

II. *The reassurance of the disciples.*

From the beginning they had misunderstood Christ's mission and methods. The Jewish idea of the Messiah was a temporal king, who should deliver the nation from Romish rule and once more establish Israel as a sovereign state. The sunrise for which their faith and hope waited would reveal a conquering army sweeping on to victory, marshalled by a king who should wear the crown and hold the sceptre wrested from the oppressors. The disciples believed in Christ after a fashion, but were always troubled to reconcile his position with their Jewish ideas. There was nothing in his manner or words that favoured their expectations. He was often a fugitive. He talked about truth instead of revolution. There was infinite calm in his discourse, that commended the peace of God rather than the shock of human battle. What sort of a man is this? they doubtless often asked themselves, to confront the colossal power of the empire, and break this oppressive yoke from our neck. And yet, as now and then he showed his strength by some wonderful miracle, their courage revived, and they waited in trembling hope. But how will they endure his capture and ignominious death? Such a culmination of their previous disheartenment would be likely to extinguish the last spark of their faith, and carry them over to the ranks of those who considered Christ as an impostor.

The transfiguration was, in part, to remedy all that. They could not look on that bewildering scene and ever feel again that Christ was to be judged by common standards of measurement. As has been said, "They could never forget in what majesty they had seen him; never forget in his humiliation that they had heard him called the beloved Son, by the lips of the Eternal himself. Nor could they ever hesitate whom to obey, when they had seen Moses and Elias, representatives of the law and the prophets, withdraw before him, and heard him proclaimed from the cloud of presence as far higher than they." Even Gethsemane and Calvary could not now utterly destroy their faith, however sorely it might be tried. Something of the transfiguration splendour relieved the

darkness as they looked upon the cross; something of the transfiguration light streamed along the path by which they ran with hasty steps to the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection.

Beyond the immediate and special purpose of this event in Christ's life, there were other ends to be served by it. It gave the world light on certain disputed points in regard to which men greatly need to be well informed.

1. *The nature of Christ.* It was in dispute while he was on earth; it has been disputed ever since. The old question of the Master, "Whom say ye that I am?" is asked of every generation and every man. Widely different answers are given to the interrogation. To some he is only a man, subject to the weaknesses that discount the value of our common humanity; to others he is a perfect man, by some strange endowment rid of the flaws and scars that disfigure the rest of the race, the true ideal of what all men should be. To others still he is more than man, but less than God, a unique, solitary being; whose precise status in the scale of existence it is impossible to give. To those who rightly apprehend him, he appears to be what he really is—true Deity, God incarnate.

2. *The nearness of the invisible world.* Men have a feeling, rather than a reasonable belief, that it is somewhere remote. Our friends pass from us into it, and we hear from them no more. It seems to us that they must be at some inaccessible distance, or they would come to comfort us in our sorrow and save us from heart-break. In our own thought of dying, there are infinite spaces to be traversed before we can reach rest and home. The transfiguration ought to stifle every such false notion. Moses and Elijah came at a moment's notice to comfort the troubled Saviour. From the golden streets to the slopes of Hermon was only a brief transit. The visible and invisible worlds are not a wide remove from each other. "This day," said Christ to the thief on the cross, "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," and the sun was stooping to it, setting when he said it. We distress ourselves without cause, when we torture ourselves with the thought that our be-