the door of the celestial city. Remember how Balaam ended, and stands gibbeted in the New Testament as an evil man, and the type of false teachers. Finally, beware of knowledge which is not operative in conduct, of convictions which are neglected and pass away, of vague desires which come to nought.

THE END