

days of Christ, the Church is weighted down with dull-minded, custom-ridden, mechanical formalists—men who abhor originality, poetry, passion, and are incapable of making allowance for the faults, real or seeming, which spring out of these; men who look only on the surface of things, and lack the insight which can look into the heart of a man and see there the true worthy explanation of strange eccentric actions, and who still would pronounce a John the Baptist a madman, and Jesus of Nazareth a profligate.

II. The next point I would remark upon is drawn from the grand protest of Christ, to the effect that wisdom is compatible with differences as to life and work. In one respect John and Jesus were alike. Each was inspired by a holy passion for doing the divine will, and for getting others to do it for all time. This noble passion ruled their life and shaped their conduct, as it rules the life and shapes the conduct of all the great-hearted sons of wisdom. But along with this unity of passion and purpose may go great diversity in means and methods for accomplishing the common end. A man to be true to his God and his work, must be true to his own nature; and his manner of life and of action must correspond to his gifts and his opportunities, and to the time and need of the place, and not to the whims of a capricious people. Means must be adapted to ends, and men must be like their work. John and Christ had different work to do. John was a child of the old time, a Hebrew prophet, and his business was to show the people the sinfulness of their sins. His work involved rough tasks, and demanded the exercise of a stern, strong will. He had to prepare the way of the Lord; to level heights, to fill up valleys, to make rough places smooth, and crooked places straight; that is to say, he had to humble men's pride, to rouse dormant consciences, to expose special sins. And the man to do that work must be austere, so that by the very exaggerations of his self-denial he may protest against all forms of sensuality. So the man stood forth—the very incarnation of his own work. The rough garment of camel's hair, girt about him with a leathern girdle, was a grand symbol, which spoke to the eye of the people, and told them that this man was a veritable prophet, another Elijah among them, representing the Moral Law, and from the smoking peak of Sinai thundering down the stern "Thou shalt not" against the vices of the world. The people had to be shocked, aroused, frightened, and that can only be accomplished by exaggerations and extremes, by storms rushing from stormy hearts, by strong speech uttered by men who feel strongly. John was not beautiful; was not symmetrical; was not well-balanced; he was one-sided, singular, extreme, but the man for the work heaven and earth required of him; a strong, stern man; a very prophet of the prophets.

Jesus Christ had a different work to do. He had to shed abroad the genial sunshine of His Father's love; He brought the Kingdom nigh, which is righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. God had come down from Sinai's brow, and ceased to speak in thunder; He was a gracious, loving presence; healing all and giving life. Christ was the "Son of man;" He wanted to get close to the people; to win their confidence and trust, in order that He might find His way into their hearts with His gospel of mercy and heaven. So He came eating and drinking; He accepted existing customs, those that were harmless, so as to gain for Himself the chance for doing good. He asked a drink of water from a sinful woman, and told her of the living water; He went self-invited to dine with a publican, and brought salvation to the house. He had come to preach a God of infinite love and tenderness to the poor, and the preacher to succeed must be *en rapport* with his hearers. They would have been afraid of the dark browed prophet; but that man, wearing simple garments, eating and drinking just as they did every day, wearing a sunny smile upon His face, as if He had good news to tell; they were not afraid of Him; they thronged around Him; heard Him gladly; eyes long dulled with weeping kindled with the light of a new hope which rose in the heart at His words; bent bodies straightened, as if the soul had recovered a long lost sense of manhood; faces scarred and seamed all over by sins were brightened as the light of the soul broke through them. They found in Him a *man*, a brother, and then, the Son of God, mighty to redeem. "Wisdom *was* justified of her children."

It is the same now; work of many kinds must be done. In building the temple, some must fell the tall cedars in the forests of Lebanon; some must raft them along to Joppa; some must dig stones in the quarries of Mount Moriah, and some must work in silver and gold. But the trouble is that many short-sighted mortals want that all shall work with the same tools and in the same way. They want the same man to fell trees, and quarry stones and work in silver and gold. To change the figure a moment, they demand that the poet shall lead an army; that the intellectual man shall be emotional; that the scholar shall drudge at unscholarly work; that men shall do violence to all the instincts of their true nature to suit the fancied wants of society. There is work for the pastor to do, work of quiet ministering, and there are men to do it; there is work for the preacher to do, work of rousing the conscience, and kindling the emotions, and informing the judgment—a work of true prophecy—and there are preachers to do it. There is work for the revivalist to do in and for the masses, in a rough and earnest way; most needful work, and God has sent men to do it. There is work for the orator and scholar, work that must be done if men are to be developed in all that is divine in humanity; and God has

gifted men to do it. But the unthinking crowd of critics grumble at each in turn. The earnest, homely revivalist pleases but for a day; the graceful, eloquent preacher has but a short time of favour; the pastor is welcomed for awhile, but is complained of soon because he lacks the poet's gifts and preacher's grace. But—"wisdom *is* justified of her children," and the true man's work is blessed.

Now the practical and important teaching of our Lord in the matter is this: that wisdom is not a time-server, and her true-hearted, devoted children—the men who seek to do real, permanent work for God and humanity—will not accommodate themselves to the capricious humours of a changeful people. That is where the divine and heaven-born wisdom differs from the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of the world says, "Serve the time in which you live; make an effort to have things pleasant about you; study to be in the fashion; think along the lines of popular belief; speak the acceptable Shibboleth; put on appearances; suit yourself to those by whose favour you can live; don't oppose yourself to the strong current of public opinion. If you must stifle conviction to do that, then stifle conviction; if you must chill enthusiasm, then chill it; if it debars you from living a great heroic life, then let heroism go by the board. Serve the times and live in peace and favour." That is a bad spirit, you say,—a thing to be met and tolerated out in the market, or in ordinary social life, but surely not in the Church? Well, the Spirit of Divine Wisdom lives and rules in the Church, and by the inspiration of it many a great soul works the works of God under the disfavour of a grumbling age; many are true to their own nature and their heavenly calling. They are called mad or profligate; but, like their great Master, they make confident appeal to God's eternal wisdom. But not all are that. Multitudes have yielded to the people; they have suffered mental and moral deformity; they have allowed their best powers to run to waste, their deepest convictions to lie unuttered; they have consented to speak but half their thoughts, and those the least important; they have schooled their faces; they have schooled their tongues; they have bowed down to the spirit of the age until they are bent and deformed, and men of strength and beauty no more. All can hardly be as John or Jesus, and those peevish children have a terrific power upon pliant natures. There is an old saying, "Like priest, like people"; it would be ten times more correct to say "Like people, like priest." Now and then the brave heroic man is found as preacher; but only now and then. And those querulous hosts of church members have grumbled the reality, the heart, the manhood out of multitudes of those who started with enthusiastic, high resolve to be true to truth and God. But what could they?—forced out of the pale of ordinary manhood, invested with a fancied sanctity, told their work and modes of life, and charged to follow them if they would be at peace? What could they, not being heroes of the faith? I only wonder that they have maintained so much of manhood as they yet possess. After so many centuries of oppression, it is almost a miracle that you can yet find men of independent spirit in the clerical order. Constant opposition from without—the sneers of unbelievers—the tumultuous attack of Godless crowds—the onslaught of the devil upon faith and holiness—will only make a man of God more manly; they act upon his moral and spiritual nature as the storms upon the oak, welding the branches hard, and driving the roots deeper into the soil. But this grumbling, this peevishness of church members is like a worm at the root, weakening all the tree by hindering the sap from flowing up to branches and leaves. Aye, it is true: "Like people, like priest." Shall I tell you how to get a poor and flabby ministry?—be poor and flabby yourselves. Shall I tell you how to get a hard and cold ministry, from which you can draw no inspiration and no comfort?—be hard and cold and give forth no affection. You can shape life anywhere just as you like. Out in the world you will get just what you give. Be unsocial, and others will be unsocial with you; be hard, and they will be hard. Be cold and peevish at home, and you will soon drive love out at the window and bring hate in at the door. So in matters of religious life—let your face shine, and you will find a world of sunshine about you; let your heart warm toward others, and their heart will warm toward you; strike up a song, and plenty will join in the chorus; help others to heaven, and a host will help you. But,—be complaining children, demanding impossible things—each claiming all his rights and privileges—all indulging in caprices of temper, and you will find no good in church fellowships, and no inspiration in any ministry. John and Jesus withstood the evil tempers of the age. John was a brave prophet, and Jesus was divine; and John was soon murdered in prison, and Jesus was crucified after three years of ministry. Those children rose *en masse* and killed the men who would not pipe when they were in the humour for dancing, or mourn when they wished to lament. Only a few have followed those great examples. For the most part preachers are made by the people. Some of them are—the remainder of them soon will be, precisely after your own heart. I find that the ministry is a hard, almost impossible place for the most pliant and pliable of time-servers. They cannot always change in time to meet the changing humours of the people; they cannot always guard their lips from speaking words which spring from unorthodox thoughts. Sometimes the pain at their heart will not allow them to smile just when the smile is expected; now and then they, too, get out of joint with things. Yes; for even them the