The Measure of Immeasurable Power.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"That ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ."—Eph. 1:19, 20.

"The riches of the glory of the inheritance" will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt—"and can I ever hope to reach it?" Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he was asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is "exceeding." Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, speaks of the "love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and of God being "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. "According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." Is that heaping together of synonyms, or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is his wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself this morning to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

I. So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.

According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." The Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens—these are the things which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the *chef d' œuvre* of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a man, and that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, the members and their Head, the Christ and His church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there, and that, must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of my own weakness, creep across me, and all my hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is, when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His church must be. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." "The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them."

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of his Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, "And you hath He quickened." And then, catching it up a verse or two afterwards, reiterates clause by clause what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling, glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives are concerned, and the scope and the aim of them, "in the heavens," and "sit with Him in heavenly places"—these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our life "is exalted high above all principalities and powers"; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that we are His, we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

II.—Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which works in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure, though it be, in its depth of fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly-discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience, we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it *is* the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, "Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands." And hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus: "We see not yet all things put under Him." Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently not, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will arise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery, when we look on the world as it is to-day, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the "working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." "We see not yet all things put under Him." Be it so, "but we see Jesus," and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above him. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there. We try, and slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff and say, "We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below"? Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us and lifts us and sets us there.

"No man hath ascended up into heaven save He that came down from heaven," and having returned thither, stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and so poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments whilst anything remains unattained. And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better, if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realise the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth." That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the Divine power. It is great to preserve the ancient heavens fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to "give power to the faint," and "increase strength to them that have no might." And that is what He will do with us.

III.—Lastly, notice the conditions for the operation of the power.

"To usward who believe," says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying "ye," but now, by that "us," he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

"To usward who believe." Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and if you have only a thimble in your hand you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power; the one is that infinite limit of the "power which He wrought in Christ," and the other the practical limit—the working bounds of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? And if, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refreshes our parched lips, and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault it that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, "According to your faith be it unto you."

Rule of Life.

REV. S. CUSHING.

St. James says: "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This is not merely a statement that neglected opportunities are sinful, but here is the announcement of a glorious principle of life. In the context he says: "Go to now, ye that say, To-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. Your life is but a vapor that vanisheth away. Whereas ye ought to say, *If the Lord will* we will do this or that." This principle recognizes the will of God as the unvarying rule of life—that all our plans and purposes are to be in accord with that will. "*To him* that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is a sin."

The person knowing the principle, if he does not conform to it and make it the rule of life, is living in sin. Luther adopted it when he said he would engage in nothing on which he could not ask the blessing of God." Paul practiced it when he said: "God, whose I am and whom I serve." Some one has remarked: "Take Christ with you wherever you go. Go not where He will not be a welcome guest." Adopt this unvarying rule of life, and you will not be found at the theatre, the dancing-party, the card table, or any other place of amusement taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus. You will, however, following the example, and with the spirit of Christ say, "Lo! I come to do Thy will, O my God!"

— In nearly every neighborhood there are invalids who are confined to their rooms by chronic or temporary ailments to whom the sight of a cheerful face, with the assurance that some one is thinking of them, is like a medicine. If you do not believe this, try it some afternoon. Don your prettiest costume, take a few flowers in your hand, and with a bright smile on your face just "run in" to see some one whom you have missed from church or in social gatherings. It need not be one of your intimate friends. Go to see those with whom you have but a slight acquaintance. Think beforehand of a helpful thought to carry them. Speak of the beautiful shrubs you have seen on the way, of the birds you heard singing as you came along. Express a kindly interest in their welfare, but on no account ask for a detailed account of their illness. Those who are shut in from the busy world like to feel that they are remembered, and small services of this kind honor Christ as much as the greater offices in His name.

— A Hacking Cough disturbs rest.—Use Baird's Balsam of Horehound.

Art Thou Careful?

There are only two things that hinder the believer from unshadowed fellowship with God, sin and care. God is not an exceeding joy if we carry either of these loads. We cannot stand the strain of work and worry both; besides, we must remember that such behaviour not only makes us unhappy, but is dishonoring to the God whom we say we trust. He says: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you," just let Him care, and do not do it yourself. Care, according to the Greek word, is that which diverts us from our present duty to weary calculations of how to meet conditions that may never arise.

Fret, worry, anxiety, the habit of anticipating evil; crossing bridges before we reach them; the permission of foreboding fears about the future; all that attitude of mind which broods over the mistakes of the past and dwells on the shadows which coming events may cast, rather than on the love and will of God—this is care. The Greek verb indicates not that we must keep casting it, but do it once for all. Many know what it is to wake in the morning with a sense of weariness and depression because of the burdens of the coming day, and have dreaded to rise and face the difficulties, wishing to lie still and shirk them if possible. They cannot be gotten rid of in this way, however, and the heavy-hearted one rises and attempts to pray. Perhaps this prayer has been offered in a hopeless sort of way, asking God to help, but not daring to think He would. There is not confidence, no assurance; they do not know what the Psalmist meant when he said: "They looked unto Him and were lightened."

But we may kneel with a heavy load and rise with the peace of God upon the face; for does He not speak to us by many promises of His precious Word? "The chariots of God are twenty thousand;" that is, He comes to us in so many, many ways. "He maketh the clouds His chariots;" the darkness and trouble are the ways in which He comes to us. How much better to be borne along in His chariot than to plod along over a rough road with dismal face and tired heart. The believer has no more to do with care than he has with sin; but he must first learn to cast all his sins upon the Lord before he can cast his cares. If his sins rise up between him and God and trouble him, then he has not really given them to God, that He may separate them from him as far as the east is from the west. When these are given up, then cares may be taken to Him—look up, saying: "Take this, Lord, and this, and that. I will trust and not be afraid." As George Hubert says so quaintly in his sonnet: "Put care into Christ's bag." If the world judges of God by the looks and words of many of His professed children, is it wonderful that it is less attracted than repelled? Either there is no God, or He is powerless to help, or He does not really love, or He is careless of the needs of His children. Such must be the reflections of many as they look on the heavy, care-worn anxious faces of God's professed people, and remark there the same deeply-plowed furrows that these years have made for them-selves. We are either libels or Bibles; either harbor lights or warning signals; either attractions or detractions; and which we shall be depends very much on what we do with care.—*Selected.*

The Way will be Cleared as We Go.

The driver of the tramcar through the streets of our city starts with his car upon a line which runs continuously to his journey's end. If he goes on straight ahead he will surely come to the destined place. Should he be able to see all the route at once, he would observe many coal-wagons, furniture-vans, timber-carriages, brewers'-drays, and the like, blocking up his road along the rails, and he might mournfully ask, "How can I move all these?" But he takes no such lengthened view and asks no such useless question. As he moves along, all sorts of obstructive traffic giveys way before him, even the van demons yield up the road. When one of them is a little slow in getting out of the way, our driver blows his whistle; and, after two or three shrill appeals, the obstinate vehicle retires. As the rails run all the way so does the car.

Just so we are on the rails of eternal life. Between us and heaven there are a thousand obstructions, and, if we think of them all, we may well be fearful; but they will one and all disappear as we come to them. If they should seem likely to bar our progress, we must sound the whistle of prayer, and in due season they will turn aside, and leave us a clear road along the lines of covenant grace. Therefore go ahead, and fear no impediment; for the line is laid, and we have a legal right to travel along it, and none may lawfully hinder us.

This is what I learned from the driver of the tramcar.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Seeing God.

The pure in heart shall see God. This promise does not simply give assurance that those who obey God in this life shall have the blessedness of beholding Him in the life to come. It means that the obedient child of God shall have God revealed to him in this life as a consequence of his heart purity. Through his obedience he has unfolded within new powers of perception that lay hold of divine things. He becomes conscious of the presence of an invisible intelligence with whom his soul holds communion and from whom he draws higher endowments of personal life. Just as the senses bring him into consciousness of the material world which surround him, so the newly awakened susceptibility of the heart makes him aware of the presence of God. We become conscious of the outward visible world because our senses are responsive to its influences. We see the material universe through the effects it awakens in our material senses. In the same way, when our spiritual nature is made alive in God, we become responsive to the influence of His presence. He is made known to us by the effects that are wrought upon us by His personal influence upon us. Our spirits respond to benign influences of His Spirit in more exalted forms of personal life. There are breathed into us aspirations, motives, and dispositions which we know come from a source above us. They are the revelations of God's presence to us and in us.—*Methodist Recorder.*

The Trivial Round.

Pious old George Herbert told us long ago that the maid who swept a room for love of God made "that and the action fine." So in our familiar hymn, it is

"The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

It lifts all the drudgery of daily existence out of the reach of commonplace, just to keep saying—there is "holiness" on the harness, there is "holiness" on the shining surface of the kettle faithfully scoured. It ennobles man or woman in any station to keep saying, "This I do for Jesus' sake! I do my daily duties, just as I go up to communion, in remembrance of Him."

True piety can accomplish this, and never lose anything. For it has a titanic force to deal with great, grave affairs; and it certainly possesses a gentle grace to touch on what are called trifles. I have somewhere read the comment of admiring surprise with which one of the strangers present in an exhibition looked upon a steam trip-hammer. He saw the giant crush into powder a mass of steel; one sudden blow struck it into shattered splinters, and the hissing fragments flew as if an icicle had been hit by a child's mallet. And then he saw the workman lay a diamond brooch upon the anvil, and the ponderous weight came down as swiftly as before; but it only touched the jewel at its topmost angle without bruising it, and withdrew.

Why cannot the Christion life do that? Why cannot it combine delicacy with strength, and modify its forces to its needs? Why cannot a pure-hearted believer sing and pray and play with such constantly filial affection that all his life shall show his loyalty? Why cannot a good man do everything he does do just as he takes the bread at a communion, "in remembrance" of the Lord Jesus Christ?—*Every Thursday.*

Cleaving to the Lord.

There must be resistance to all the forces which would detach if there is to be union with God in the midst of life in the world. As the sailor clings to a spar, though the waves dash around him and his fingers get stiffened with cold and cramped with keeping the one position, and can scarcely hold on, for he knows that it is life to cling and death to loosen and so tightens his grasp, so must we lay hold of God and, in spite of all obstacles, keep hold of Him. Our grasp tends to slacken, and is feeble at best, even if there were nothing outside of us to make it difficult for us to get a good grip; but there are howling winds and battering waves blowing and beating on us and making it hard to keep our hold.

Do not let us yield to those, but in spite of them all let our hearts tighten round Him, for it is only in His sweet, eternal, perfect love that they can be at rest, and let our thoughts keep close to Him in spite of all distractions, for it is only in the measure in which His light fills our minds and His truth occupies our thoughts that our thinking spirits will be at rest. And let our desires, like the tentacles of some shell, first fasten upon its rock, and feeling out toward the ocean that is coming to it, let our desires go all out toward Him until they touch that after which they feel, and curl round it in repose and in blessedness.

The whole secret of a joyful, strong, noble Christian life lies here—that on the foundation of faith we should rear tenacious adherence to Him in spite of all obstacles.—*Selected.*

True Worth—What One Is.

Now certainly one object that God had in sending His Son away from home, putting Him down here on the earth for a few years, letting Him fare exactly as other boys and girls had to fare, giving Him no "push," but making Him take His chances, was to show us that it is the boy and girl that God thinks of, and not the fineness of the clothes they wear, the amount of money they have to spend, or the sumptuousness of the house in which they live. It is not that God objects to fine houses; we can see from the wonderful beauty of this world which God has made how much he thinks of beautiful things; but by giving His Son Jesus only plain clothes to wear, and only an ordinary house to occupy, and a cheap shed to be born in, He shows us that it is always the boy He thinks of first, and not the sumptuous dwelling that the boy has his home in; the baby that He thinks of first, and not the fancy cradle that the baby is rocked in.

It was only a few days ago that I went through the Babies Ward of the Postgraduate Medical Hospital on East Twentieth street, New York city. The sick children that are gathered there are drawn from some of the poorest and most hopeless homes in town; but all these little ones had been nicely washed, tastily dressed, the wards in which they were gathered as neatly furnished, and the little cribs in which they were lying as cleanly and tidy in their arrangement as any that could be found in our best homes; and the consequence of it all was that the poor little waifs looked exactly as sweet and lovable as any that you could discover in the most palatial residences along our main avenues. God would teach us then by such cases as these, and especially by the case of His own Son, our Lord, born of poor parents in a cheap little house, that the worth of boys or girls is something entirely apart from the kind of clothes they wear, or the style of house in which they live; that the worth of a child is what the child is, not what the child has; that a diamond is still a diamond though its brightness be hidden or soiled, and that the humble roof and the lowly manger may nevertheless shelter the dearest of God's little ones—His own Holy Child our Saviour.—*Rev. Dr. Chas. Parkhurst, in Harper's Young People.*

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