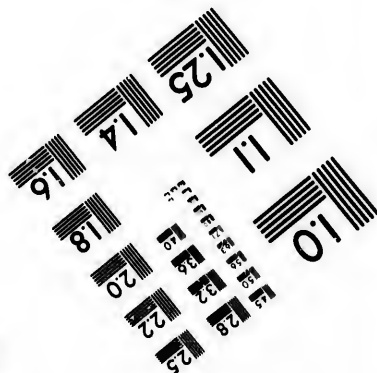
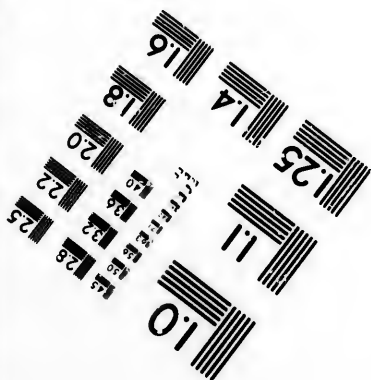
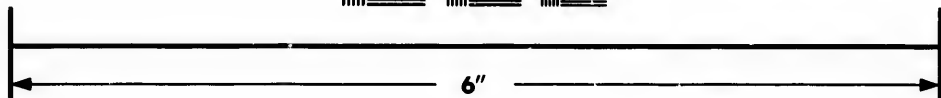
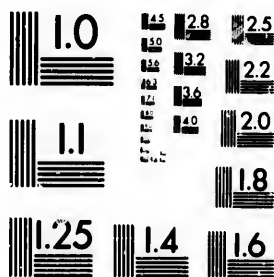


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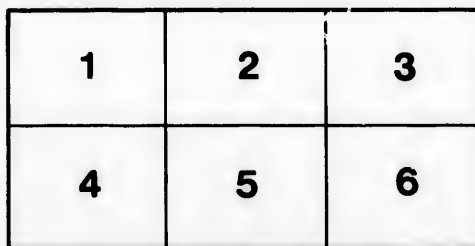
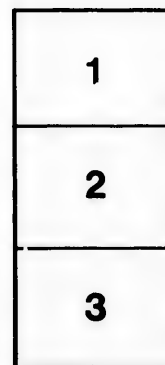
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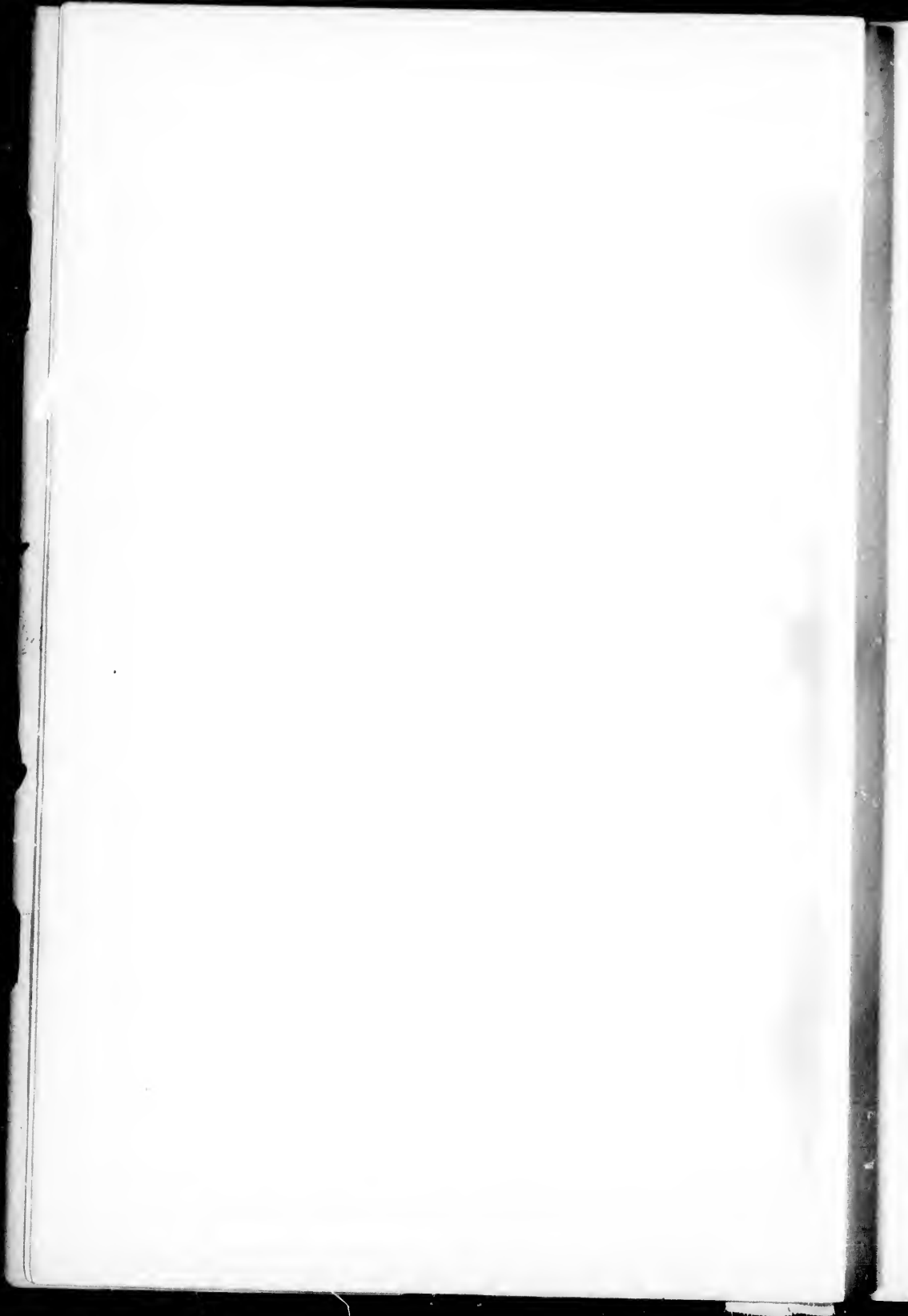
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SERMON I.

THE GIFTS OF CHRIST AS WITNESS,
RISEN AND CROWNED.



SERMON I.

THE GIFTS OF CHRIST AS WITNESS, RISEN AND CROWNED.

"Grace be unto you and peace from Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful Witness and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.— Rev. i. 4-5.

So loftily did John in his old age come to think of his Lord. The former days of blessed nearness had not faded from his memory ; rather he understood their meaning better than when he was in the midst of their sweetness. Years and experience, and the teaching of God's Spirit, had taught him to understand what the Master meant when He said :—" It is expedient for you that I go away ; " for when he had departed John saw Him a great deal more clearly than ever he had done when he beheld Him with his eyes. He sees Him now invested with these lofty attributes, and, so to speak, involved in the brightness of the Throne of God. For the words of my text are not only remarkable in themselves, and in the order in which they give these three aspects of our Lord's character, but remarkable also in that they occur in an invocation in which the Apostle is calling down blessings from Heaven on the heads of his brethren. The fact that they do so

occur points a question :—Is it possible to conceive that the writer of these words thought of Jesus Christ as less than Divine ? Could he have asked for “ grace and peace ” to come down on the Asiatic Christians from the Divine Father, and an Abstraction and a Man ? A strange Trinity that would be, most certainly. Rightly or wrongly, the man that said “ Grace and peace be unto you, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before His Throne, and from Jesus Christ,” believed that the name of the One God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But it is not so much to this as to the connection of these three clauses with one another, and to the bearing of all three on our Lord’s power of giving grace and peace to men’s hearts, that I want to turn your attention now. I take the words simply as they lie here ; asking you to consider, first, how grace and peace come to us “ from the faithful Witness ” ; how, secondly, they come “ from the first begotten from the dead ” ; and how, lastly, they come “ from the Prince of the kings of the earth. ”

I.—Now as to the first of these, “ the faithful Witness. ” All of you who have any familiarity with the language of Scripture will know that a characteristic of all the writings which are ascribed to the Apostle John, viz., his Gospel, his Epistles, and the book of the Revelation, is their free and remarkable use of that expression, “ Witness. ” It runs through all of them, and is one of the many threads of connection which tie them all together, and which constitute a very strong argument for the common authorship of the three sets of writings, vehemently as that has of late been denied.

But where did John get this word ? According to his own teaching he got it from the lips of the Master, Who began His career with these words, “ We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen, ” and who

all but ended it with these royal words, "Thou sayest that I am a King ! For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth." Christ Himself, then, claimed to be in an eminent and special sense the witness to the world.

The witness of what ? What was the substance of His testimony ? It was a testimony mainly about God. The words of my text substantially cover the same ground as His own words, "I have declared Thy name unto My brethren," and as those of the Apostle : "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." And they involve the same ideas as lie in the great name by which He is called in John's Gospel, "the Word of God."

That is to say, all our highest and purest and best knowledge of God comes from the life and conduct and character of Jesus Christ. His revelation is no mere revelation by words. Plenty of men have talked about God, and said noble and true and blessed things about Him. Scattered through the darkness of heathenism, and embedded in the sinfulness of every man's heart, there are great and lofty and pure thoughts about Him, which to cleave to and follow out would bring strength and purity. It is one thing to speak about God in words, maxims, precepts ; it is another thing to show us God in act and life. The one is theology, the other is Gospel. The one is the work of man, the other is the exclusive prerogative of God manifested in the flesh.

It is not Christ's words only that make Him the "Amen," the "faithful and true Witness," but in addition to these, He witnesses by all His deeds of grace, and truth, and gentleness, and pity ; by all His yearnings over wickedness, and sorrow, and sinfulness ; by all His drawings of the profligate and the outcast and the guilty to Himself, His life of loneliness, His death of shame. In all these, He is show-

ing us not only the sweetness of a perfect human character, but *in* the sweetness of a perfect human character, the sweeter sweetness of our Father, God. The substance of His testimony is the Name, the revelation of the character of His Father and our Father.

This name of "witness" bears likewise strongly upon the characteristic and remarkable *manner* of our Lord's testimony. The task of a witness is to affirm; his business is to tell his story—not to argue about it, simply to state it. And there is nothing more characteristic of our Lord's words than the way in which, without attempt at proof or argumentation, He makes them stand on their own evidence; or, rather, depend upon His veracity. All His teaching is characterised by what would be insane presumption in any of us, and would at once rule us out of court as unfit to be listened to on any grave subject, most of all on religious truth. For His method is this:—"Verily, verily, I say to you! Take it on My word. You ask Me for proof of My saying: I am the proof of it; I assert it. That is enough for you!" Not so do men speak. So does the faithful Witness speak; and instead of the conscience and common sense of the world rising up and saying, "This is the presumption of a religious madman and dictator," they have bowed before Him and said, "Thou art fairer than the children of men! Grace is poured into Thy lips." He is the "faithful Witness," Who lays His own character and veracity as the basis of what He has to say, and has no mightier word by which to back His testimony than His own sovereign "Verily! verily!"

The name bears, too, on the *ground* of His testimony. A faithful witness is an eye-witness. And that is what Christ claims when He witnesses about God. "We speak that we do know, we testify that we have seen." "I speak that which I have seen with My Father!" There is nothing more remarkable about the oral portion of our Lord's

witness than the absence of any appearance, such as marks all the wisest words of great men, of having come to them as the result of patient thought. We never see Him in the act of arriving at a truth, nor detect any traces of the process of forming opinions in Him. He speaks as if He had seen, and His tone is that of one who is not thinking out truth or grasping at it, but simply narrating that which lies plain and clear ever before His eyes. I do not ask you what that involves, but I quote His own statement of what it involves :—"No man hath ascended up into Heaven save He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven."

There have been plenty of great and gracious words about God, and there have been plenty of black and blasphemous thoughts of Him. They rise in our own hearts, and they come from our brothers' tongues. Men have worshipped gods gracious, gods loving, gods angry, gods petulant, gods capricious ; but God after the fashion of the God whom Jesus Christ avouches to us, we have nowhere else, a God of absolute love, Who "so loved the world"—that is, you and me—"that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish."

And now I ask, is there not grace and peace brought to us all from that faithful Witness, and from His credible testimony? Surely the one thing that the world wants is to have the question answered whether there really is a God in Heaven that cares anything about me, and to Whom I can trust myself wholly ; believing that He will lift me out of all my meannesses and sins, and make me clean and pure and blessed like Himself. Surely that is the deepest of all human needs, howsoever little men may know it. And sure I am that none of us can find the certitude of such a Father unless we give credence to the message of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This day needs that witness as much as any other ; some-

times in our unbelieving moments, we think *more* than any other. There is a wave—I believe it is only a wave—passing over the cultivated thought of Europe at present which will make short work of all belief in a God that does not grip fast to Jesus Christ. As far as I can read the signs of the times, and the tendency of modern thinking, it is this:—either an absolute Silence, a Heaven stretching above us, blue and clear, and cold, and far away, and *dumb*; or else a Christ that speaks—He or none! The Theism that has shaken itself loose from Him will be crushed, I am sure, in the encounter with the agnosticism and the materialism of this day. And the one refuge is to lay fast hold of the old truth:—“The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”

Oh! You orphan children that have forgotten your Father, and have turned prodigals and rebels; you that have begun to doubt if there is anyone above this low earth that cares for you; you that have got bewildered and befogged amidst the manifold denials and controversies of this day, come back to the one voice that speaks to us in tones of confident certainty as from personal knowledge of a Father. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,” says Jesus to us all: “hearken unto Me, and know God, Whom to know in Me is eternal life.” Listen to Him. Without His testimony you will be the sport of fears, and doubts, and errors. With it in your hearts you will be at rest. Grace and peace come from the faithful Witness.

II.—We have grace and peace from the Conqueror of Death.

The “first *begotten* from the dead” does not precisely convey the idea of the original, which would be more accurately represented by “the first *born* from the dead”—the resurrection being looked upon as a kind of birth into a higher order of life. It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to observe that the accuracy of this designation, “the

first born from the dead," as applied to our Lord is not made questionable because of the mere fact that there were others who rose from the dead before His resurrection, for all of these died again. What a strange feeling that must have been for Lazarus and the others, to go twice through the gates of death ; twice to know the pain and the pang of separation ! But these all have been gathered to the dust, and lie now waiting "the adoption, that is the resurrection of the body." But this Man, being raised, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him. And how is it that grace and peace come to us from the risen Witness ? Two or three words may be said about that.

Think how, first of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the confirmation of His testimony. In it the Father, to whom He hath borne witness in His life and death, bears witness to Christ, that His claims were true and His work well-pleasing. He is "declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead." If our Lord did not rise from the dead, as all Christendom to-day* has been declaring its faith that He did, then, as it seems to me, there is an end to His claims to be Son of God, and Son of Man, or any thing other than a man like the rest of us. If He be no more and naught else than a man, altogether like the rest of us, then there is an end to any special revelation of the Divine nature, heart, purposes, and will, in His works and character. They may still be beautiful, they may still reveal God in the same sense in which the doings of any good man suggest a fontal source of goodness from which they flow, but beyond that they are nothing. So all the truth, and all the peace, all the grace and hope which flow to us from the witness of Jesus Christ to the Father, are neutralised and destroyed unless we believe in the resurrection from the dead. His words may still remain gracious, and true in a measure, only all dashed with the terrible mistake that He asserted that He would rise again,

* Easter Sunday.

and rose not. But as for His life, it ceases to be in any real sense, because it ceases to be in any unique sense, the revelation to the world of the character of God.

And, therefore, as I take it, it is no exaggeration to say that the whole fabric of Christianity, and ail Christ's worth as a witness to God, stand or fall with the fact of His resurrection. If you pull out that keystone, down comes the arch. There may still be fair carving on some of the fallen fragments, but it is no longer an arch that spans the great gulf, and has a firm pier on the other side. Strike away the resurrection and you fatally damage the witness of Jesus. You cannot strike the supernatural out of Christianity, and keep the natural. The two are so inextricably woven together that to wrench away the one lacerates the other, and makes it bleed, even to death. If Christ be not risen we have nothing to preach, and you have nothing to believe. Our preaching and your faith are alike vain: ye are yet in your sins. Grace and peace come from faith in the "first begotten from the dead."

And that is true in another way too. Faith in the resurrection gives us a living Lord to confide in—not a dead Lord, Whose work we may look back upon with thankfulness; but a living one, Who works now upon us, and by Whose true companionship and real affection, strength and help are granted to us every day. The cold frost of death has not congealed that stream of love that poured from His heart while He lived on earth; it flows yet for each of us, for all of us, for the whole world.

My brother, we cannot do without a living Christ to stand beside us, to sympathise, to help, to love. We cannot do without a living Christ with Whom we may speak, Who will speak to us. And that communion which is blessedness, that communication of power and righteousness which is life, are only possible, if it be true that His death was not the end of His relationship to us, or of His

work in the world, but was only a transition from one stage of that work to another. We have to look to Christ, the "faithful Witness," the Witness Who witnessed when He died; but we have to look to Him that is risen again and takes His place at the right hand of God. And the grace and peace flow to us not only from the contemplation of the past witness of the Lord, but are showered upon us from the open hands of the risen and living Christ.

In still another way do grace and peace reach us, from the "first begotten from the dead," inasmuch as in Him and in His resurrection—life we are armed for victory over that foe whom He has conquered. If He be the firstborn, He will have "many brethren." The "first" implies a second. He has been raised from the dead, therefore death is not the destruction of conscious life. He has been raised from the dead, therefore any other man may be. Like another Samson, He has come forth from the prison-house, with the bars and gates upon His mighty shoulders, and has carried them away up there to the hill-top where He is. And the prison-house door stands gaping wide, and none so weak but he can pass out through the ever open portals. Christ has risen, and therefore if we will trust Him we have conquered that last and grimmest foe. And so for ourselves, when we are trembling, as we all do with the natural shrinking of flesh from the thought of that certain death; for ourselves, in our hours of lonely sorrow, when the tears come or the heart is numbed with pain; for ourselves when we lay ourselves down in our beds to die, grace and peace, like the dove that fell on His sacred head as it rose from the water of the baptism—will come down from His hands Who is not only "the faithful Witness," but the "first begotten from the dead."

III.—Lastly, we have grace and peace from the King of kings.

The series of aspects of Christ's work here is ranged in

order of time, in so far as the second follows the first, and the third flows from both, though we are not to suppose that our Lord has ceased to be the faithful Witness when He has ascended His Sovereign Throne. His own saying, "I have declared Thy name, and will declare it," shows us that His witness is perpetual, and carried on from His seat at the right hand of God.

He is the "Prince of the kings of the earth," just because He is "the faithful Witness." That is to say:—His dominion is the dominion of the truth; His dominion is a kingdom over men's wills and spirits. Does He rule by force? No! Does He rule by outward means? No! By terror? No! but because, as He said to the astonished Pilate, He came "to bear witness to the truth;" therefore is He the King not of the Jews only but of the whole world. A kingdom over heart and conscience, will and spirit, is the kingdom which Christ has founded, and His rule rests upon His witness.

And not only so, He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth" because in that witness He dies, and so becomes a "martyr" to the truth—the word in the original conveying both ideas. That is to say, His dominion rests not only upon truth. That would be a dominion grand as compared with the kingdom of this world, but still cold. His dominion rests upon love and sacrifice. And so His Kingdom is a kingdom of blessing and of gentleness; and He is crowned with the crowns of the universe, because He was first crowned with the crown of thorns. His first regal title was written upon His Cross, and from the Cross His Royalty ever flows. He is the King because He is the sacrifice.

And He is the Prince of the kings of the earth because, witnessing and slain, He has risen again; His resurrection has been the step midway, as it were, between the humiliation of earth and death, and the loftiness of the Throne.

By it He has climbed to His place at the right hand of God. He is King and Prince, then, by right of truth, love, sacrifice, death, resurrection.

And King to what end ! That He may send grace and peace. Is there no peace for a man's heart in feeling that the Brother that loves him and died for him rules over all the perplexities of life, the confusions of Providence, the sorrows of a world, and the corruptions of his own nature ? Is it not enough to drive away fears, to anodyne cares, to disentangle perplexities, to quiet disturbances, to make the coward brave, and the feeble strong, and the foolish wise, and the querulous patient, to think that my Christ is King ; and that the hands which were nailed to the Cross wield the sceptre, and that He who died for me rules the universe and rules me ?

Oh, brethren ! There is no tranquility for a man anywhere else but in the humble, hearty recognition of that Lord as his Lord. Crown Him with your reverence, with your loyal obedience, with your constant desires ; crown him with your love, the most precious of all the crowns that He wears, and you will find that grace and peace come to you from Him.

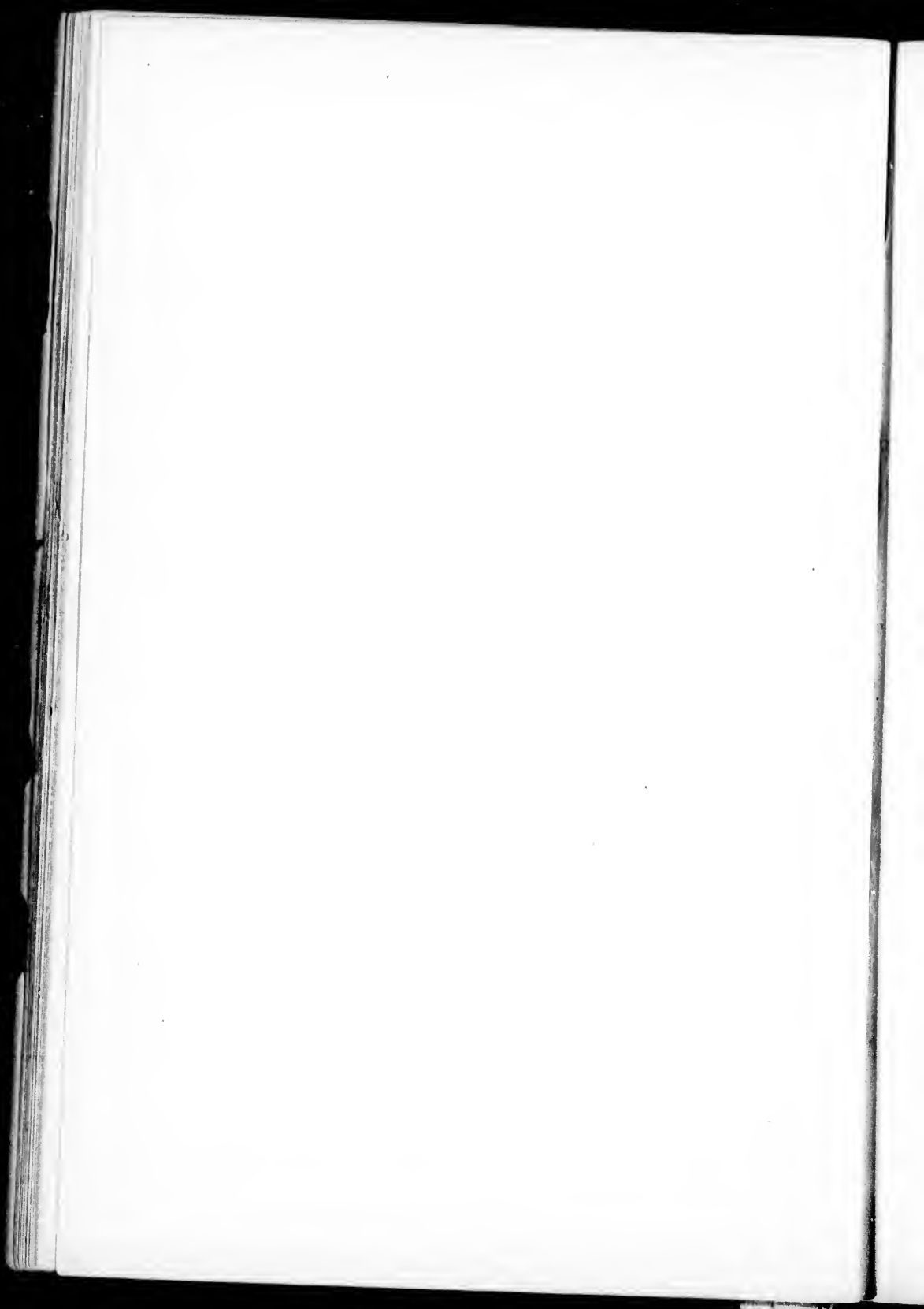
Such, then, is the vision that this seer in Patmos had of his Lord. It was to him a momentary opening of the heavens, which showed him his throned Lord ; but the fact which was made visible to his inward eye for a moment is an eternal fact. To-day as then, to-morrow as to-day, for Asiatic Greeks and for modern Englishmen, for past centuries, for the present, and for all the future, for the whole world for ever, Jesus Christ is the only witness whose voice breaks the awful silence and tells us of a Father ; the only Conqueror of Death Who makes the life beyond a firm, certain fact ; the King Whose dominion it is life to obey. We all need Him. Your hearts have wants which only His grace can supply, your lives have troubles which

only His peace can still. Sin and sorrow, change and trial, separation and death, are facts in every man's experience. They are ranked against us in serried battalions. You can conquer them all if you will seek shelter and strength from Him who has died for you, and lives to succour and to save. Trust Him ! Let your faith grasp the past fact of the cross whose virtue never grows old, and the present fact of the Throne from which He bends down with hands full of grace ; and on His lips the tender old words : " Peace I leave with you, My peace give I unto you ! "

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SERMON II.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A TRANSFIGURATION.



SERMON II.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A TRANSFIGURATION.

"Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds."—Romans xii. 2.

IN the preceding verse the Apostle begins the hortatory or practical part of the Epistle, and gathers the whole sum of Christian duty into one word—Sacrifice. In like manner, in this verse another general idea from which all Christian morality may be deduced, is put forth. As all is to be sacrifice, so all is to be transformation. Self-denying surrender is the one principle ; continued change into another likeness is the other, which, taken together may be regarded as the all-sufficient rules of all Christian conduct and character.

There are three things that strike me in these words—where Paul begins, namely with an inward change ; what he expects from the inward change, a life transfigured ; and what he is sure will be the result of such a transfigured life, a growing unlikeness to the fleeting fashion of this world. So we have to look together briefly at these three things.

I.—Where Paul begins,—with an inward renewal, “the renewing of your minds.” He goes deep down, because he had learned in his Master’s school who said: “Make the tree good and the fruit good.” To tinker at the outside with a host of anxious rules about conduct, and red-tape restrictions, and prescriptions, is all waste time and vain effort. You may wrap a man up in the swaddling bands of specific precepts until you can scarcely see him, and he cannot move, and you have not done a bit of good. We have to go deeper than that, down to the “hidden man of the heart” to touch the inward springs of action. The inner man must be dealt with first, and then the outward will come right in due time. How many of the plans for the social and moral renovation of the world, come under the lash of this condemnation, and are at once declared to be inadequate because they only skim the surface of the evil! They are as superficial as a doctor’s treatment would be, who would direct all his attention to curing pimples when the patient is dying of consumption. They wipe away the matter of a sore, and leave the sore itself untouched. We shall have to go deeper than that, as Paul, echoing his Master, reminds us; and to begin right in the middle if we intend to influence to any purpose the circumference and the outside. First of all must come the renewing of the mind and, after that, the transfiguration of the life.

Still further, not only have we to begin in the middle,—but there has to be a radical change in the middle,—the renewing of the mind, the making of the mind over again. “The mind,” I suppose, is here taken in a somewhat popular sense, for Paul is not teaching psychology, but practical morality. The word seems to be equivalent to the thinking faculty, the “intellect” as we say, but, possibly, to be used in a somewhat wider sense as including the whole inner man, with feelings, and desires, as well as thoughts. That inner man has got a wrong twist somehow; it needs

to be recreated, made anew, moulded over again. For in all of us, apart from this renovating and ennobling influence, it is what Paul calls "the mind of the flesh," or human nature unredeemed and unregenerate. It is held in slavery and submission to the external—to the material ; it is a mass of affections fixed upon the transient of low thoughts. A predominant self-regard characterises it and its actions. That is a sad stern picture.

Ah ! dear brethren, what man that knows himself, and has ever tried fairly to judge his own inner history and life, but will say : "It is all true" ? Nature's sternest painter is her best. The teaching that a man, apart from God and the renovating influences of Christianity, has a mind that needs to be shaped all over again before it is capable of nobility and purity and true holiness, and wisdom, is a teaching to which, if you will strip it of the mere, hard shell of theological language, by which it has often been made repulsive to men, everybody's conscience, when once it is fairly appealed to, gives in its "Amen !" And when I come to a miscellaneous congregation like this, and bring the message to each heart—"Thou art the man !" there is not one of us, if he is honest with himself, but will say, "Yes ! I know it all ; I am !" Apart from God we have minds enslaved, that need to be emancipated.

Then another step here is—this new creation of the inner man is only possible as the result of the communication of a life from without. That communicated life from without is the life of Jesus Christ Himself, put into your heart, on condition of your simply opening the door of your heart by faith, and saying to Him "Come in, Thou blessed of the Lord." And He comes in, bearing in His hands this gift most chiefly, the gift of a germ of life which will mould and shape our "mind" after His own blessed pattern.

But that renewal, beginning in the centre, absolutely

essential for all lofty and pure living, which is in itself the result of the communication of the gift of Jesus Christ, which gift is the result of our simple faith—that new life, when given, needs to be fostered and cherished. It is only a little spark that has to kindle a great heap of green wood, and to turn it into its own ruddy likeness. We have to keep our two hands round it, for fear it should be blown out by the rough gusts and tempests of passion and of circumstance. It is only a little seed that is sown in our hearts; we have to cherish and cultivate it, to water it by our prayers, and to watch over it, lest either the fowls of the air with light wings should carry it away, or the heavy wains of the world's business and the world's pleasures should crush it to death, or the thorns of earthly desires should spring up and choke it. We must cherish it and care for it, that it may bring forth fruit abundantly in our life.

II.—So much for the first point that is here. Now a word or two about the second; the transfigured life which follows upon that inward renewal. Many of you know, I have no doubt, that the word in our text—“Be ye *transformed* by the renewal of your minds,” is the same as is employed in two of the Evangelists' accounts of our Lord's transfiguration. And it is never employed except there, and here, and once besides.

I daresay it would be going too far to say that in selecting this word the Apostle had in his mind any allusion to that incident, but the coincidence is, at all events, remarkable; and we may, I think, fairly take that event as illustrating very beautifully the nature of the change which should pass over us. In the transfiguration, our Lord's indwelling divinity seems as it were, to have come floating up to the surface for once, and to have been made visible. So in like manner from within to the outward edge of the being, this renewed mind shall work, irradiating our

faces with a diviner beauty, and turning even this "muddy vesture of decay" into snowy whiteness, "so as no fuller on earth shall be able to white" it. "A transfigured life" suggests to us, in the light of the story, even nobler and loftier aspirations and hopes than the phrase, "a transformed life." There lie in it, and in the context, some important thoughts. It suggests that the inward life, if it is healthy and true and strong, will certainly shape the outward conduct and character. Just as truly as the physical life moulds the infant's limbs, just as truly as every periwinkle shell on the beach, is shaped into the convolutions that will fit the inhabitant, by the power of the life that lies within, so the renewed mind will make a fit dwelling for itself. To a large extent a man's spirit shapes his body. Did you never see some homely face, perhaps that of a grey-haired, wrinkled old woman, perhaps that of some pallid invalid, that had in it the very radiance of Heaven, and of which it might be said without exaggeration that it "was as the face of an angel"? Did you never see goodness making men and women beautiful? Did you never see some noble emotion stamp its own nobility on the countenance, and seem to dilate a man's very form and figure, and make the weakest like an angel of God? Have not there been other faces besides the face of Moses, that shone as men came down from the Mount of Communion with God? Or as Milton puts it:—

"Oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begins to cast a beam on the outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind."

Even as the fashion of His countenance was altered, so the inner life of Christ deep and true in a man's heart will write its presence in his countenance, and show how awful and how blessed goodness is.

But apart from that, which of course is not immediately in the Apostle's mind here, surely it does not need many

words to remind you that the inward change of the mind, of which I have been speaking, will manifest itself in conduct and character. What about the Christianity that does not show itself as such? What about men that look exactly as if they were not Christians? What about the inward life that never comes up to the surface?

A certain kind of seaweeds that lie at the bottom of the sea, when their flowering time comes, elongate their stalks and reach the light and float upon the top, and then, when they have flowered and fruited, they sink again into the depths. Our Christian life should come up to the surface and open out its flowers there, and show them to the heavens and to all eyes that look. Does your Christianity do that! It is no use talking about the inward change unless there is the outward transfiguration. Ask yourselves the question whether that is visible or not in your lives.

And then, still further, this image of our text suggests to us that the essential character of our transfiguration is the moulding of us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Christ's life is in you if you are in Him. If you are a Christian man or woman you have got a bit of Jesus Christ in you. And just as every leaf that you take off some plants and stick into a flower-pot will in time become a little plant exactly like the parent from which it was taken, so the Christ-life that is in you, if it is worth anything,—that is to say, if it is really in you at all—will be shaping you into His likeness, and growing into a copy of its source and origin. The least little tiny speck of musk, invisibly taken from a cake of it, and carried away ever so far, will diffuse the same fragrance as the mass from which it came; and the little almost imperceptible slice, if I may so say, of Jesus Christ's life that is in you and me, if it be in us at all, will smell as sweet if not as strong as the great life from which it came. The life of Christ in us will mould us, in the measure of its power, into the likeness of Christ, from

Whom it comes. What a blessed thought that we may move among men, as copies of Jesus Christ; with like visible consecration, and making men feel as they look at us that the gospel has power to evoke a rare beauty of character which witnesses for His transforming grace!

But, as I said before, in reference to the inward renewal, so I say in reference to the outward transfiguration, the life within will not work up to the surface and manifest itself in our conduct and character except upon condition of our continual effort, and our own honest endeavour. No doubt it is His life that moulds us, no doubt it is the gift of His Divine Spirit, whereby our characters are refined and hallowed, are ennobled and elevated, are delivered from selfishness, are lifted from their low creeping along the ground, and taught to aspire to the heavens. But all that will not come without our co-operation, earnest and prayerful and perpetual. We must be fellow-workers with God, in the task of building up our characters into the likeness of our Master. The fact that His Spirit is given to us is not a reason for our indolence, but it *is* a reason for our work, because it supplies us with the material with which we can work with some hope of success, and gives us the power by which we can do the thing that we desire.

So instead of a man saying, "It is Christ's life in me that must mould me, and therefore I need do nothing," he should say, "I have Christ's life within me to mould me, and therefore I must work." What would you think of a man that said, "It is the steam that drives the spindles, so I need not put the belting on! And just as wise is he who makes the thought of the renovation and transfiguration being all the work of Christ a pillow for his indolence, and an excuse for his selfish sloth. "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you."

III.—Lastly, let us consider the ultimate consequence which the Apostle regards as certain, from this central in-

ward change ; viz., the unlikeness to the world around. "Be not conformed to this world."

I need not spend time in discussing the notion to be attached to the expression, "this world." Suffice it for our present purpose to say it stands for the whole mass of men and things apart from God. And the "fashion of this world" is the whole set of maxims, opinions, thoughts, theories, views of life, pursuits, the like, of such men.

We all know well enough what the world is, by the specimen of it that we have inside of ourselves, but the principle that I want to insist upon for a moment is this : that the more we get like Jesus Christ, the more certainly we get unlike the world.

For the two theories of life are clean contrary, the one is all limited by this "bank and shoal of time," the other stretches out through the transient to lay hold on the Infinite and Eternal. The one is all for self, the other is all for God, with His will for law, and His love for motive. The two theories, I say, are contrary the one to the other, so that likeness to and adherence to the one must needs be dead in the teeth of the other.

And that contrariety is as real to-day as ever it was. Paul's "world" was a grim, heathen, persecuting world ; our "world" has got christened, and goes to church and chapel, like a respectable gentleman. But for all that it is the world yet, all the same, and you and I have to shake our hands free of it as thoroughly as ever it was a Christian man's duty to do so. No doubt there is a great deal of world in the Church, and, thank God, there is a little of the Church in the world, so that the gulf does not seem quite as deep as once it was. But when you come down to fundamentals, and the underlying principles of life, the antagonism is as great and real as ever it was. So let no man fancy that this generation has less need for this commandment than any generation that has gone before.

How is the commandment to be obeyed? Well, of course there are large tracts of human life where the saint and the sinner have to do exactly the same things; where the holiest and the most selfish have to perform the same functions, be touched by the same emotions, feel the same anxieties, weep the same tears, and smile the same smiles; attend to the same tasks, and gather together the same treasures. No doubt! and yet "there shall be two women grinding at a mill," the one of them at that side shall be a Christian, the other of them on that side shall not. They push the handle round, and the push that carries the handle round half the circumference of the millstone may be a bit of religious worship, and the push that carries it round the other half of the circumference may be a bit of serving the world and the flesh and the devil. Two men shall be sitting at the same desk, two boys at the same bench at school, two servants in the same kitchen, two students at the same class at Owen's College, and the one shall be serving God and glorifying His name, and the other shall be serving self and Satan. The one may be immersed in and the other may be antagonistic to the world, to the very depths of his soul. Not the things done, but the motive, makes the difference.

And yet that is not all that has to be said. There are a great many things which it is not my business, standing here, to enumerate *seriatim*, in which not to be "conformed to the world" means to be outwardly different, and to have nothing to do with certain acts and certain people. Have nothing to do with things for instance, which in themselves are unmistakably wrong; nor with things which, not being in themselves unmistakably wrong, have got evil inextricably mixed up with them, like, as I believe, the English stage; nor with things which, not being in themselves unmistakably wrong, and not having evil inextricably mixed up with them, are yet, as ex-

perience shows you, bad for *you*. This generation of the Church seems in business and in daily life, and most of all in its amusements, to be trying how near it can go to the world, which is to me a suspicious sign that much of it is only a christened world after all. Do not you try, my brother, if you want your Christian life to be vigorous and strong, how near to the world you can go. It is a dangerous game. It is like children trying how far they can stretch out of the nursery window without tumbling into the street ; you will go over some day when you miscalculate a little bit.

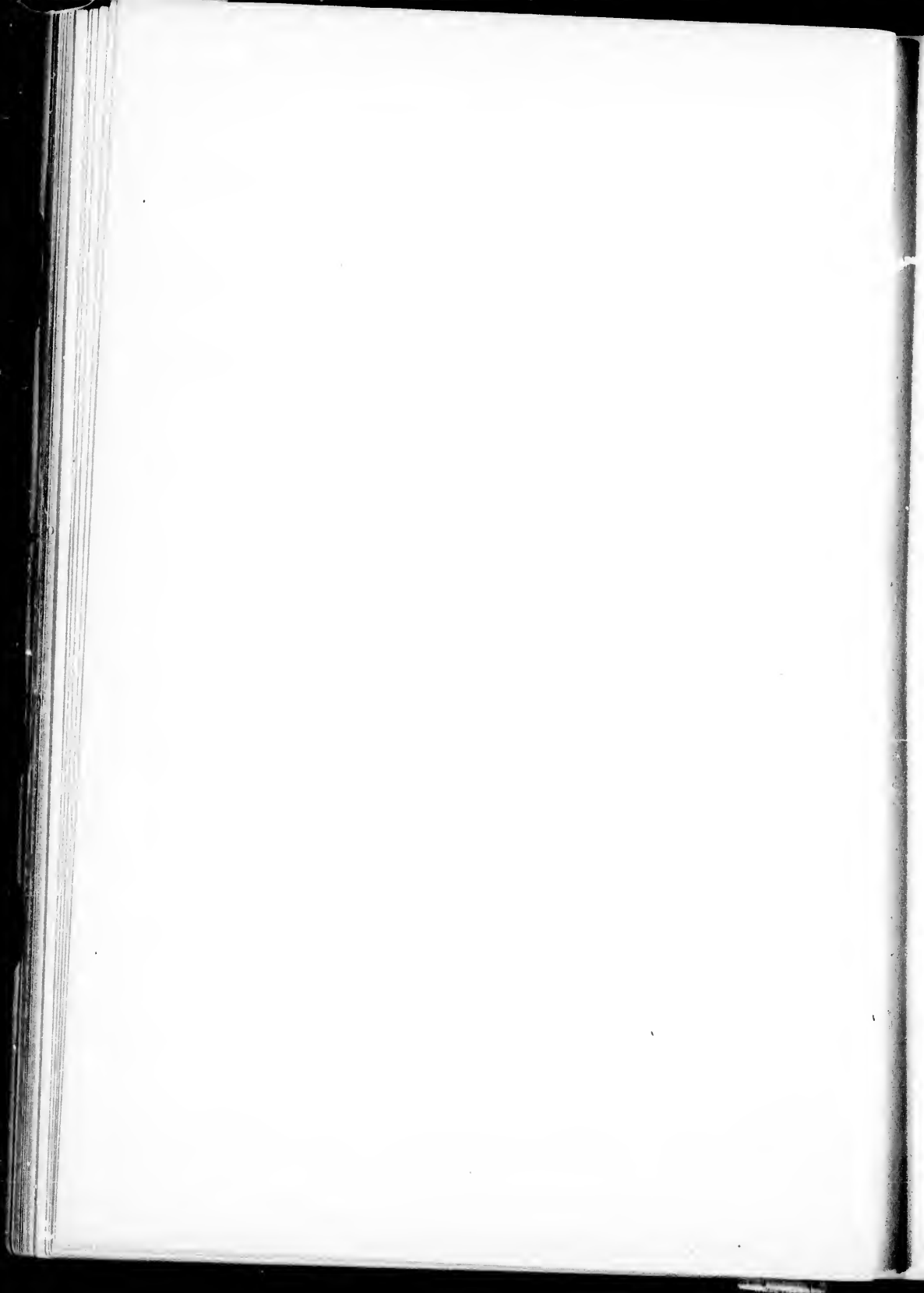
Rather "be ye transfigured," and then you will find that when the inner mind is changed, many of the things that attracted tempt no more, and many of the people that wanted to have you do not care to have you, for you spoil their sport and are a wet blanket to their amusements and enjoyments. Do you deepen the life of Christ in your hearts, and see to it that day by day the influence of His sweet love is more and more manifest in your nature, and then of itself this nonconformity to the world's maxims and the world's fashion will certainly come.

Unless our unlikeness to the world is the result of our growing likeness to Christ, it is of little value. It is useless to preach unworldliness to men unless they have Christ in their hearts. The great means of becoming unlike the world is becoming like Him, and the great means of becoming like Him is living near Him and drinking in His life and Spirit. So we shall be delivered from the world's tyranny.

So, dear brethren, a great hope is offered to every man ; even the foolishest, the weakest, the most vile and degraded. There is nobody so deeply stamped with the mark and superscription of the Beast, but that it may be erased from his forehead, and printed there the sign and the token of the Lamb. We cannot, by any effort, mould our

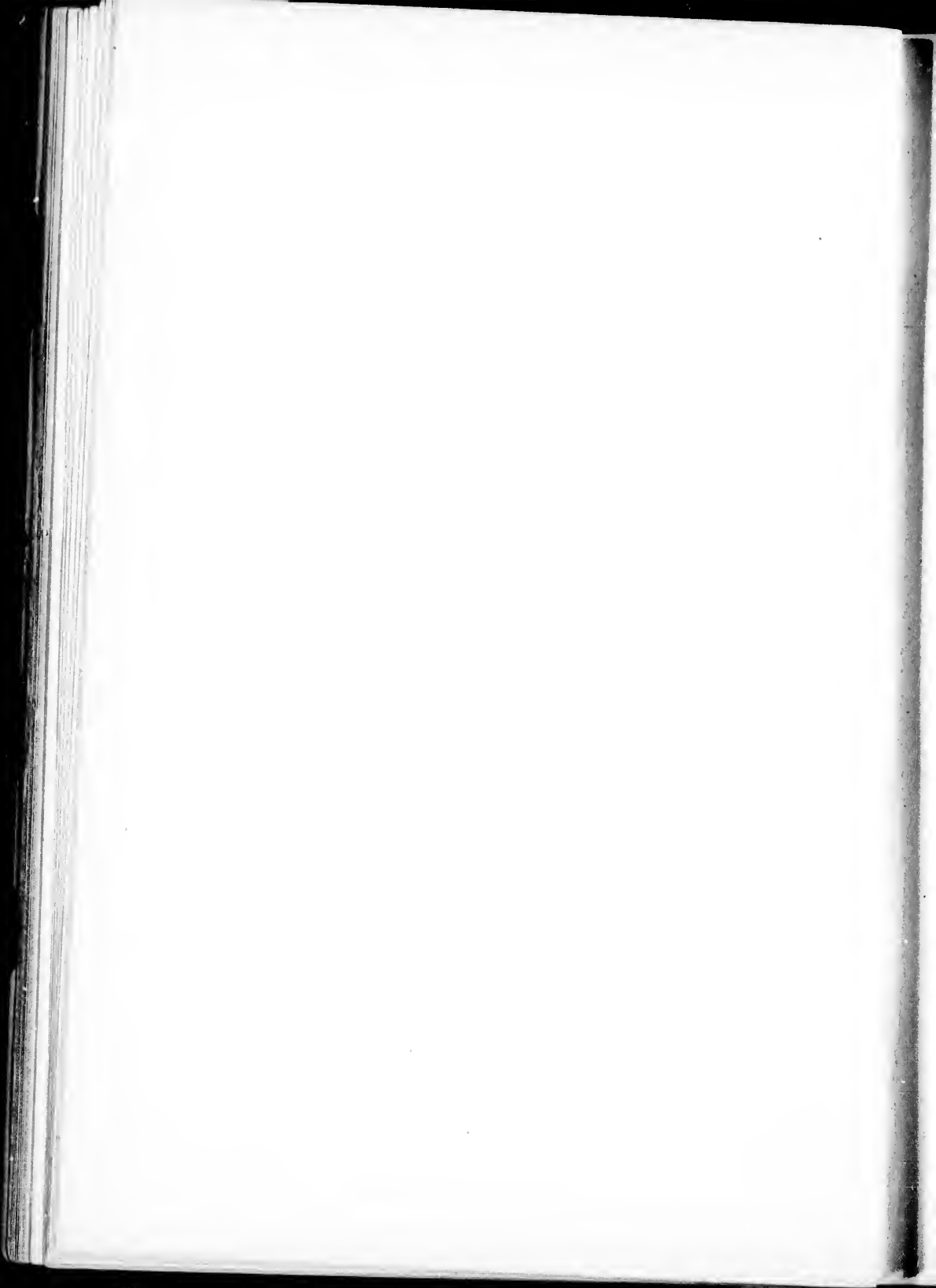
natures afresh. But we can open our hearts to the entrance of Christ's transforming life. That will change all the hard, obstinate nature, as a furnace conquers the masses of ore cast into it until they become fluid in proportion as they absorb the heat. So we may be melted by the love and moulded into the likeness of our Lord.

We should widen our expectations to the magnificent sweep of His promise. "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." But we must begin by opening our hearts to the heaven which shall work onward and outwards till it has changed all. Let us gaze on Him in love and faith, till, looking, we become like Him. The sun when it shines upon a mirror makes the mirror shine like a little sun. "We all with open face, reflecting as a mirror does the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image."



SERMON III.

FROM THE DEPTHS TO THE HEIGHTS.



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FROM THE DEPTHS TO THE HEIGHTS.

"1. Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. 2. Lord hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. 3. If Thou, Lord shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord! who shall stand? 4. But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. 5. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. 6. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. 7. Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. 8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."—Psalm cxxx.

THIS psalm gives us what we may call the ascent of the soul from the depths to the heights.

It is "a song of degrees," as the heading tells us, that is, a "song of *goings up*." Whatever that very enigmatical phrase may mean, there is a sense in which this Psalm, at any rate, is distinctly a song of ascent, in that it starts from the very lowest point of self-abasement and consciousness of evil, and rises steadily and, though it may be slowly, yet surely, up to the tranquil summit, led by a consciousness of the Divine Presence and grace.

Let us, then, read the Psalm over this morning, and try to bring out some little of its depth and beauty. It falls very clearly into four portions, of a couple of verses each. The first of them is a cry from the depths. Then in the second and third verses we have the second rung of the ladder, as it were, or stage of ascent. That great yearning for God is for a moment checked by a dark thought,

which, however, being overcome, issues into a blessed bright assurance. The man has been crying to God, and he stops ; his voice is, as it were, blown back into his own throat when he thinks this—"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord ! who shall stand ?" And then we must insert a thought that is not expressed in the Psalm. "But Thou *dost not* so mark iniquity." "*For*," as the little word at the beginning of verse iv. would be more accurately rendered, "there is forgiveness with Thee, that thou mayest be feared." So the dark thought is overwhelmed and drowned, as it were, in the great, glad confidence—"There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared."

And then, after the appropriation, in this great act of confidence and faith, of the great truth of God's forgiving mercy, there comes the third step in the ladder, also expressed in a couple of verses : "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning : I say, more than they that watch for the morning." That is to say, there we get the permanent, peaceful dependence upon God, of the spirit that has tasted His forgiving mercy. Conscious dependence, blessed tranquillity, fixed reliance upon God's faithful Word, and an absorbing desire for more and more of the light which alone can scatter the darkness of fear and guilt and sin—these are the third step on the ladder.

And then the fourth, likewise expressed in a couple of verses, is what I may call the missionary call from the depths of personal experience of God's forgiving mercy :—"Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his transgressions." Up on the summit of that great hope, which belongs to all Israel, of a complete, an all-embracing deliverance and redemption, the Psalmist stands with the sunshine about him, having

climbed steadily from that low, abject condition of consciousness of his sin and evil.

So much, then, for the outline of the course of thought that lies here. And now let me just say a word or two about each of these steps.

I.—We have the cry from the depths.

What depths? The psalmist thinks of himself as of a man at the bottom of a pit, sending up to the surface a faint call which may easily be unheard. He has some sense of the height to which his voice must rise, and as he catches a glimpse of the exalted Lord, he feels how far below he is. Measured by the height of that throne "high from the beginning," all men are in the depths. But he does not merely mean to express his sense of human insignificance, nor even his sorrows, nor his despondency. There are deeper pits than these, so deep that these are by comparison but dimples on the surface, and a man never truly cries to God till he has been down into the deepest of them.

The depths which the Psalmist here means are away down far below these shallow ones. They are the depths into which the spirit feels itself going down, sick and giddy, when there comes the thought, "I am a sinful man, O Lord, in the presence of Thy great purity." Out of these depths does he cry to God.

Now, three remarks are all I have time to make on this matter:—

First, the depths are the place for us all. Every man amongst us has to go down there, if we take the place that belongs to us.

The next thing is—Unless you have cried to God out of these depths you have never cried to Him at all. Unless you come to Him as a penitent sinful man, with the consciousness of transgression awakened within you, your prayers are shallow.

Or, to put it into other words, the beginning of all true personal religion lies in the sense of my own sin and my lost condition. Why, the difference between the tepid, superficial religion that so many of you have—and true religion consists a great deal more in this than in anything else—that in the one case a sense of sin has been awakened, and in the other it has not. The reason why multitudes of people who formally call themselves Christians have such a slight hold of Christian truth, and why the Gospel has so small a power over them, is because they have never found out, in any real sense of the word, that they are sinful men.

You *say* it no doubt. You breathe out formal confessions. Have you ever been down into the depths, brother? If you have not, this psalm may teach you that you have never cried to God. It is a very easy-going kind of religion, and so it is a very fashionable kind, which diminishes the importance of the fact of sin; and it is not only a very easy-going one, but a very impotent one. I believe, for my part, that as far as creed is concerned, one main reason of the larger number of the misapprehensions and waterings-down of the full-toned Christian truth which we see round us, is that men have not appreciated the importance, as a factor in their theology, of the doctrine of sin. And so far as practice is concerned, one main reason why the prevalent religion is such a poor, flabby, impotent thing is the same. If a man does not think much about sin, he does not think much about a Divine Saviour. And wherever you find a conception of Christianity which makes light of the Divinity or of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the reason for that error lies very largely in this other one—an under-estimate of the importance of the fact of sin.

Wherever you find men and women with a Christianity that sits very lightly upon them, that does not impel them to

any acts of service and devotion, that seldom breaks out into any heroisms of self-surrender, and never rises into the heights of communion with God, depend upon it that the roots of it are to be found here, that the man has never been down into the abyss and never sent his voice up from it as some man that had tumbled down a coalpit might fling a despairing call up to the surface, in the hope that somebody wandering past the mouth of it might hear the cry. "Out of the depths" he has not cried unto God.

And the third thought about this first part is that you want nothing more than a cry to draw you from the pit. If out of the depths you cry, you will cry yourself out of the depths. Here is a man at the foot of a cliff that rises beetling like a black wall behind him, the sea in front, the bare, upright rock at his back; not a foothold for a mouse between the tide at the bottom and the grass at the top. What is he to do? There is only one thing—he can shout. Perchance somebody will hear him, a rope may come dangling down in front of him; and if he has nerve he may shut his eyes and make a spring and catch it.

There is no way for you up out of the pit, brother, but to cry to God, and that will bring a rope down. Nay, rather, the rope is there. Your grasping the rope and your cry are one. "Ask, and ye shall receive!" God has let down the fulness of His forgiving love in Jesus Christ our Lord, and all that we need is the call, which is likewise faith, which accepts while it desires, and desires in its acceptance; and then we are lifted up "out of the horrible pit and the miry clay," and our feet are set upon a rock, and our goings established.

We have all to go down into the depths if we would understand ourselves. If we have not cried out of the depths we have never cried at all. Religion begins with penitence. A cry is all that is needed to bring us out of the depths. That is the first step on this ladder.

II.—And now as to the second. We have here a dark fear and a bright assurance. As I said, the man's prayer is, as it were, blown back into his throat by the thought, "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord! who shall stand?" And then—as if he *would not* be swept away from his confidence even by this great blast of cold air from out of the North, that comes like ice and threatens to chill his hope to death—"But," says he, "there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mightest be feared." So these two halves represent the struggle in the man's mind. They are like a sky, one half of which is piled with thunder-clouds, and the other serenely blue. To "mark iniquities" is to impute them to us. The word, in the original, means to *watch*, that is to say, to remember in order to punish. If a man be regarded by God's eye through the mist of his sins, they turn the bright sun of God's own light into a red-hot, flaming ball of fire. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities,"—that is, shouldest take them into account in Thy thoughts and dispositions and dealings towards us,—“O Lord! who shall stand? Here, then, we have expressed the profound sense of the impossibility of any man's sustaining the righteous judgment of God. "Who shall stand," exclaimed a prophet, "when He appeareth?" "Who may stand in Thy sight," cried a psalmist, "when once Thou art angry?" Like a man having to yield ground to an eager enemy, or to bend before the blast, every man has to bow before that flashing brightness and to own that retribution would be destruction.

I do not wish to bring exaggerated charges. But has not every man moments in which he knows that remorse is not too strong a word to apply to what should be his feelings about his past? I do not charge you with vices or with crimes. I do not say there are no moral distinctions amongst men outside the pale of Christianity. I would

not say, as St. Augustine said, "That the virtues of the heathen were splendid vices." At least I should want to talk a page and a half of commentary if I did adopt the phrase; but I ask you, Is not this true, that you know that there is an awful difference between what you ought to be and what you are?

Do we not all know that our characters and our lives have been, as it were, distorted, that our moral nature has been marred with animal lusts, and that ambitions and worldly desires have come in and prevented us from following the law of conscience? Is not that very conscience, more or less distorted, drugged and dormant? And is not all this largely voluntary? Do we not feel, in spite of all pleas about circumstances and "heredity," that we could have helped being what we are? And do we not feel that, after all, if there be such a thing as God's judgment and retribution, it must come down on us with terrible force? That is what our psalm means when it says that if God be strict to mark iniquities there is not one of us that can stand before Him; and we know it is true. You may be a very respectable man; that is not the question. You may have kept your hands clear from anything that would bring you within the sweep of the law; that has nothing to do with this matter. You may have subdued animal passions, been sober, temperate, chaste, generous—a hundred other things. Our congregations are not made up, as a rule, of reprobates, but they *are* made up, as a rule, of two classes—one of sinful men that have a little found out how sinful they are, and who are trying to trust in God's mercy in Jesus Christ, and so to get better, and the other of Pharisees, who have never been down into the depths of their own hearts, nor caught a glimpse of their own evil; but who listen to all the warnings and pleadings of the Gospel and never think that they have any personal interest in them, but are

actually coated over with a water-proofing from their very knowledge of the truth which prevents the truth telling on them, and think themselves all right because they come to church or chapel on a Sunday, and do not go for a walk in the fields with a dog at their heels.

Ah ! dear friends, gross, palpable sin slays its thousands, and that clean, respectable, ghastly purity of a godless, self-complacent morality, I do believe, slays its tens of thousands. "The publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you !" Not because they are better, but because—poor wretches ! God help them !—they know that there is nothing in their lives that they can plume themselves upon. And you, not because your goodness is not goodness of a sort, but because you are building upon it, and think that such words as those of my text go clean over your heads—you are in this perilous position.

Oh ! dear friends ! will you go home to-day and take ten minutes at your own home quietly to think over that verse of my psalm, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand !" Can I ? CAN I ?

That is the thundery side of the sky, and it makes all the more tender the sapphire blue of the other side :—"But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." No man ever comes to that confidence that has not sprung to it, as it were, by a rebound from the other thought. It needs, first of all, that the heart should have tremblingly entertained the contrary hypothesis, in order that the heart should spring to the relief and the gladness of the counter truth. It must first have felt the shudder of the thought, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities" in order to come to the gladness of the thought, "But there is forgiveness with Thee !

"Forgiveness !" The word so translated here in my text has for its literal meaning, "cutting-off," "excision."

And so it suggests the notion of taking a man's sin, that great black deformity that has grown upon his soul, and cutting it clean out with a merciful amputating knife. You know that doctors sometimes say, "Well, the only salvation of him would be an operation, but the tumour has got so implicated with the vital tissues that it would scarcely be possible to apply the knife." That is what the world says, and that is what philosophy says, and modern pessimism says, about my sin, and your sin, and the world's sin. "No! we cannot operate; we cannot cut out the cankerous tumour." Christianity says, "Miserable physicians are ye all; stand aside!" and it removes the malignant growth by a mighty and wondrous act of God's Divine mercy and Infinite power and love, in the Cross of Jesus Christ, which separates between man and his disease, and cuts it out, leaving him the more living after the amputation of that which was killing him. The world thinks the disease to be a bit of the man that cannot be got rid of. No, says the Gospel; it can all be swept away through God's forgiveness.

Men may say, "There cannot be forgiveness; you cannot alter consequences." But forgiveness has not to do only with consequences; but also and chiefly with the personal relation between me and God, and that can be altered. A judge pardons when he remits penalties. A father forgives though he sometimes chastises.

If a man has sinned, his whole life thereafter will be different from what it would have been if he had not sinned. I know that well enough. You cannot, by any pardon, alter the past, and make it not to be. I know that well enough. The New Testament doctrine and the Old Testament hope of forgiveness do not assert that you can, but say that you and God can get right with one another. A *person* can pardon. We have not merely to do with impersonal laws; we have not only to do with "the mill of

God—"that grinds slowly," but with God Himself. There is such a thing as the pardon of God. His love will come to a man free, unembittered, and will not be dammed back by transgressions, if the man will go and say, "Father! I have sinned! forgive for Thy dear Son's sake. There is forgiveness with Thee!"

And that forgiveness lies at the root of all true godliness. No man reverences, and loves, and draws near to God so rapturously, so humbly, as the man that has learned pardon through Jesus Christ. My dear friend believe this; your religion must have for its foundation the assurance of God's pardoning mercy in Christ, or it will have no firm and deep foundation at all. I press that upon you, and ask you this one question: Is the basis of your religion the sense that God has forgiven you freely all your iniquities? "There is forgiveness with Thee, *that Thou mayest be feared.*" That is the second step of this song of ascents.

III.—And now about the third stage of this ladder. "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope." There is the permanent, peaceful attitude of the spirit that has tasted the consciousness of forgiving love—a continual dependence upon God.

Like a man that has just recovered from some illness, but still leans upon the care, and feels his need of seeing the face of that skilful physician that has helped him through, there will be still, and always, the necessity for the continual application of that pardoning love. But they that have tasted that the Lord is gracious can sit very quietly at His feet and trust themselves to His kindly dealings, resting their souls upon His strong word, and looking for the fuller communication of light from Himself. This is a beautiful picture of a tranquil, continuous, ever-rewarded, and ever-fresh waiting upon Him, and reliance upon His mercy.

“More than they that watch for the morning.” That is beautiful! The consciousness of sin was the dark night. The coming of His forgiving love flushed all the eastern Heaven with diffused brightness that grew into perfect day. And so the man waits quietly for the dawn, and his whole soul is one absorbing desire that God may dwell with him, and brighten and gladden him.

IV.—I must not dwell upon these words, for I wish to say just a word about the last of the rounds of this ladder, in which the personal experience becomes general, and an evangel, a call upon the man’s lips to all his brethren. “Let Israel hope in the Lord.” There was no room for anything in his heart when he began this psalm except his own self in his misery, and that Great One high above him there. There was nobody in all the universe to him but himself and God, at his first cry from the depths.

There is nothing which isolates a man so awfully as a consciousness of sin and of his relation to God. But there is nothing that so knits him to all his fellows, and brings him into such wide-reaching bonds of amity and benevolence, as the sense of God’s forgiving mercy for his own soul. So the call bursts from the lips of the pardoned man, inviting all to taste the experience and exercise the trust which have made him glad: “Let Israel hope in the Lord.”

And then look at the broad Gospel that he has attained to know and to preach. “For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is redemption.” Not only forgiveness, but redemption—and that from every form of sin. It is “plenteous”—multiplied, as the word might be rendered. Our Lord has taught us to what a sum that Divine multiplication amounts. Not once, nor twice, but “seventy times seven” is the prescribed measure of human forgiveness, and shall men be more placable than God! The perfect numbers, seven and ten are multiplied together,

and that again increased sevenfold, to make a numerical symbol for the Innumerable, and to bring the Infinite within the terms of the Finite. It is inexhaustible redemption, not to be provoked, not to be overcome by any obstinacy of evil—available for all, available for every grade and every repetition of transgression. "Mine iniquities are more than the hairs of my head," confesses another Psalmist, but almost in the same breath he tells us of God's loving thoughts, which are still more numerous than the hairs of his head—"If I would declare and speak of *them*, they are more than can be numbered." That forgiving grace is older and mightier than all sins, and is able to conquer them all. As when an American prairie for hundreds of miles is smoking in the autumn fires, nothing that man can do can cope with it. But the clouds gather and down comes the rain, and there is water enough in the sky to put out the fire. And so God's inexhaustible mercy, streaming down upon the lurid smoke-pillars of man's transgression, and that alone is enough to quench the flame of a man's and of a world's transgression, though heated from the lowest hell.

"With Him is plenteous redemption ; He shall redeem Israel from *all* his iniquities." That is the Old Testament prophecy. Let me leave on your hearts the New Testament fulfilment of it. The Psalmist said, "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." He was sure of that, and his soul was at "peace in believing" it. But there were mysteries about it which he could not understand. He lived in the twilight dawn, and he and all his fellows had to watch for the morning, of which they saw but the faint promise in the Eastern sky. The sun is risen for us—"Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." That is the fulfilment, the vindication, and explanation of the Psalmist's hope. Lay hold on Christ, and He will lift you out of the depths, and set you upon the sunny heights of the Mountain of God.

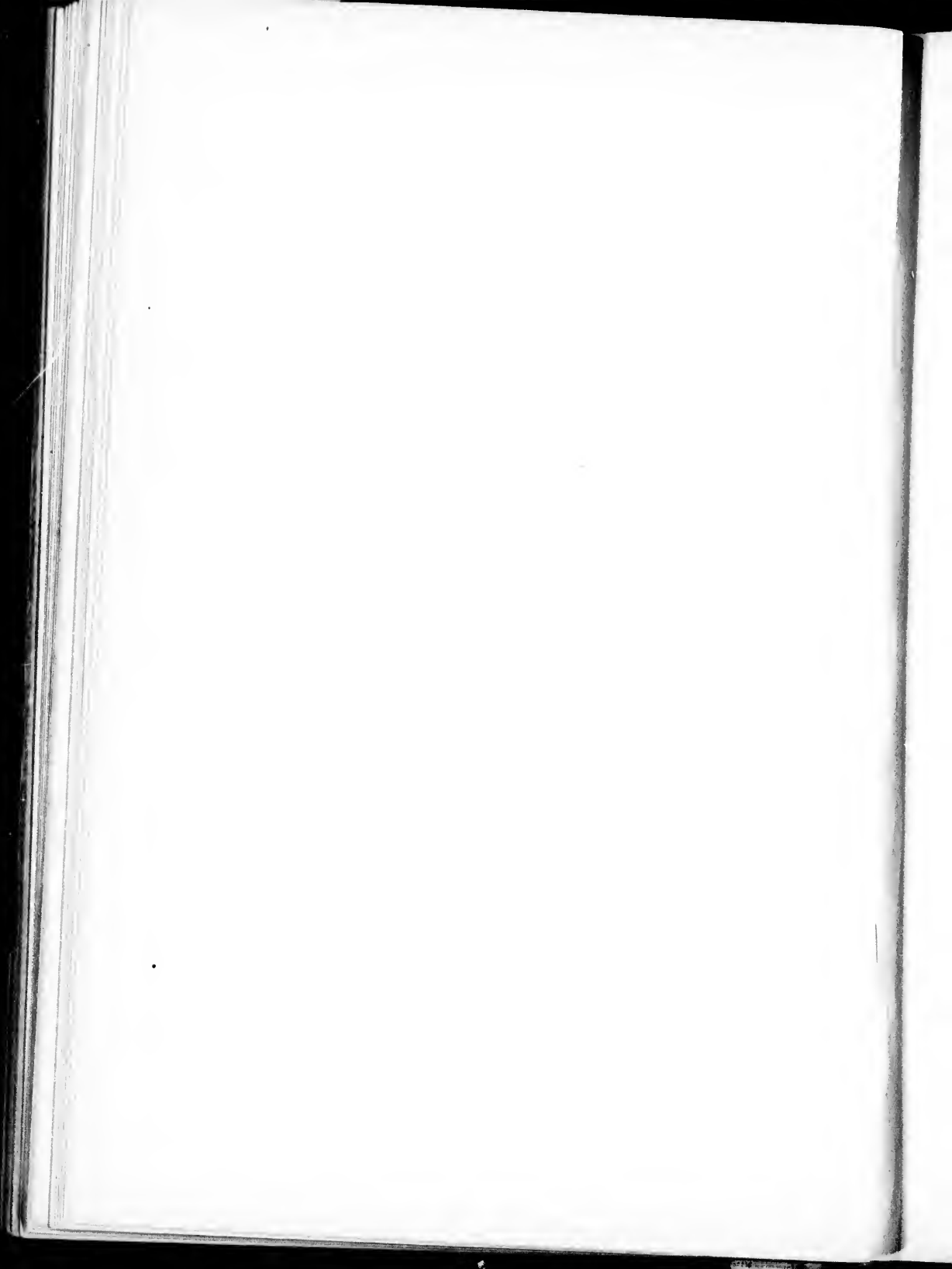
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SERMON IV.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN.

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SERMON IV.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN.

"They compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His Cross." Mark xv. 21.

How little these people knew that they were making this man immortal! What a strange fate that is which has befallen those persons in the Gospel narrative, who for an instant came into contact with Jesus Christ. Like ships passing athwart the white ghostlike splendour of the moonlight on the sea, they gleam silvery pure for a moment as they cross its broad belt and then are swallowed up again in the darkness.

This man Simon, fortuitously, as men say, meeting the little procession at the gate of the city, for an instant is caught in the radiance of the light, and stands out visible for evermore to all the world; and then sinks into the blackness, and we know no more about him. This brief glimpse tells us very little, and yet the man and his act and its consequences may be worth thinking about.

He was a Cyrenian; that is, he was a Jew by descent, probably born, and certainly resident, for purposes of com-

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merce, in Cyrene, on the North African coast of the Mediterranean. No doubt he had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover ; and like very many of the strangers who flocked to the Holy City for the feast, met some difficulty in finding accommodation in the city, and so was obliged to go and lodge in one of the outlying villages. From this lodging he is coming in, in the morning, knowing nothing about Christ nor His trial, knowing nothing of what he is about to meet, and happens to see the procession as it is passing out of the gate. He is, by the centurion impressed to help the fainting Christ to carry the heavy Cross. He probably thought Christ a common criminal, and would resent the task laid upon him by the rough authority of the officer in command. But he was gradually touched into some kind of sympathy ; drawn closer and closer, as we suppose, as he looked upon this dying meekness ; and at last, yielding to the soul-conquering power of Christ.

Tradition says so, and the reasons for supposing that it may be so may be very simply stated. The description of him in our text as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" shows that, by the time when Mark wrote, his two sons were members of the Christian community, and had attained some eminence in it. A Rufus is mentioned in the salutations in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, as being "elect in the Lord," that is to say, "eminent," and his mother is associated in the greeting, and commended as having been motherly to Paul as well as to Rufus. Now, if we remember that Mark's Gospel was probably written in Rome, and for Roman Christians, the conjecture seems a very reasonable one that the Rufus here was the Rufus of the Epistle to the Romans. If so, it would seem that the family had been gathered into the fold of the Church, and in all probability, therefore, the father with them.

Then there is another little morsel of possible evidence which may just be noticed. We find in the Acts of the

Apostles, in the list of the prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch, a "Simon, who is called Niger" (that is black, the hot African sun having tanned his countenance, perhaps), and side by side with him one "Lucius of Cyrene," from which place we know that several of the original brave preachers to the Gentiles in Antioch came. It is *possible* that this may be our Simon, and that he who was the last to join the band of disciples during the Master's life and learned courage at the Cross was among the first to apprehend the world-wide destination of the Gospel, and to bear it beyond the narrow bounds of his nation.

At all events, I think we may, with something like confidence, believe that his glimpse of Christ on that morning and his contact with the suffering Saviour ended in his acceptance of Him as his Christ, and in his bearing in a truer sense the Cross after Him.

And so I seek now to gather some of the lessons that seem to me to arise from this incident.

I.—First, the greatness of trifles. If that man had started from the little village where he lived five minutes earlier or later, if he had walked a little faster or slower, if he had happened to be lodging on the other side of Jerusalem, or if the whim had taken him to go in at another gate, or if the centurion's eye had not chanced to alight on him in the crowd, or if the centurion's fancy had picked out somebody else to carry the cross, then all his life would have been different.

And so it is always. You go down one turning rather than another, and your whole career is coloured thereby. You miss a train, and you escape death. Our lives are like the Cornish rocking stones, pivoted on little points. The most apparently insignificant things have a strange knack of suddenly developing unexpected consequences, and turning out to be, not small things at all, but great and decisive and fruitful.

Let us then look with ever fresh wonder on this marvelous contexture of human life, and on Him that moulds it all to His own perfect purposes. Let us bring the highest and largest principles to bear on the smallest events and circumstances, for you can never tell which of these is going to turn out a revolutionary and formative influence in your life. And if the highest Christian principle is not brought to bear upon the trifles, depend upon it it will never be brought to bear upon the mighty things. The most part of every life is made up of trifles, and unless these are ruled by the highest motives, life, which is divided into grains like the sand, will have gone by, while we are preparing for the big events which we think worthy of being regulated by lofty principles. Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.

Look after the trifles, for the law of life is like that which is laid down by the Psalmist about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ: "There shall be a handful of corn in the earth," a little seed sown in an apparently ungenial place "on the top of the mountains." Ay! but this will come of it, "The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon," and the great harvest of benediction or of curse, of joy or of sorrow, will come from the minute seeds that are sown in the *great* trifles of your daily life.

Let us learn the lesson, too, of quiet confidence in Him in Whose hands the whole puzzling, overwhelming mystery lies. If a man once begins to think of how utterly incalculable the consequences of the smallest and most commonplace of his deeds may be, how they may run out into all eternity, and like divergent lines, may enclose a space that gets larger and wider the further they travel; if, I say, a man once begins to indulge in thoughts like these, it is difficult for him to keep himself calm and sane at all, unless he believes in the great living Providence that lies above all, and shapes the vicissitude and mystery

of life. We can leave all in His hands—and if we are wise we shall do so—to Whom *great* and *small* are terms that have no meaning; and Who looks upon men's lives, not according to the apparent magnitude of the deeds with which they are filled, but simply according to the motive from which, and the purpose towards which, these deeds were done.

II.—Then, still further, take this other lesson, which lies very plainly here—the blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ. If you turn to the story of the Crucifixion, in John's Gospel, you will find that the narratives of the three other Gospels are, in some points supplemented by it. In reference to our Lord's bearing of the Cross, we are informed by John that when He left the Judgment Hall He was carrying it Himself, as was the custom with criminals under the Roman law. The heavy cross was laid on the shoulder, at the intersection of its arms and stem, one of the arms hanging down in front of the bearer's body, and the long upright trailing behind.

Apparently our Lord's physical strength, sorely tried by a night of excitement and the hearings in the High Priest's Palace, and before Pilate, as well as by the scourging, was unequal to the task of carrying, albeit for that short passage, the heavy weight. And there is a little hint of that sort in the context. In the verse before my text we read, "they led Jesus out to crucify Him," and in the verse after, "they bring," or *bear* "Him to the place Golgotha," as if, when the procession began, they led Him, and before it ended they had to carry Him, His weakness having become such that He Himself could not sustain the weight of His cross or of His own enfeebled limbs. So, with some touch of pity in their rude hearts, or more likely with professional impatience of delay, and wanting to get their task over, the soldiers lay hold of this stranger, press him into the service and make him carry the heavy upright, which

trailed on the ground behind Jesus. And so they pass on to the place of execution.

Very reverently, and with few words, one would touch upon the physical weakness of the Master. Still, it does not do us any harm to try to realise how very marked was the collapse of His physical nature, and to remember that that collapse was not entirely owing to the pressure upon Him of the mere fact of physical death ; and that it was still less a failure of His will, or like the abject cowardice of some criminals who have had to be dragged to the scaffold, and helped up its steps ; but that the reason why His flesh failed was very largely because there was laid upon Him the mysterious burden of the world's sin.

Christ's demeanour in the act of death, in such singular contrast to the calm heroism and strength of hundreds who have drawn all their heroism and strength from Him, suggests to us that, looking upon His sufferings, we look upon something the significance of which does not lie on the surface ; and the extreme pressure of which is to be accounted for by that blessed and yet solemn truth of prophecy and Gospel alike—"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

But, apart from that, which does not enter properly into my present contemplations, let us remember that though changed in form, very truly and really in substance, this blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ is given to us ; and is demanded from us, too, if we are His disciples. He is despised and set at nought still. He is crucified afresh still. There are plenty of men in this day who scoff at Him, mock Him, deny His claims, seek to cast Him down from His throne, rebel against His dominion. It is an easy thing to be a disciple when all the crowd is crying "Hosanna!" It is a much harder thing to be a disciple when the crowd, or even when the influential cultivated opinion of a generation is crying "Crucify Him !

Crucify Him!" And some of you Christian men and women have to learn the lesson that if you are to be Christians you must be Christ's companions when His back is at the wall as well as when men are exalting and honouring Him; that it is your business to confess Him when men deny Him, to stand by Him when men forsake Him, to avow Him when the avowal is likely to bring contempt upon you from some people; and thus, in a very real sense, to bear His Cross after Him. "Let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach;"—the tail end of His Cross. It is the lightest! He has borne the heaviest end on His own shoulders; but we have to ally ourselves with that suffering and despised Christ if we are to be His disciples.

I do not dwell upon the lesson often drawn from this story, as if it taught us to "take up *our* cross daily and follow Him." That is another matter, and yet is closely connected with that about which I speak, but what I say is, Christ's Cross has to be carried to-day; and if we have not found out that it has, let us ask ourselves if we are Christians at all. There will be hostility, alienation, a comparative coolness, and absence of a full sense of sympathy with you, in many people, if you are a true Christian. You will come in for a share of contempt from the wise and the cultivated of this generation, as in all generations. The mud that is thrown after the Master will spatter your faces too, to some extent; and if we are walking with Him we shall share, to the extent of our communion with Him, in the feelings with which many men regard Him. Stand to your colours! Do not be ashamed of Him in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

And there is yet another way too, in which this honour of helping the Lord is given to us. As in His weakness He needed someone to aid Him to bear His Cross, so in His glory He needs our help to carry out the purposes for

which the Cross was borne. The paradox of a man carrying the Cross of Him Who carried the world's burden is repeated in another form too. He needs nothing, and yet He needs us. He needs nothing, and yet He needed that ass which was tethered at the place where two ways met, in order to ride into Jerusalem upon it. He does not need man's help, and yet He does need it, and He asks for it. And though He bore Simon the Cyrenean's sins "in His own body on the tree," He needed Simon the Cyrenean to help Him to bear the tree. He needs us to help Him to spread throughout the world the blessed consequences of that Cross and bitter Passion. So to us all is granted the honour, and from us all are required the sacrifice and the service of helping the suffering Saviour.

III.—Another of the lessons which may very briefly be drawn from this story is that of the perpetual recompense and record of the humblest Christian work. There were different degrees of criminality, and different degrees of sympathy with Him, if I may use the word, in that crowd that stood round the Master. The criminality varied from the highest degree of violent malignity in the Scribes and Pharisees, down to the lowest point of ignorance, and therefore all but entire innocence on the part of the Roman legionaries, who were merely the mechanical instruments of the order given, and stolidly "watched Him there," with eyes which saw nothing.

On the other hand, there were all grades of service, and help and sympathy, from the vague emotions of the crowd who beat their breasts, and the pity of the daughters of Jerusalem, the kindly-meant help of the soldiers, who would have moistened the parched lips, to the heroic love of the women at the Cross, whose ministry was not ended even with His life. But surely the most blessed share in that day's tragedy was reserved for Simon, whose bearing of the Cross may have been compulsory at first, but became,

ere it was ended, willing service. But whatever were the degrees of recognition of Christ's character, and of sympathy with the meaning of His sufferings, yet the smallest and most transient impulse of loving gratitude that went out towards Him was rewarded then, and is rewarded for ever, by blessed results in the heart that feels it.

Besides these, service for Christ is recompensed, as in the instance before us, by a perpetual memorial. How little Simon knew that "wherever in the whole world this Gospel was preached, there also, this that *he* had done should be told for a memorial of him!" How little he understood when he went back to his rural lodging that night, that he had written his name high up on the tablet of the world's memory, to be legible for ever. Why, men have fretted their whole lives away to get what this man got, and knew nothing of—one line in the chronicle of fame.

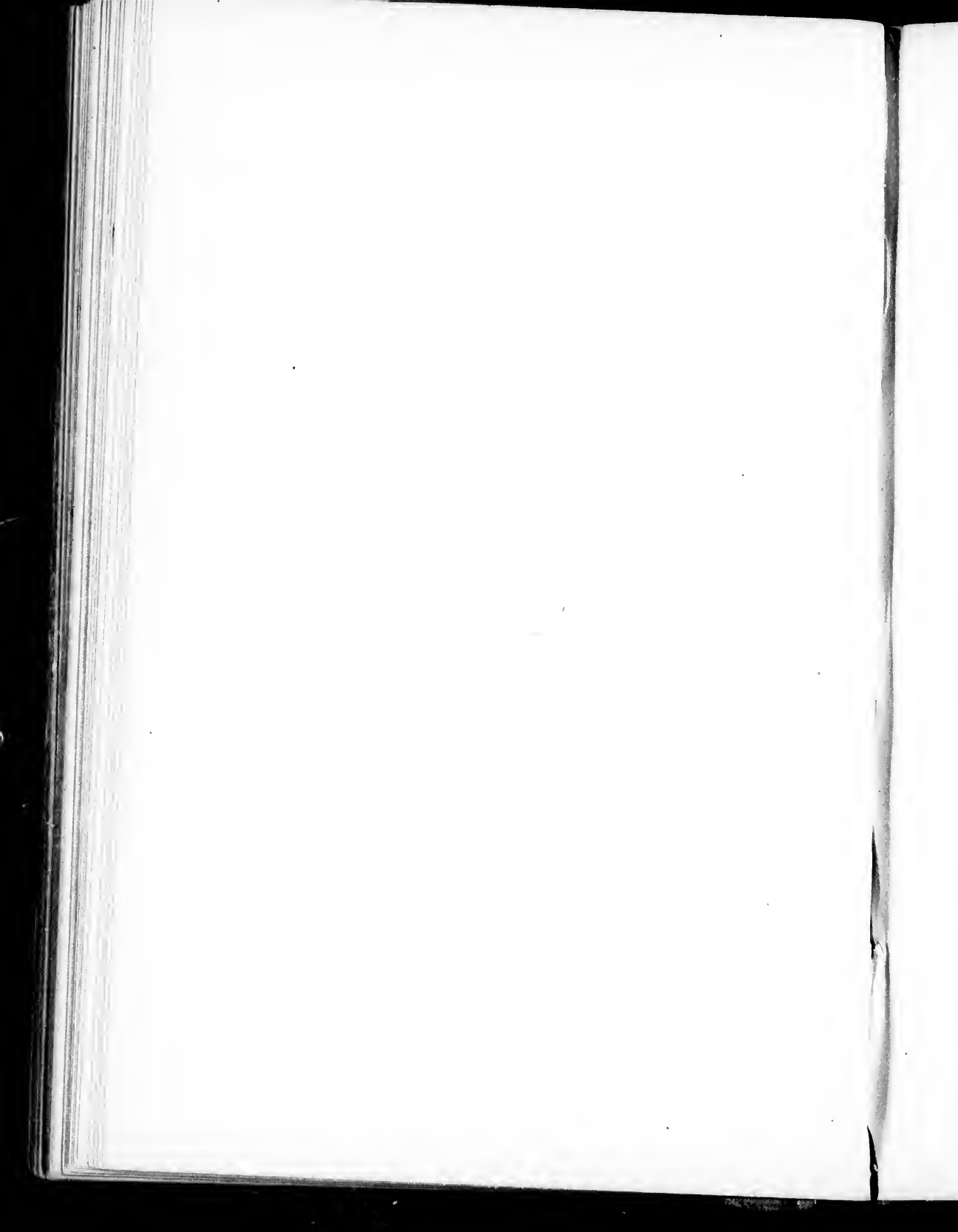
So we may say, it shall be always, "I will never forget any of their works." We may not leave them inscribed in any records that men can read. What of that, if they are written in letters of light in the "Lamb's Book of Life," to be read out by Him before His Father, and the holy angels in that last great day? We may not leave any separable traces of our services, any more than the little brook that comes down some gully on the hillside flows separate from its sisters, with whom it has coalesced, in the bed of the great river or in the rolling, boundless ocean. What of that so long as the work, in its consequences, shall last? Men that sow some great prairie broadcast cannot go into the harvest field and say, "I sowed the seed from which that ear came, and you the seed from which this one sprang." But the waving abundance belongs to them all, and each may be sure that his work survives and is glorified there; "that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." So a perpetual remembrance is sure for the smallest Christian service.

IV.—The last thing that I would say is, let us learn from this incident the blessed results of contact with the suffering Christ. Simon the Cyrenian apparently knew nothing about Jesus Christ when the Cross was laid on his shoulders. He would be reluctant to undertake the humiliating task, and would plod along behind Him for a while, sullen and discontented ; but by degrees he touched by more of sympathy, and get closer and closer to the Sufferer. And if he stood by the Cross when it was fixed, and saw all that transpired there, no wonder if, at last, after more or less protracted thought and search, he came to understand Who He was that he had helped, and to yield himself to Him wholly.

Yes ! dear brethren, Christ's great saying, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," began to be fulfilled when He began to be lifted up. The centurion, the thief, this man Simon, by looking on the Cross, learned the Crucified.

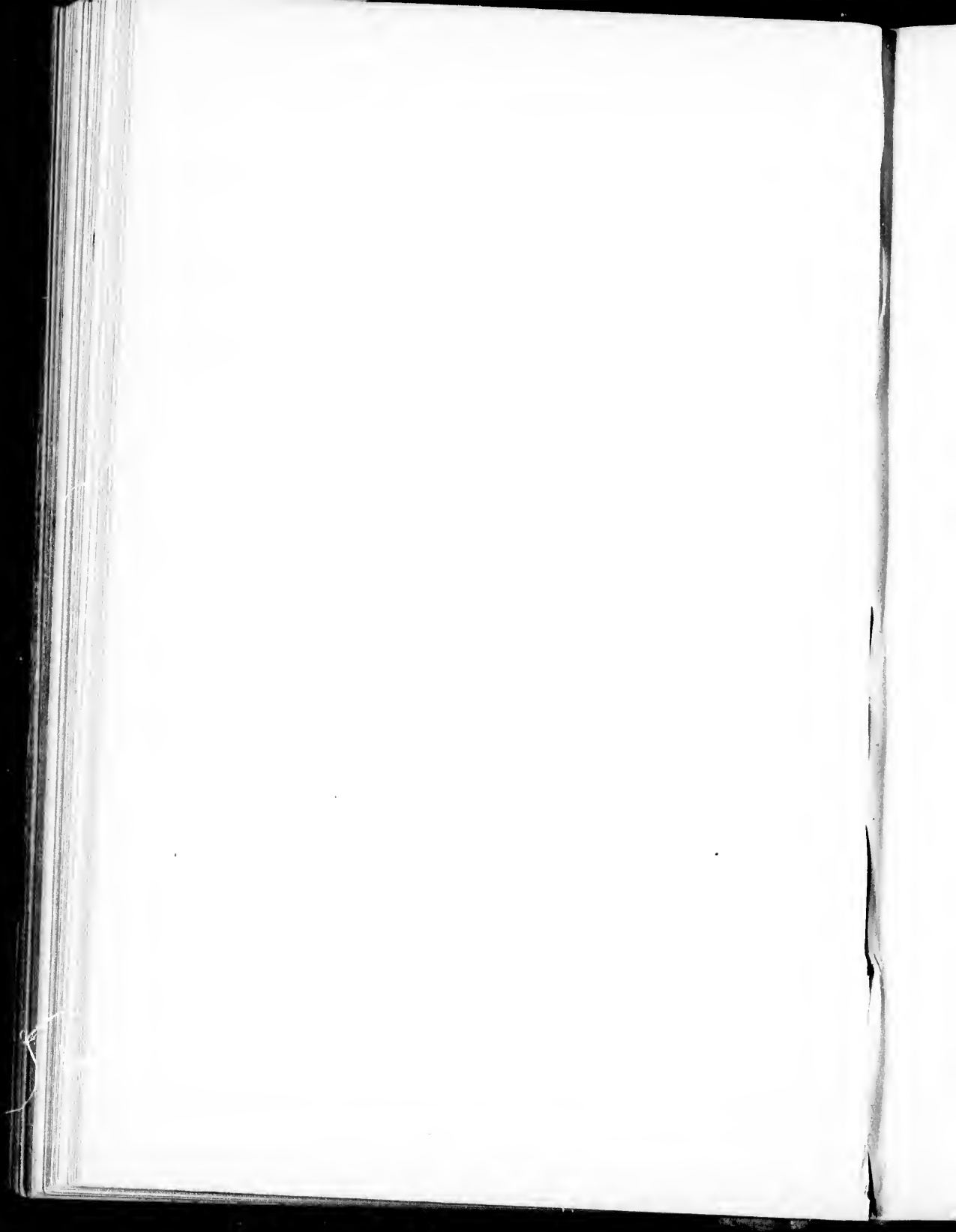
And it is the only way by which any of us will ever learn the true mystery and miracle of Christ's great and loving Being and work. I beseech you, take your places there behind Him, near His Cross ; gazing upon Him till your hearts melt, and you, too, learn that He is your Lord, and your Saviour, and your God. The Cross of Jesus Christ divides men into classes as the Last Day will. It, too, parts men—sheep to the right hand, goats to the left. If there was a penitent, there was an impenitent thief ; if there was a convinced centurion, there were gambling soldiers ; if there were hearts touched with compassion, there were mockers who took His very agonies and flung them in His face as a refutation of His claims. On the day when that Cross was reared on Calvary it began to be what it has been ever since, and is at this moment to every soul who hears the gospel, "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." Contact with the suffering

Christ will either bind you to His service, and fill you with His Spirit, or it will harden your hearts, and make you tenfold more selfish—that is to say, “tenfold more a child of hell,” than you were before you saw and heard of that Divine meekness of the suffering Christ. Look to Him, I beseech you, who bears what none can help Him to carry, the burden of the world’s sin. Let Him bear yours, and yield to Him your grateful obedience, and then take up your cross daily, and bear the light burden of self-denying service to Him, who has borne the heavy load of sin for you and all mankind.



SERMON V.

THE PATIENT MASTER AND THE SLOW
SCHOLARS.



SERMON V.

THE PATIENT MASTER AND THE SLOW SCHOLARS.

"Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" John xiv. 9.

THE Apostle Philip, like some others of the less important of the Apostolic band, appears only in this Gospel. The little that we know of him shows us his character with considerable clearness. He was the first whom Christ Himself called, and immediately on his obeying that call, he found Nathanael. You remember that his answer to Nathanael's doubt, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was "Come and see!" Sight was to him the great satisfying experience. He held fast by the maxim: "seeing is believing."

The same simple, matter of fact character comes out in the second reference to him, in connection with our Lord's miraculous feeding of the multitude with the "five barley loaves and the two small fishes." He singles out Philip to put to him the question, "Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?" The answer keeps close within the limits of the visible. He has no thought beyond a quick,

practical calculation, "So many people, so much bread, and so little money in our purses." A solid, steady, practical man, who was in the way of trusting his senses more than anything else, and who was not very familiar with any loftier region.

Then we find him put to perplexity by the desire of the heathen Greeks to see Christ, and not venturing to say anything about it to the Master, so dim was his conception of Him, until he had plucked up heart of grace by taking counsel with his fellow townsman Simon.

In the text, in precise harmony with all these indications of character, we get him breaking in upon our Lord's discourse with a request in which good and evil, right and wrong, are strangely blended: "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." He was right to the heart's core in believing that Jesus Christ could do that, and he was right, through and through, in believing that that would be enough for any man; but he was wrong in fancying that an outward, visible manifestation—which was what was running in his head—such as had been granted to prophets and lawgivers, was better, or more, than he had had for three years already. The thing that he was asking, in its highest form was there before him, and, while he thought so much of seeing, he had not been able to see it, though he had been staring at it for three years!

"Have I been so long with you, and yet thou hast not known Me?" That is the question which may well touch all our hearts, and bring us to our knees before Him. I purpose to look at this question, then, of our Lord's this morning in three ways:—First of all, as teaching us what ignorance of Christ is; second, as a wonderful glimpse into His pained and loving heart; and lastly, as a piercing question for us all.

I.—First, this question of our Lord's seems to me to carry in it a great lesson as to what ignorance of Christ is.

Why does our Lord charge Philip here with not knowing Him? Because Philip had said "Lord! show us the Father and it sufficeth us." And why was that question a betrayal of Philip's ignorance of Christ? Because it showed that he had not discerned Him as being "the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," and had not understood that "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Not knowing that, all his knowledge of Christ, howsoever tender and sweet it may have been, howsoever full of love, and reverence, and blind admiration—is but twilight knowledge, which may well be called ignorance.

I would press that one thought upon you, dear brethren, as plainly coming out of this question and underlying it—that not to know Christ as the manifest God is practically to be ignorant of Him altogether. This man asked for some visible manifestation, such as their old books told them had been granted to Moses on the mountain, to Isaiah in the temple, and to many another one besides.

But if such a revelation had been given—and Christ could have given it if He would—what a poor thing it would have been when put side by side with that mild and lambent light that was ever streaming from Him, making God visible to every sensitive and responsive nature! For these external manifestations for which Philip is here hungering, what could they show? They could show certain majestic, splendid, pompous, outside characteristics of God, but they could never show *God*, much less could they show "the Father." The revelation of Righteousness and Love could be entrusted to no flashing brightnesses, and to no thunders and lightnings. There can be no revelation of these things to the outward eye, but only to the heart, through the medium of a human life. For not the power which knows no weariness, not the eye which never closes, not the omniscience which holds all things, great and small, in its grasp, are the divinest glories

in God. These are but the fringe, the outermost parts of the circumference ; the living Centre is a Righteous Love, which cannot be revealed by any means but by showing it in action ; nor shown in action by any means so clearly as by a human life. Therefore, above all other forms of manifestations of God stands the Person of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh.

And let me remind you that this is His own claim, not once nor twice, not in this Gospel alone, but in a hundred other places. Some people tell us that the conception of our Lord Jesus Christ proper to John's Gospel as being the revelation of the Father, is peculiar to John's Gospel. Did you ever read these words in one of the others :—" No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him " ? It seems to me that if there is anything certain about Jesus Christ at all, it is certain that, whilst upon earth, He claimed habitually to be the visible manifestation of God, in a degree and in a manner wholly unlike that in which a pure, good, wise, righteous man may claim to shine with some reflected beams of Divine brightness. And we have to reckon and make our account with that, and shape our theology accordingly.

So we have to look upon all Christ's life as showing men the Father. His gentle compassion, His meek wisdom, His patience with contumely and wrong, His long-suffering yearning over men, His continual efforts to draw them to Himself,—all these are the full revelation of God to the world. They all reach their climax on the cross. As we look on Him, faint and bleeding, yet to the end pitying and saving, we see the full, final revelation of the very heart of God, and with adoring wonder, exclaim " Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us. "

There are some of you who admire and reverence this

great Teacher, this pure Humanity, who know much of Him, who seek to follow in His footsteps in some measure, but who stand outside that innermost circle wherein He manifests Himself as the God Incarnate, the Sacrifice, and the Saviour of the sins of the world. Whilst I thankfully admit that a man's relation to Christ may be a great deal deeper and more vital and blessed than his articulate creed, I am bound to say that not to know Him in this His very deepest and most essential character is little different from being ignorant of Him altogether.

Here is a great thinker or teacher, whose fame has filled the world, whose books are upon every student's shelf : he lives in a little remote country hamlet ; the cottagers beside him know him as a kind neighbour, and a sympathetic friend. They never heard of his books, they never heard of his thoughts, they do not know anything of his world-wide reputation, all over the world. Do you call that knowing him ? You do not know a man if you only know the surface, and not the secrets of his being.

You do not know a man if you only know the subordinate characteristics of his nature, but not the essential ones. The very inmost secret of Christ is this, that he is the Incarnate God, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

You may be disciples, in the imperfect sense in which these Apostles were disciples before the Cross, and the Resurrection, and the Ascension, imperfect disciples like them, but without their excuse for it. But oh ! brethren, you will never know Him until you know Him as the Eternal Word, and until you can say " We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. " Not seeing that, you see but as a dim speck, or a star a little brighter than its brethren that hang in the heavens of history, Him Who really is the Central Sun, from Whom all light comes, to Whom the

whole creation moves. If you know Him for the Incarnate Word and Lamb who bears the world's sin, you know Him for what He is. All the rest is most precious, most fair; but without that central truth, you have but a fragmentary Christ, and nothing less than the whole Christ is enough for you.

II.—Now, secondly, I take these words as giving us a glimpse into the pained and loving heart of our Lord. We very seldom hear Him speak about His own feelings or experience, and when He does it is always in some such incidental way as this. So that these glimpses, like little windows opening out upon some great prospect, are the more precious to us.

I think we shall not misunderstand the tone of this question if we see in it wonder, pained love, and tender remonstrance. "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" In another place we read:—"He marvelled at their unbelief." And here there is almost a surprise that He should have been shining so long and so near, and yet the purblind eyes should have seen so little.

But there is more than that, there is complaint and pain in the question—the pain of vainly endeavouring to teach, vainly endeavouring to help, vainly endeavouring to love. And there are few pains like that. All men that have tried to help and bless their fellows have known what it is to have their compassion and their efforts thrown back upon themselves. And there are few sorrows heavier to carry than this, the burden of a heart that would fain pour its love into another heart if that heart would only let it, but is repelled, and obliged to bear away its treasures unimparted. The slowness of the pupil is the sorrow of the honest teacher. The ingratitude and non-receptiveness of some churlish nature that you tried to lavish good upon, have they not often brought a bitterness to your hearts?

If ever you have had a child, or a friend, or a dear one that you have tried to get by all means to love you, and to take your love, and who has thrown it all back in your face, you may know in some faint measure what was at least one of the elements which made Him the "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief."

But this question reveals not only the pain caused by slow apprehension and unrequited love, but also the depth and patience of a clinging love that was not turned away by the pain. How tenderly the name "Philip" comes in at the end! It recalls that other instance when a whole world of feeling and appeal was compressed into the one word to the weeping woman, "Mary," and when another world of unutterable rapture of surprise and joy was in her one answering word, "Rabboni." It bids us think of that patient love of His which will not be soured by any slowness or scantiness of response. Dammed back by our sullen rejection, it still flows on, seeking to conquer by long-suffering. Refused, it still lingers round the closed door of the heart, and knocks for entrance. Misunderstood, it still meekly manifests itself. Surely in that gentle compassion, in that patience with man's wrong and contumely, and imperfect apprehension and inadequate affection, we see the manifested God.

Let us remember, too, that the same pained and patient love is in the *heart* of the throned Christ to-day. Mystery and paradox as it *may* be, I suppose that there still passes over even His victorious and serene repose in the Heavens some shadow of pain and sorrow when we turn away from Him, or so slowly apprehend His character and His work. And I may, I think, fairly bring to you this question. "Do ye thus requite the Lord?" and urge this appeal of His pitying, tender love on each of us—Grieve not the heart that has died for you.

We cannot understand how anything like pain should,

however slightly, darken that glory ; but if it be true that He in the Heavens has yet "a fellow-feeling of our pains," it is not less true that His love is still wounded by our lovelessness, and His manifestation of Himself made sad by the slowness of our reception of Him.

III.—Let us look at this question as being a piercing question addressed to each of us. It is the great wonder of human history that, after eighteen hundred years, the world knows so little of Jesus Christ. The leaders of opinion, the leaders of the literature of England, for instance, to-day, the men that profess to guide the thoughts of this generation, how little they know, really, about this Master! What profound misconceptions of the whole genius of Christianity, and of Him who is Christianity, we see among the teachers who pay Him high homage and conventional respect, as well as among those who profess to reject Him and His mission. Some people take a great deal more trouble to understand Buddha than they do to understand Christ. How little, too, the mass of men know about Him! It is enough to break one's heart to look round one, and think that He has been so long time with the world, and that this is all which has come of it. The Light has been shining for all these eighteen hundred years, and yet the mist is so little cleared away, and the ice is so little melted. The great proof that the world is bad is that it does not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that He has stood before it for nearly nineteen centuries now, and so few have been led to turn to Him with the adoring cry, "My Lord and my God."

But let us narrow our thoughts to ourselves. This question comes to many of you in a very pointed way. You have known about Jesus Christ all your lives, and yet, in a real, deep sense you do not know Him at this moment. For the knowledge of which my text speaks is the knowledge by acquaintance with a person rather than

the knowledge that a man may have of a book. And it is the knowledge by experience. Have you that? Do you know Christ as a man knows his friend, or do you know Him as you know about Julius Cæsar? Do you know Christ because you live with Him and He with you, or do you know about Him in that fashion in which a man in a great city knows about his neighbour across the street, that has lived beside him for five and twenty years and never spoken to him once all the time? Is that your knowledge of Christ? If so, it is no knowledge at all. "I have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear," describes all the acquaintance which a great many of my friends here have with Him. Oh! my brother! the very fact that He has been so long with you is the reason why you know so little about Him. People that live close by something, which men come from the ends of the earth to see, have often never seen it. A man may have lived all his life within sound of Niagara, and perhaps never have gone to look at the rush of the waters. Is that what you do with Jesus Christ? Are you so accustomed to hear about Him that you do not know Him? have so long heard of Him that you never come to see Him? "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?"

And, dear friends, you who do know Him a little, this question comes to you with a very pathetic appeal. In Him are infinite depths to be experienced and to become acquainted with, and if we know Him at all as we ought to do, our knowledge of Him will be growing day by day. But how many of us stand at the same spot that we did when we first said that we were Christians!

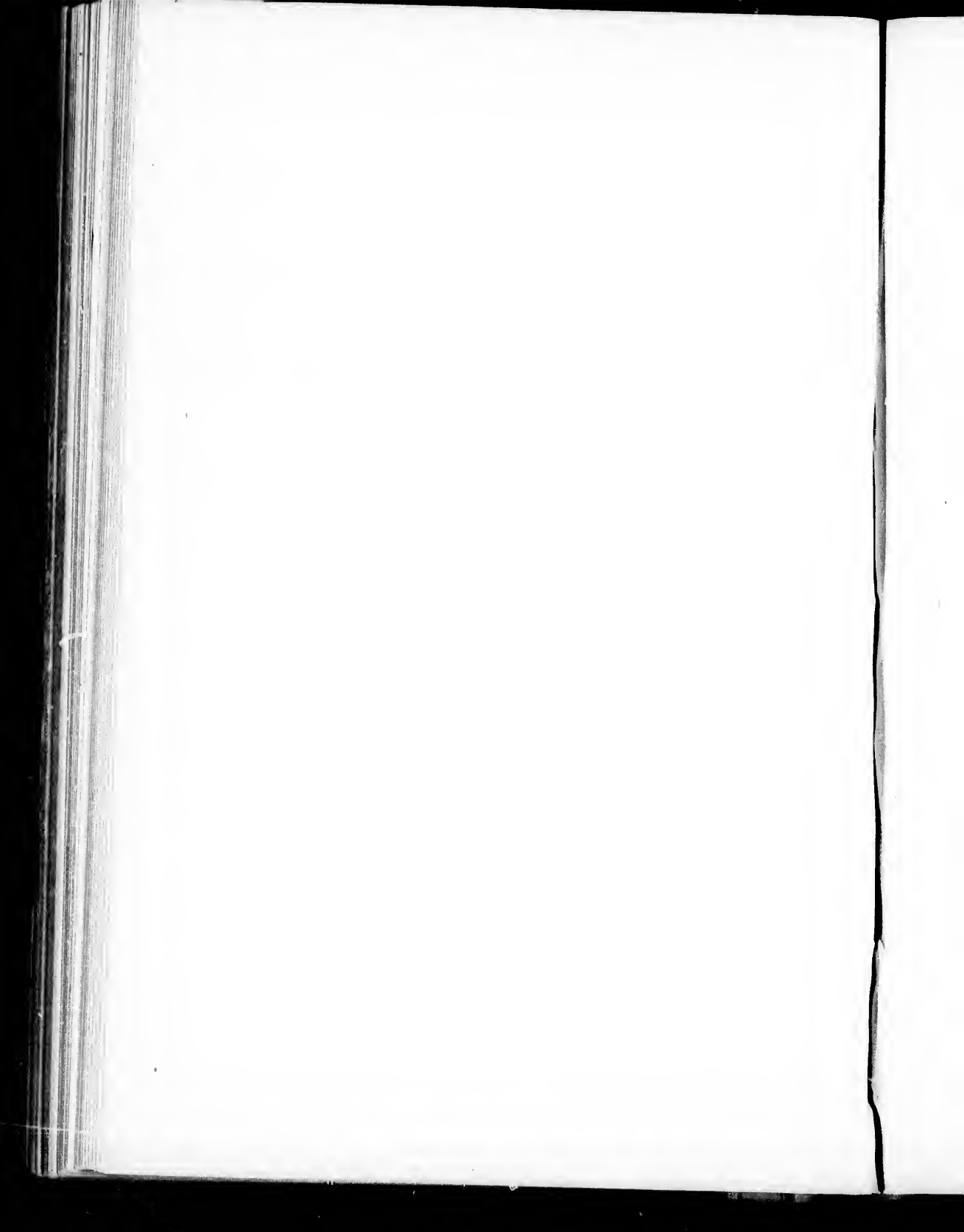
We are like the Indians who live in rich gold countries and could only gather the ore that happened to lie upon the surface or could be washed out of the sands of the river. In this great Christ there are depths of gold, great reefs and veins of it, that will enrich us all if we dig, and

we shall not get it unless we do. He is the boundless ocean. We have contented ourselves with coasting along the shore, and making timid excursions from one headland to another. Let us strike out into the middle deep, and see all the wonders that are there. This great Christ is like the infinite sky with its unresolved nebulae. We have but looked with our poor, dim eyes. Let us take the telescope that will reveal to us suns blazing where now we only see darkness.

If we have any true knowledge of Jesus Christ at all it ought to be growing every day ;—and why does it not ? You know a man because you are much with him. As the old proverb says : “ If you want to know anybody you must summer and winter with them ;” and if you want to know Jesus Christ, there must be a great deal more meditative thoughtfulness, and honest study of His life and work than most of us have put forth. We know people, too, by sympathy, and by love, and by keeping near them. Keep near your Master, Christian men ! Oh, it is a wonder, and a shame, and a sin for us professing Christians, that, having tasted the sweetness of His love, we should come down so low as to long for the garbage of earth. Who is fool enough to prefer vinegar to wine, bitter herbs to grapes, dross to gold ? Who is there that, having consorted with the King, would gladly herd with ragged rebels ? And yet that is what we do. We love one another, our families, people round about us. We labour to surround ourselves with friends, and to fill our hearts from these many fountains. All right and well ! But let us seek to know Christ more, and to know Him most chiefly in this aspect, that He is for us the manifest God and the Saviour of the world. “ For this is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.”

Then let us keep near Him, and love Him, that we may

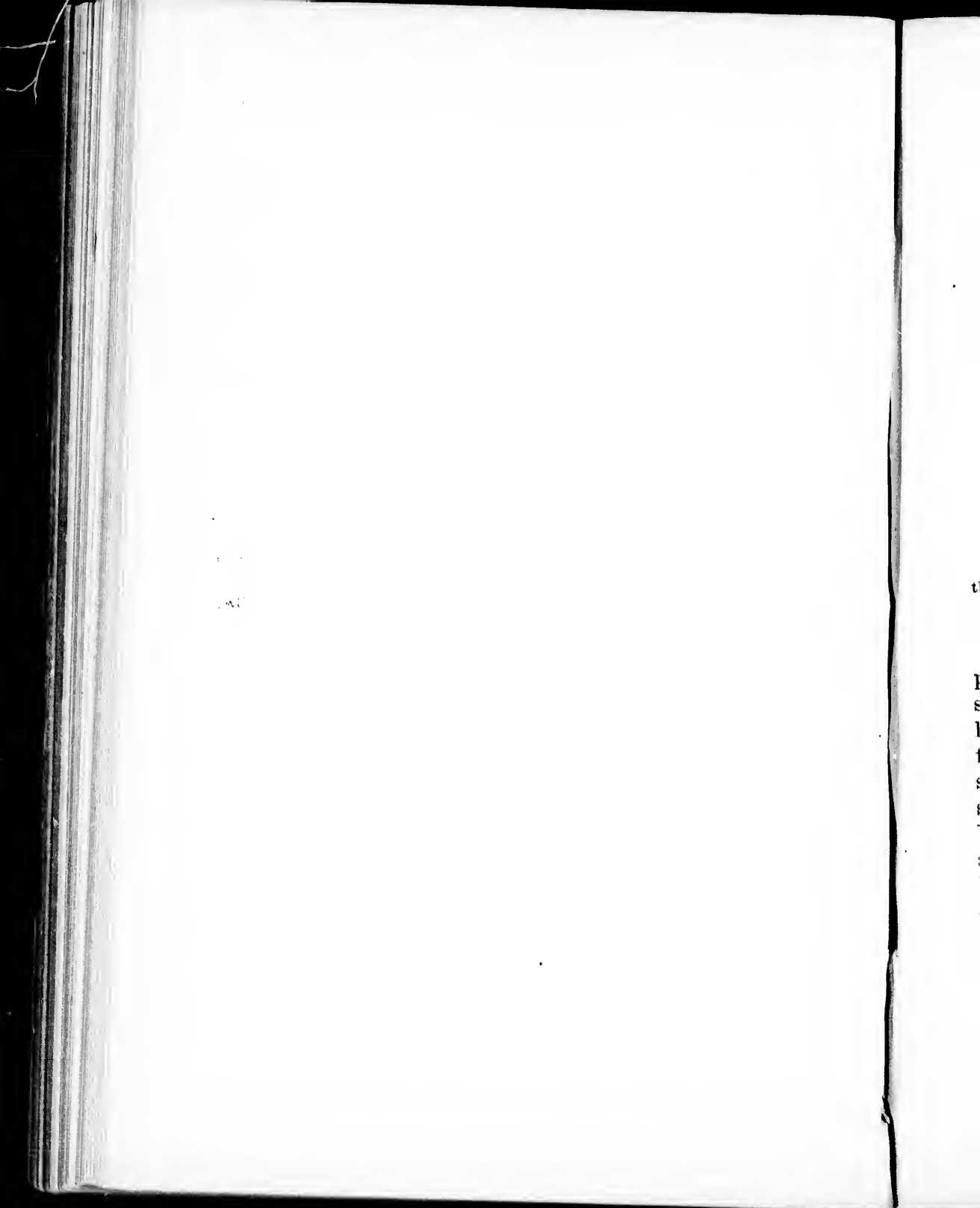
know him better as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. So we shall be filled with all the fulness of God, and not need to ask for any other vision of the Father, beyond the all-sufficing sight of God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.



SERMON VI.



“SEE THOU TO THAT.”



SERMON VI.

“SEE THOU TO THAT.”

“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood, And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that.

“I am innocent of the blood of this just person; See ye to it.” Matt. xxvii. 4-24.

SO, what the priests said to Judas, Pilate said to the priests. They contemptuously bade their wretched instrument bear the burden of his own treachery. They had condescended to use his services, but he presumed too far if he thought that that gave him a claim upon their sympathies. The tools of more respectable and bolder sinners are flung aside as soon as they are done with. What were the agonies or the tears of a hundred such as he to these high-placed and heartless transgressors? Priests though they were, and therefore bound by their office to help any poor creature that was struggling with a wounded conscience, they had nothing better to say to him than this scornful gibe:—“What is that to us? See thou to that.”

Pilate, on the other hand, metes to them the measure which they had meted to Judas. With curious verbal correspondence, he repeats the very words of Judas and of

the priests. "Innocent blood," said Judas. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person," said Pilate. "See thou to that," answered they. "See ye to it," says he. He tries to shove off his responsibility upon them, and they are quite willing to take it. Their consciences are not easily touched. Fanatical hatred which thinks itself influenced by religious motives is the blindest and cruellest of all passions, knowing no compunction, and utterly unperceptive of the innocence of its victim.

And so these three, Judas, the priests, and Pilate, suggest to us, I think, a threefold way in which conscience is perverted. Judas represents the agony of conscience, Pilate represents the shuffling sophistications of a half-awakened conscience, and those priests and people represent the torpor of an altogether misdirected conscience.

I.—Judas—the agony of conscience. "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." We do not need to enter at any length upon the difficult question as to what were the motives of Judas in his treachery. For my part I do not see that there is anything in the Scripture narrative, simply interpreted, to bear out the hypothesis that his motives were mistaken zeal and affection for Christ; and a desire to force Him to the avowal of His Messiahship. One can scarcely suppose zeal so strangely perverted as to begin by betrayal, and if the object was to make our Lord speak out His claims, the means adopted were singularly ill-chosen. The story, as it stands, naturally suggests a much less far-fetched explanation.

Judas was simply a man of a low earthly nature, who became a follower of Christ, thinking that he was to prove a Messiah of the vulgar type, or another Judas Maccabæus. He was not attracted by Christ's character and teaching. As the true nature of Christ's work and kingdom became more obvious, he became more weary of Him and it. The closest proximity to Jesus Christ made eleven enthusi-

astic disciples, but it made one traitor. No man could live near Him for three years without coming to hate Him if he did not love Him. Then, as ever, He was set for the fall and for the rise of many. He was the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.

But be this as it may, we have here to do with the sudden revulsion of feeling which followed upon the accomplished act. This burst of confession does not sound like the words of a man who had been actuated by motives of mistaken affection. He knows himself a traitor, and that fair, perfect character rises before him in its purity, as he had never seen it before—to rebuke and confound him.

So this exclamation of his puts into a vivid shape, which may help it to stick in our memories and hearts, this thought—what an awful difference there is in the look of a sin before you do it and afterwards! Before we do it the thing to be gained seems so attractive, and the transgression that gains it seems so comparatively insignificant. Yes! and when we have done it the two alter places; the thing that we win by it seems so contemptible—thirty pieces of silver! pitch them over the Temple inclosure and get rid of them—the things that we win by it seem so insignificant, and the thing that we did to win them dilates into such awful magnitude!

For instance, suppose we do anything that we know to be wrong, being tempted to it by a momentary indulgence of some mere animal impulse. By the very nature of the case, that dies in its satisfaction and the desire dies along with it. We do not want the thing any more when once we have got it. It lasts but a moment and is past. Then we are left alone with the thought of the sin that we have done. When we get the prize of our wrong-doing, we find out that it is not as all-satisfying as we expected it would be. Most of our earthly aims are like that. The chase is a great deal more than the hare. Or, as George

Herbert has it, "Nothing between two dishes," a splendid service of silver plate, and when you take the cover off there is no food to eat. "Such are the pleasures here."

Universally, this is true, that sooner or later, when the delirium of passion and the rush of temptation are over and we wake to consciousness, we find that we are none the richer for the thing gained, and oh! so infinitely the poorer for the means by which we gained it. It is that old story of the Veiled Prophet that wooed and won the hearts of foolish maidens, and, when he had them in his power in the inner chamber, removed the silver veil which they had thought hid dazzling glory and showed hideous features that struck despair into their hearts. Every man's sin does that for him. And to you I come now with this message: every wrong thing that you do, great or small, will be like some of those hollow images of the gods that one hears of in barbarian temples—looked at in front, fair, but when you get behind them you find a hollow, full of dust and spiders' webs and unclean things. Be sure of this, every sin is a blunder.

That is the first lesson that lies in these words of this wretched traitor; but again, here is an awful picture for us of the hell upon earth, of a conscience which has no hope of pardon.

I do not suppose that Judas was lost, if he were lost, because he betrayed Jesus Christ, but because, having betrayed Jesus Christ, he never asked to be forgiven. And I suppose that the difference between the traitor who betrayed Him and the other traitor who denied Him, was this, that the one, when "he went out and wept bitterly," had the thought of a loving Master with him, and the other when "he went out and hanged himself" had the thought of nothing but that foul deed glaring before him. I pray you to learn this lesson—you cannot think too much, too blackly, of your own sins, but you may

think too exclusively of them, and if you do they will drive you to madness of despair.

My dear friend, there is no penitence or remorse which is deep enough for the smallest transgression ; but there is no transgression which is so great but that forgiveness for it may come. And we may have it for the asking if we will go to that dear Christ that died for us. The consciousness of sinfulness is a wholesome consciousness. I would that every man and woman listening to me now had it deep in their consciences, and then I would that it might lead us all to that one Lord in whom there is forgiveness and peace. Be sure of this, that if Judas Iscariot, when his "soul flared forth in the dark," died without hope and without pardon, it was not because his crime was too great for forgiveness, but because the forgiveness had never been asked. There is no unpardonable sin except that of refusing the pardon that avails for all sin.

II.—So much, then, for this first picture and the lessons that come out of it. In the next place we take Pilate, as the representative of what I have ventured to call the shufflings of a half-awakened conscience.

"I am innocent of the blood of this just person," says he, "see ye to it." He is very willing to shuffle off his responsibility upon priests and people, and they, for their part, are quite as willing to accept it ; but the responsibility can neither be shuffled off by him nor accepted by them. His motive in surrendering Jesus to them was probably nothing more than the low and cowardly wish to humour his turbulent subjects, and so to secure an easy tenure of office. For such an end what did one poor man's life matter ? He had a great contempt for the accusers, which he is scarcely at the pains to conceal. It breaks out in half-veiled sarcasms, by which he cynically indemnifies himself for his ignoble yielding to the constraint which they put upon him. He knows perfectly well that the Roman power has

nothing to fear from this King, whose Kingdom rested on His witness to the Truth. He knows perfectly well that unavowed motives of personal enmity lie at the bottom of the whole business. In the words of our text he acquits Christ, and thereby condemns himself. If Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, he knew that he, as governor, was guilty of prostituting Roman justice, which was Rome's best gift to her subject nations, and of giving up an innocent man to death, in order to save himself trouble and to conciliate a howling mob. No washing of his hands will cleanse them. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten" that hand. But his words let us see how a man may sophisticate his conscience and quibble about his guilt.

Here, then, we get once more a vivid picture that may remind us of what, alas! we all know in our own experience, how a man's conscience may be clear-sighted enough to discern, and vocal enough to declare, that a certain thing is wrong, but not strong enough to restrain from doing it. Conscience has a voice and an eye; alas! it has no hands. It shares the weakness of all law, it cannot get itself executed. Men will climb over a fence, although the board that says, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," is staring them in the face in capital letters at the very place where they jump. Your conscience is a king without an army, a judge without officers. "If it had authority, as it has the power, it would govern the world," but as things are, it is reduced to issuing vain edicts and to saying, "Thou shalt not!" and if you turn round and say "I will, though," then conscience has no more that it can do.

And then here, too, is an illustration of one of the commonest of the ways by which we try to slip our necks out of the collar, and to get rid of the responsibilities that really belong to us. "See ye to it" does not avail to put Pilate's crime on the priests' shoulders. Men take part

in evil, and each thinks himself innocent, because he has companions. Half-a-dozen men carry a burden together; none of them fancies that he is carrying it. It is like the case of turning out a platoon of soldiers to shoot a mutineer—nobody knows whose bullet killed him, and nobody feels himself guilty; but there the man lies dead, and it was somebody that did it. So corporations, churches, societies, and nations do things that individuals would not do, and each man of them wipes his mouth and says, “I have done no harm.” And even when we sin alone we are clever at finding scapegoats. “The woman tempted me and I did eat,” is the formula universally used yet. The school-boy’s excuse:—“Please, sir! it was not me! it was the other boy!” is what we are all ready to say.

Now, I pray you, brethren, to remember that, whether our consciences try to shuffle off responsibility for united action upon the other members of the firm, or whether we try to excuse our individual actions by laying blame on our tempers, or whether we adopt the modern slang, and talk about circumstances, and heredity and the like, as being reasons for the diminution or the extinction of the notion of guilt, it is sophistical trifling; and down at the bottom the most of us know that I alone am responsible for the volition which leads to my act. I could have helped it if I had liked. Nobody compelled me to keep in the partnership of evil, or to yield to the tempter. Pilate was not forced by his subjects to give the commandment that “it should be as they required.” They had their own burden to carry. Each man has to bear the consequences of his actions. There are many “burdens” which we can “bear for one another, and so fulfil the law of Christ;” but every man has to bear as his own the burden of the fruits of his deeds. In that harvest, he that soweth and he that reapeth are one, and each of us has to drink as we ourselves have brewed.

"God will send the bill to you," and you have to pay for your share, however many companions you may have had in the act.

So do not you sophisticate your consciences with the delusion that your responsibility may be shifted to any other person or thing. These may diminish, or may modify your responsibility, and God takes all that into account. But after all these have been taken into account there is this left—that you yourselves have done the act, which you need not have done unless you had so willed, and that having done it, you have to carry it on your back for evermore. "See thou to that," was a heartless word, but it was a true one. "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God," and as the old Book of Proverbs has it, "If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself, and if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it."

III.—And so, lastly, we have here another group still—the priests and people. They represent for us the torpor and misdirection of conscience. "Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children." They were perfectly ready to take the burden upon themselves. They thought that they were "doing God service" when they slew God's Messenger. They had no perception of the beauty and gentleness of Christ's character. They believed Him to be a blasphemer, and they believed it to be a solemn religious duty to slay him then and there. Were they to blame because they slew a blasphemer? According to Jewish law—no! They were to blame because they had brought themselves into such a moral condition that that was all they thought of and saw in Jesus Christ. With their awful words they stand before us, as perhaps the crowning instances in Scripture history of the possible torpor which may paralyze consciences.

I need not dwell, I suppose, even for a moment, upon the thought of how the highest and noblest sentiments

may be perverted into becoming the allies of the lowest crime. “O Liberty! what crimes have been done in thy name!” you remember one of the victims of the guillotine said, as her last words. O Religion! what crimes have been done in *thy* name! is one of the lessons to be gathered from Calvary.

But, passing that, to come to the thing that is of more consequence to each of us, let us take this thought, dear brethren, as to the awful possibility of a conscience going fast asleep in the midst of the wildest storm of passion, like that unfaithful prophet Jonah, down in the hold of the heathen ship. You can lull your consciences into dead slumber. You can stifle them so that they shall not speak a word against the worst of your sins. You can do it by simply neglecting them, by habitually refusing to listen to them. If you keep picking all the leaves and buds off the tree before they open, it will stop flowering. You can do it by gathering round yourself always, and only, evil associations and evil deeds. The habit of sinning will lull a conscience faster than almost anything else. We do not know how hot this chapel is, or how much the air is exhausted, because we have been sitting in it for an hour and a half. But if we came into it from outside now we should feel the difference. Styrian peasants thrive and fatten upon arsenic, and men may flourish upon all iniquity and evil, and conscience will say never a word. Take care of that delicate balance within you, and see that you do not tamper with it nor twist it.

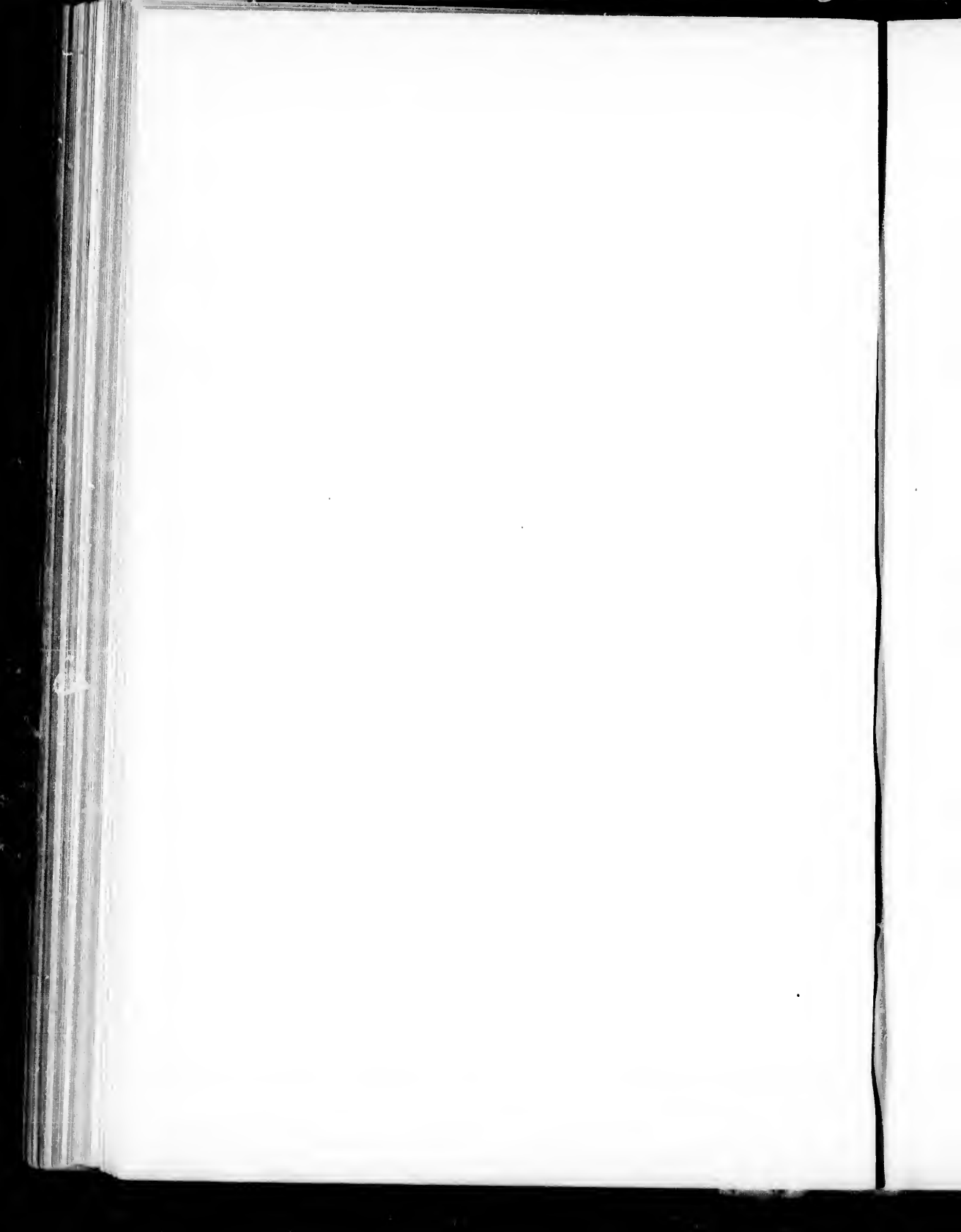
Conscience may be misguided as well as lulled. It may call evil good, and good evil; it may take honey for gall, and gall for honey. And so we need something outside of ourselves to be our guide, our standard. We are not to be contented that our consciences acquit us. “I know nothing against myself, yet I am not hereby justi-

fied," says the Apostle, "he that judgeth me is the Lord." And it is quite possible that a man may have no prick of conscience and yet have done a very wrong thing. So we want, as it seems to me, something outside of ourselves that shall not be affected by our variations. Conscience is like the light on the binnacle of a ship. It tosses up and down along with the vessel. We want a steady light yonder on that headland, on the fixed solid earth, which shall not heave with the heaving wave, nor vary at all. Conscience speaks lowest when it ought to speak loudest. The worst man is least troubled by his conscience. It is like a lamp that goes out in the thickest darkness. Therefore we need, as I believe, a revelation of truth and goodness and beauty outside of ourselves to which we may bring our consciences that they may be enlightened and set right. We want a standard like the standard weights and measures that are kept in the Tower of London, to which all the people in the little country villages may send up their yard measures, and their pound weights, and find out if they are just and true. We want a *Bible*, and we want a *Christ* to tell us what is duty, as well as to make it possible for us to do it.

These groups which we have been looking at now, show us how very little help and sympathy a wounded conscience can get from its fellows. The conspirators turn upon each other as soon as the detectives are amongst them, and there is always one of them ready to go into the witness-box and swear away the lives of the others to save his own neck. Wolves tear sick wolves to pieces.

Round us there stands Society, pitiless and stern, and Nature, rigid and implacable; not to be besought, not to be turned. And when we, in the midst of this universe of fixed law and cause and consequence, wail out, "I have sinned," a thousand voices say to us, "What is that to us? See thou to that." And so I am left with my

guilt—it and I together. There comes One with outstretched, wounded hands, and says, "Cast all thy burden upon Me, and I will free thee from it all." "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!" Trust in Him, in His great sacrifice, and you will find that His "innocent blood" has a power that will liberate your conscience from its torpor, its vain excuses, its agony and despair.



SERMON VII.

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HOW TO DWELL IN THE FIRE OF GOD.

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SERMON VII.

HOW TO DWELJ. IN THE FIRE OF GOD.

"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil."—Isa. xxxiii. 14, 15.

"He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God."—1 John iv. 16.

I HAVE put these two verses together because, striking as is at first sight, the contrast in their tone, they refer to the same subject, and they substantially preach the same truth. A hasty reader, who is more influenced by sound than by sense, is apt to suppose that the solemn expressions in my first text: "the devouring fire" and "everlasting burnings" mean *hell*. They mean *God*, as is quite obvious from the context. The man who is to "dwell in the devouring fire" is the *good* man. He that is able to abide "the everlasting burnings" is "the man that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly," that "despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." The prophet has been calling all men, far and near, to behold a great act of Divine judgment in which God has been

manifested in flaming glory, consuming evil ; now he represents the "sinners in Sion", the unworthy members of the nation, as seized with sudden terror, and anxiously asking this question, which in effect means : "Who among us can abide peacefully, joyfully, fed and brightened, not consumed and annihilated, by that flashing brightness and purity ?" The prophet's answer is the answer of common sense—like draws to like. A holy God must have holy companions.

But that is not all. The fire of God is the fire of love as well as the fire of purity ; a fire that blesses and quickens, as well as a fire that destroys and consumes. So the Apostle John comes with his answer, not contradicting the other one, but deepening it, expanding it, letting us see the foundations of it, and proclaiming that as a holy God must be surrounded by holy hearts, which will open themselves to the flame as flowers to the sunshine, so a loving God must be clustered about by loving hearts, who alone can enter into deep and true friendship with Him.

The two answers, then, of these texts are one at bottom ; and when Isaiah asks, "Who shall dwell with the everlasting fire ?"—the perpetual fire, burning and unconsumed, of that Divine righteousness—the deepest answer, which is no stern requirement but a merciful promise, is John's answer, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God."

The simplest way, I think, of bringing out the force of the words before us will be just to take these three points which I have already suggested—the world's question, the partial answer of the prophet, the complete answer of the Apostle.

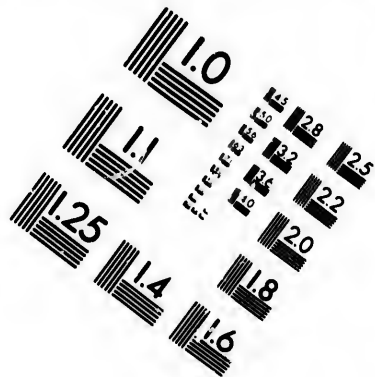
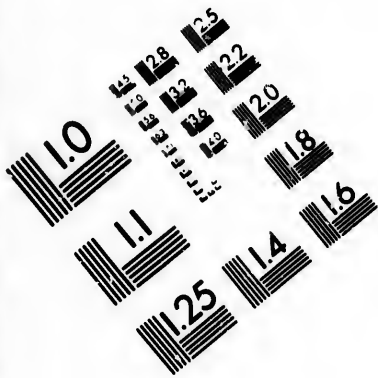
I.—The world's question.

I need only remind you how frequently in the Old Testament the emblem of fire is employed to express the Divine nature. In many places, though by no means in all, the prominent idea in the emblem is that of the purity

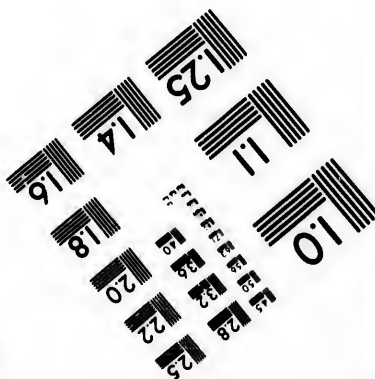
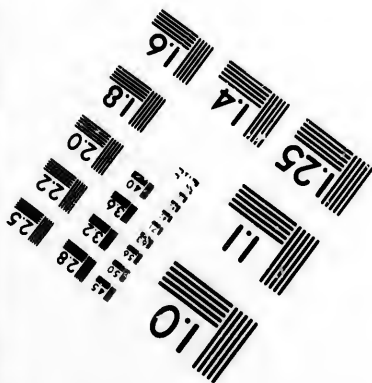
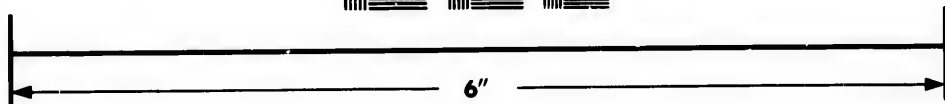
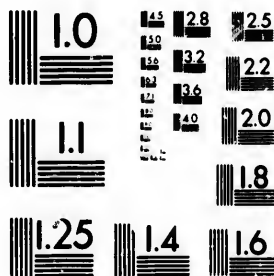
of the Divine nature, which flashes and flames as against all which is evil and sinful. So we read in one grand passage in this very book, "the Light of Israel shall become a fire." As if the lambent beauty of the highest manifestation of God gathered itself together, intensified itself, was forced back upon itself; and from merciful, illuminating light turned itself into destructive and consuming fire. And we read, you may remember, too, in the description of the symbolical manifestation of the Divine nature which accompanied the giving of the Law on Sinai that "the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain," and yet into that blaze and brightness the Law-giver went, and lived and moved in it.

There is, then, in the Divine nature a side of antagonism and opposition to evil, which flames against it, and labours to consume it. I would speak with all respect for the motives of many men in this day who dread to entertain the idea of the Divine wrath against evil lest they should in any manner trench upon the purity and perfectness of the Divine love. I respect and sympathise with the motive altogether; and I neither respect nor sympathise with the many ferocious pictures of that which is called the wrath of God against sin, which much so-called orthodox teaching has indulged in. But if you will only remove from that word "anger" the mere human associations which cleave to it, of passion on the one hand, and of a wish to hurt its object on the other, then you cannot, I think, deny to the Divine nature the possession of that passionless and unmalignant wrath, without striking a fatal blow at the perfect purity of God. A God that does not hate evil, that does not flame out against it, using all the energies of His being to destroy it, is a God to whose character there cleaves a fatal suspicion of indifference to good, of moral apathy. If I have not a God to trust in that hates evil because He loveth righteousness, then "the





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pillared firmament itself were rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble"; nor were there any hope that this damnable thing that is killing and sucking the life-blood out of our spirits should ever be destroyed and cast aside. Oh! It is short-sighted wisdom, and it is cruel kindness, to tamper with the thought of the wrath of God, the "everlasting burnings" of that eternally pure nature wherewith it wages war against all sin!

But then let us remember that, on the other side, the fire which is the destructive fire of perfect purity is also the fire that quickens and blesses. God is love, says John, and love is fire, too. We speak of "the flame of love," of "warm affections," and the like. The symbol of fire does not mean destructive energy only. And these two are one. God's wrath is a form of God's love; God hates because He loves.

And the "wrath" and the "love" differ much more in the difference of the eye that looks, than they do in themselves. Here are two bits of glass, one of them catches and retains all the fiery-red rays, the other all the yellow. It is the one, same, pure, white beam that passes through them both, but one is only capable of receiving the fiery-red beams of the wrath, and the other is capable of receiving the golden light of the love. Let us take heed lest, by destroying the wrath, we maim the love; and let us take heed lest, by exaggerating the wrath, we empty the love of its sweetness and its preciousness; and let us accept the teaching that these are one, and that the deepest of all the things that the world can know about God lies in that double saying, which does not contradict its second half by its first, but completes its first by its second—God is Righteousness, God is Love.

Well, then, that being so, the question rises to every mind of ordinary thoughtfulness: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell

with everlasting burnings?" A God fighting against evil ; can you and I hope to hold familiar fellowship with Him ? A God fighting against evil ; if He rises up to exercise His judging and His punishing energies, can we meet Him ? "Can thy heart endure and thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee ?" is the question that comes to each of us if we are reasonable people. I do not dwell upon it ; but I ask you to take it, and entertain it for yourselves.

To "dwell with everlasting burnings" means two things. First, it means to hold a familiar intercourse and communion with God. The question which presents itself to thoughtful minds is—what sort of man must I be if I am to dwell near God ? The lowliest bush may be lit by the Divine fire, and not be consumed by it ; and the poorest heart may be all aflame with an indwelling God, if only it yield itself to Him, and long for His likeness. Electricity only flames into consuming fire when its swift passage is resisted. The question for us all is, how can I receive this Holy fire into my bosom, and not be burned ? Is any communion possible, and if it be, on what conditions ? It is the question which the heart of man is really asking, though it knows not the meaning of its own unrest.

"To dwell with everlasting burnings" means, secondly, to bear the action of the fire, the judgment of the present and the judgment of the future. The question for each of us is, can we face that judicial and punitive action of that Divine Providence which works even here, and how can we face the judicial and punitive action in the future ?

I suppose you all believe, or at least say that you believe, that there is such a future judgment. Have you ever asked yourselves the question, and rested not until you got a reasonable answer to it, on which, like a man

leaning on a pillar, you can lean the whole weight of your expectations—how am I to come into the presence of that devouring fire? Have you got any fireproof dress that will enable you to go into the furnace like the Hebrew youths, and walk up and down in the midst of it, well and at liberty? Have you? “Who shall dwell amidst the everlasting fires?”

That question has stirred sometimes, I know, in the consciences of every man and woman that is listening to me. Some of you have tampered with it, and tried to throttle it, and laughed at it, and shuffled it out of your mind by the engrossments of business, and tried to get rid of it in all sorts of ways: and here it has met you again to-day. Let us have it settled, in the name of common sense (to invoke nothing higher) once for all, upon reasonable principles that will stand; and do you see that you settle it to-day.

II.—And now, look next at the prophet's answer. It is simple. He says that if a man is to hold fellowship with, or to face the judgment of, the pure and righteous God, the plainest dictate of reason and common sense is that he himself must be pure and righteous to match. The details into which his answer to the question runs out are all very homely, prosaic, pedestrian kind of virtues, nothing at all out of the way, nothing that people would call splendid or heroic. Here they are:—“He that walks righteously,”—a short injunction, easily spoken, but how hard!—“and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, that shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.” Righteous action, righteous speech, inward hatred of possessions gotten at my neighbour's cost, and a vehement resistance to all the seductions of sense; shutting his hands, stopping his ears, fastening his eyes up tight so that he may not handle, nor hear, nor

see the evil--there is the outline of a homely, everyday sort of morality which is to mark the man who, as Isaiah says, can "dwell amongst the everlasting fires."

Now, if at your leisure you will turn to the Psalms xv. and xxiv. you will find there two other versions of the same questions and the same answer, both of which were obviously in our prophet's mind when he spoke. In the one you have the question put: "Who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?" In the other you have the same question put: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" And both these two psalms answer the question and sketch the outline (and it is only an outline) of a righteous man, from the Old Testament point of view, substantially in the same fashion that Isaiah does here.

I do not need to remark upon the altogether unscientific and non-exhaustive nature of the description of righteousness that is set forth here. There are a great many virtues, plain and obvious, that are left out of the picture. But I want you to notice one very special defect, as it might seem. There is not the slightest reference to anything that we call religion. It is all purely pedestrian, worldly morality; do righteous things; do not tell lies; do not cheat your neighbour; stop your ears if people say foul things in your hearing; shut your eyes if evil comes before you. These are the kind of duties enjoined, and these only. The answer of my text moves altogether on the surface, dealing only with conduct, not with character, and dealing with conduct only in reference to this world. There is not a word about the inner nature, not a word about the inner relation of a man to God. It is the minimum of possible qualifications for dwelling with God.

Well, now, do you achieve that minimum? Suppose we waive for the moment all reference to God; suppose we waive for the moment all reference to motive and inward nature; suppose we keep ourselves only on the

outside of things, and ask what sort of *conduct* a man must have that is able to walk with God? We have heard the answer.

Now, then, is that *me*? Is this sketch here, admittedly imperfect, a mere black-and-white swift outline, not intended to be shaded or coloured, or brought up to the round; is this mere outline of what a good man ought to be, at all like me? Yes or no? I think we must all say No! to the question, and acknowledge our failure to attain to this homely ideal of conduct. The requirement pared down to its lowest possible degree, and kept as superficial as ever you can keep it, is still miles above me, and all I have to say when I listen to such words is, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

My dear friends! take this one thought away with you to-day:—the requirements of the most moderate conscience are such as no man among us is able to comply with. And what then? Am I to be shut up to despair? am I to say,—then nobody can dwell within that bright flame? Am I to say,—then when God meets man, man must crumble away into nothing and disappear? Am I to say, for myself—then, alas! for me, when I stand at His judgment bar?

III.—Let us take the Apostle's answer: "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God."

Now, to begin with, let us distinctly understand that the New Testament answer, represented by John's great words, entirely endorses Isaiah's; and that the difference between the two is not that the Old Testament, as represented by Psalmist and Prophet, said:—"You must be righteous in order to dwell with God," and that the New Testament says: "You need not be!" Not at all! John is just as vehement in saying that nothing but purity can bind a man in thoroughly friendly and familiar conjunction with God as David or Isaiah was. He insists as

much as anybody can insist upon this great principle, that if we are to dwell with God we must be like God, and that we are like God when we are like Him in righteousness and love, "He that saith he hath fellowship with Him, and walketh in darkness, is a liar!" That is John's short way of gathering it all up. Righteousness is as essential in the Gospel scheme for all communion and fellowship with God as ever it was declared to be by the most rigid of legalists; and if any of you have got the notion that Christianity has any other terms to lay down than the old terms—that righteousness is essential to communion—you do not understand Christianity. If any of you are building upon the notion that a man can come into loving and familiar friendship with God as long as he loves and cleaves to any sin, you have got hold of a delusion that will wreck your souls yet,—is, indeed, harming, wrecking them now, and will finally destroy them if you do not get rid of it. Let us always remember that the declaration of my first text lies at the very foundation of the declaration of my second.

What, then, is the difference between them? Why for one thing it is this—Isaiah tells us that we must be righteous, John tells us how we may be. The one says "There are the conditions," the other says, "Here are the means by which you can have the conditions." Love is the productive germ of all righteousness; it is the fulfilling of the law. Get that into your hearts, and all these relative and personal duties will come. If the deepest, inmost life is right, all the surface of life will come right. Conduct will follow character, character will follow love.

The efforts of men to make themselves pure, and so to come into the position of holding fellowship with God are like the wise efforts of children in their gardens. They stick in their little bits of rootless flowers, and they

water them, but, being rootless, the flowers are all withered to-morrow and flung over the hedge the day after. But if we have the love of God in our hearts, we have not rootless flowers, but the seed which will spring up and bear fruit of holiness.

But that is not all. Isaiah says: "Righteousness," John says "Love," which makes righteousness. And then he tells us how we may get love, having first told us how we may get righteousness: We love Him because He first loved us. It is just as impossible for a man to work himself into loving God as it is for a man to work himself into righteous actions. There is no difference between the impossibilities in the two cases. But what we can do is, we can go and gaze at the thing that kindles the love; we can contemplate the Cross on which the great Lover of our souls died, and thereby we can come to love Him. John's answer goes down to the depths, for his notion of love is the response of the believing soul to the love of God which was manifested on the Cross of Calvary. To have righteousness we must have love; to have love we must look to the love that God has to us; to look rightly to the love that God has to us we must have faith. Now you have got to the very bottom of the matter. That is the first step of the ladder—faith; and the second step is love, and the third step is righteousness.

And so the New Testament, in its highest and most blessed declarations, rests itself firmly upon these rigid requirements of the old law. You and I, dear brethren, have but one way by which we can walk in the midst of that fire, rejoicing and unconsumed, namely that we shall know and believe the love which God hath to us, love Him back again "with pure hearts fervently," and in the might of that receptive faith and productive love, become like Him in holiness, and ourselves be "baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Thus, fire-born and fiery, we shall dwell as in our native home, in God Himself.

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SERMON VIII.



THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT.

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SERMON VIII.

THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT.

"A rushing mighty wind." . . . "Cloven tongues like as fire." . . . "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." Acts ii. 2, 3, 17.

"Ye have an unction from the Holy One." 1 John ii. 20.

WIND, fire, water, oil,—these four are constant Scriptural symbols for the Spirit of God. We have them all in these fragments of verses which I have taken for my text this morning, and which I have isolated from their context for the purpose of bringing out simply these symbolical references. I think that perhaps we may get some force and freshness to the thoughts proper to this day* by looking at these rather than by treating the subject in some more abstract form. We have then the Breath of the Spirit, the Fire of the Spirit, the Water of the Spirit, and the Anointing Oil of the Spirit. And the consideration of these four will bring out a great many of the principal Scriptural ideas about the gift of the Spirit of God which belongs to all Christian souls.

I.—First, "a rushing mighty wind."

Of course, the symbol is but the putting into picturesque form of the idea that lies in the name. Spirit is breath.

* Whit Sunday.

Wind is but air in motion. Breath is the synonym for life. Spirit and life are two words for one thing. So then, in the symbol, the "rushing mighty wind," we have set forth the highest work of the Spirit—the communication of a new and supernatural life.

We are carried back to that grand vision of the prophet who saw the bones lying, very many and very dry, sapless and disintegrated, a heap dead and ready to rot. The question comes to him: "Son of man! Can these bones live?" The only possible answer, if he consult experience, is, "O Lord God! Thou knowest." Then follows the great invocation: "Come from the four winds, O breath! and breathe upon these bones that they may live." And the breath comes and "they stand up, an exceeding great army." It is the Spirit that quickeneth. The Scripture treats us all as dead, being separated from God, unless we are united to Him by faith in Jesus Christ. According to the saying of the Evangelist, "They which believe on Him receive" the Spirit, and thereby receive the life which He gives, or, as our Lord Himself speaks, are "born of the Spirit." The highest and most characteristic office of the Spirit of God is to enkindle this new life, and hence His noblest name, among the many by which He is called, is the Spirit of life.

Again, remember, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." If there be life given it must be kindred with the life which is its source. Reflect upon those profound words of our Lord:—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." They describe first the operation of the life-giving Spirit, but they describe also the characteristics of the resulting life.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth." That spiritual life, both in the Divine source and in the human recipient,

is its own law. Of course the wind has its laws, as every physical agent has; but these are so complicated and undiscovered that it has always been the very symbol of freedom, and poets have spoken of these "chartered libertines," the winds, and "free as the air" has become a proverb. So that Divine Spirit is limited by no human conditions or laws, but dispenses its gifts in superb disregard of conventionalities and externalisms. Just as the lower gift of what we call "genius" is above all limits of culture or education or position, and falls on a wool-stapler in Stratford-on-Avon, or on a ploughman in Ayrshire, so, in a similar manner, the altogether different gift of the Divine, life-giving Spirit follows no lines that Churches or institutions draw. It falls upon an Augustinian monk in a convent, and he shakes Europe. It falls upon a tinker in Bedford gaol, and he writes "Pilgrim's Progress." It falls upon a cobbler in Kettering, and he founds modern Christian missions. It blows "where it listeth," sovereignly indifferent to the expectations and limitations and the externalisms, even of organised Christianity, and touching this man and that man, not arbitrarily but according to "the good pleasure" that is a law to itself, because it is perfect in wisdom and in goodness.

And as thus the life-giving Spirit imparts Himself according to higher laws than we can grasp, so in like manner the life that is derived from it is a life which is its own law. The Christian conscience, touched by the Spirit of God, owes allegiance to no regulations or external commandments laid down by man. The Christian conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, at its peril will take its beliefs from any other than from that Divine Spirit. All authority over conduct, all authority over belief is burned up and disappears in the presence of the grand democracy of the true Christian principle: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ:" and every one of you possesses

the Spirit which teaches, the Spirit which inspires, the Spirit which enlightens, the Spirit which is the guide to all truth. So "the wind bloweth where it listeth," and the voice of that Divine Quickener is,

"Myself shall to My darling be
Both law and impulse."

Under the impulse derived from the Divine Spirit, the human spirit "listeth" what is right, and is bound to follow the promptings of its highest desires. Those men only are free as the air we breathe, who are vitalised by the Spirit of the Lord, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there alone, is liberty.

In this symbol there lies not only the thought of a life derived, kindred with the life bestowed, and free like the life which is given, but there lies also the idea of power. The wind which filled the house was not only mighty but "borne onward"—fitting type of the strong impulse by which in olden times "holy men spake as they were 'borne onward'" (the word is the same) "by the Holy Ghost." There are diversities of operations, but it is the same breath of God, which sometimes blows in the softest pianissimo that scarcely rustles the summer woods in the leafy month of June, and sometimes storms in wild tempest that dashes the seas against the rocks. So this mighty life-giving Agent moves in gentleness and yet in power, and sometimes swells and rises almost to tempest, but is ever the impelling force of all that is strong and true and fair in Christian hearts and lives.

The history of the world since that day of Pentecost has been a commentary upon the words of my text. With viewless, impalpable energy the mighty breath of God swept across the ancient world and "laid the lofty city" of paganism "low; even to the ground, and brought it even to the dust." A breath passed over the whole civilized world, like the breath of the west wind upon the

glaciers in the spring, melting the thick-ribbed ice, and wooing forth the flowers, and the world was made over again. In our own hearts and lives this is the one power that will make us strong and good. The question is all-important for each of us, "Have I this life, and does it move me, as the ships are borne along by the wind?" "As many as are impelled by the Spirit of God, they"—*they*—"are the sons of God." Is that the breath that swells all the sails of your lives, and drives you upon your course? If it be, you are Christians; if it is not you are not.

II.—And now a word as to the second of these symbols:—"Cloven tongues as of fire"—the fire of the Spirit.

I need not do more than remind you how frequently that emblem is employed both in the Old and in the New Testament. John the Baptist contrasted the cold negative efficiency of his baptism, which, at its best, was but a baptism of repentance, with the quickening power of the baptism of Him that was to follow him; when he said "I indeed baptise you with water, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The two mean but one, the fire being the emblem of the Spirit.

You will remember, too, how our Lord Himself employs the same metaphor when He speaks about His coming to bring fire on the earth, and His longing to see it kindled into a beneficent blaze. In this connection, the fire is a symbol of a quick, triumphant energy, which will transform us into its own likeness. There are two sides to that emblem, as we saw in our last sermon, one destructive, one creative; one wrathful, one loving. There are the fire of love, and the fire of anger. There is the fire of the sunshine which is the condition of life, as well as the fire of the lightning which burns and consumes. The emblem of fire is selected to express the work of the Spirit of God,

by reason of its leaping, triumphant, transforming energy. See, for instance, how, when you kindle a pile of dead green wood, the tongues of fire spring from point to point until they have conquered the whole mass, and turned it all into a ruddy likeness of the parent flame. And so here, this fire of God, if it falls upon you, will burn up all your coldness, and will make you glow with enthusiasm, working your intellectual convictions in fire, not in frost, making your creed a living power in your lives, and kindling you into a flame of earnest consecration.

The same idea is expressed by the common phrases of every language. We talk about the fervour of love, the warmth of affection, the blaze of enthusiasm, the fire of emotion, the coldness of indifference. Christians are to be set on fire of God. If the Spirit dwell in us, it will make us fiery like itself, even as fire makes the wettest green wood into fire. We have more than enough of cold Christians who are afraid of nothing so much as of being betrayed into warm emotion.

I believe, dear brethren, and I am bound to express the belief, that one of the chief wants of the Christian Church of this generation, the Christian Church of this city, the Christian Church of this chapel, is more of the fire of God! We are all icebergs compared with what we ought to be. Look at yourselves; never mind about your brethren. Let each of us look at his own heart, and say whether there is any trace in his Christianity of the power of that Spirit Who is fire. Is our religion flame or ice? Where among us are to be found lives blazing with enthusiastic devotion and earnest love? Do not such words sound like mockery when applied to us? Have we not to listen to that solemn old warning that never loses its power, and, alas! seems never to lose its appropriateness; "because thou art neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of my mouth." We ought to be like the

burning beings before God's throne, the seraphim, the spirits that blaze and serve. We ought to be like God Himself, all aflame with love. Let us seek penitently for that Spirit of fire who will dwell in us all if we will.

The metaphor of fire suggests also—purifying. "The spirit of burning" will burn the filth out of us. That is the only way by which a man can ever be made clean. You may wash and wash and wash with the cold water of moral reformation, you will never get the dirt out with it. No washing and no rubbing will ever clear sin. The way to cleanse a soul is to do with it as they do with foul clay—thrust it into the fire and that will burn all the blackness out of it. Get the love of God into your hearts, and the fire of His Divine Spirit into your spirits to melt you down, as it were, and then the scum and the dross will come to the top, and you can skim them off. Two things conquer my sin; the one is the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes me from all the guilt of the past; the other is the fiery influence of that Divine Spirit which makes me pure and clean for all the time to come. Pray to be kindled with the fire of God!

III.—Then once more, take that other metaphor, "I will pour out of My Spirit."

That implies an emblem which is very frequently used, both in the Old and in the New Testament, viz., the Spirit as water. As our Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." The "water" stands in the same relation to the "Spirit" as the "fire" does in the saying of John the Baptist already referred to—that is to say, it is simply a symbol or material emblem of the Spirit. I suppose nobody would say that there were two baptisms spoken of by John, one of the Holy Ghost and one of fire,—and I suppose that just in the same way, there are not two agents of regeneration pointed at in our Lord's words,

nor even two conditions, but that the Spirit is the sole agent, and "water" is but a figure to express some aspect of His operations. So that there is no reference to the water of baptism in the words, and to see such a reference is to be led astray by sound, and out of a metaphor to manufacture a miracle.

There are other passages where, in like manner, the Spirit is compared to a flowing stream, such as, for instance, when our Lord said, "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," and when John saw a "river of water of life proceeding from the throne." The expressions, too, of "pouring out" and "shedding forth" the Spirit, point in the same direction, and are drawn from more than one passage of Old Testament prophecy. What, then, is the significance of comparing that Divine Spirit with a river of water? First, cleansing, of which I need not say any more, because I have already spoken about it in the previous part of my sermon. Then, further, refreshing, and satisfying. Ah! dear brethren, there is only one thing that will slake the immortal thirst in your souls. The world will never do it; love or ambition gratified and wealth possessed, will never do it. You will be as thirsty after you have drunk of these streams as ever you were before. There is one spring "of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst" with unsatisfied, painful longings, but shall never cease to thirst with the longing which is blessedness, because it is fruition. Our thirst can be slaked by the deep draught of the river of the Water of Life, which proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb. The Spirit of God, drunk in by my spirit, will still and satisfy my whole nature, and with it I shall be glad. Drink of this! "Ho! everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

The Spirit is not only refreshing and satisfying, but also productive and fertilising. In Eastern lands a rill of

water is all that is needed to make the wilderness rejoice. Turn that stream on to the barrenness of your hearts, and fair flowers will grow that would never grow without it. The one means of lofty and fruitful Christian living is a deep, inward possession of the Spirit of God. The one way to fertilize barren souls is to let that stream flood them all over, and then the flush of green will soon come, and that which was else a desert will "rejoice and blossom as the rose."

So this water will cleanse, it will satisfy and refresh, it will be productive and will fertilize, and "everything shall live whithersoever that river cometh."

IV.—Then, lastly, we have the oil of the Spirit. "Ye have an unction," says John, in our last text, "from the Holy One."

I need not remind you, I suppose, of how in the old system, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with consecrating oil, as a symbol of their calling, and of their fitness for their special offices. The reason for the use of such a symbol, I presume, would lie in the invigorating and in the supposed, and possibly real, health-giving effect of the use of oil in those climates. Whatever may have been the reason for the use of oil in official anointings, the meaning of the act was plain. It was a preparation for a specific and distinct service. And so, when we read of the oil of the Spirit, we are to think that it is that which fits us for being prophets, priests, and kings, and which calls us because it fits us for these functions.

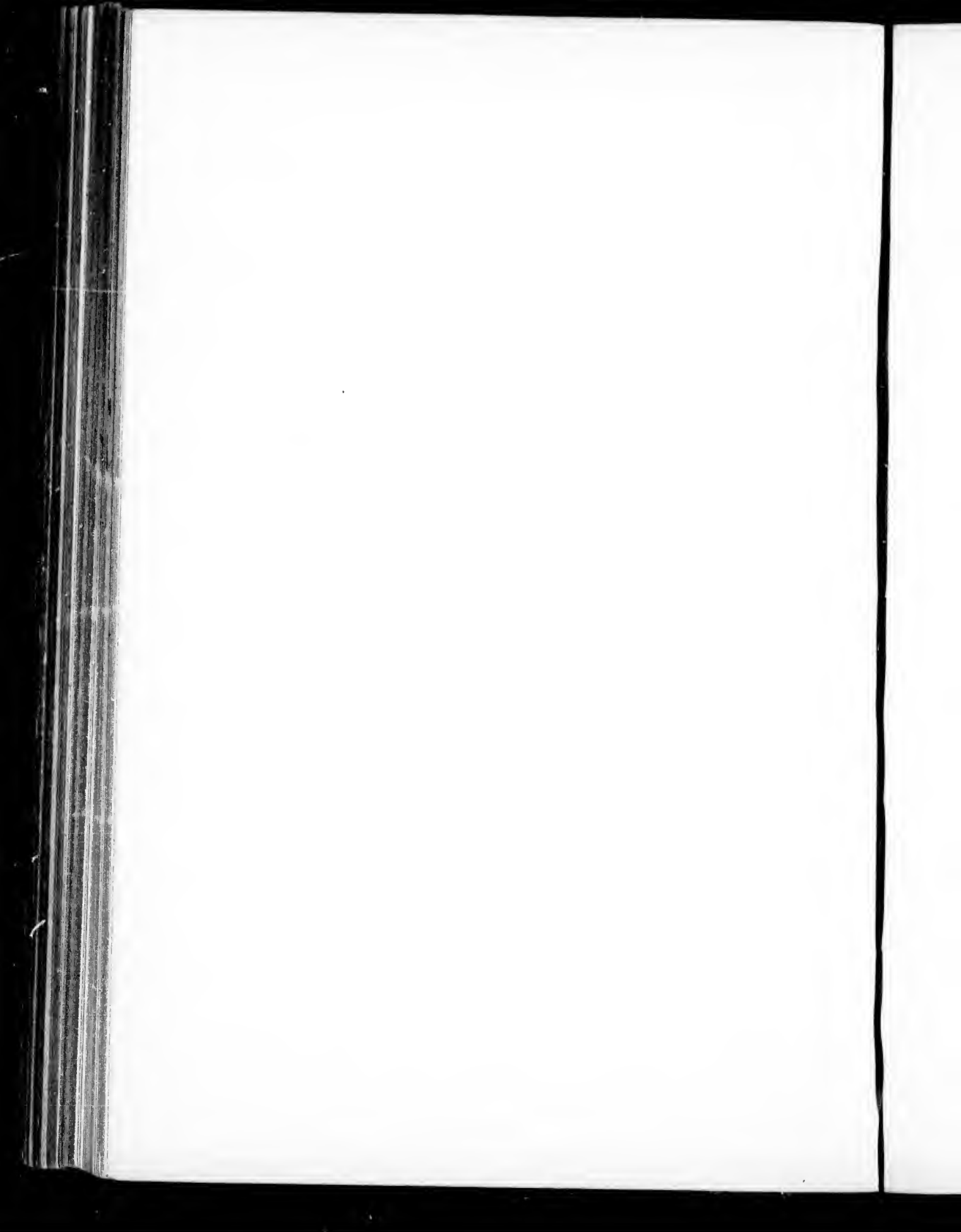
You are anointed to be prophets that you may make known Him Who has loved and saved you; and may go about the world evidently inspired to show forth His praise, and make His Name glorious. That anointing calls and fits you to be priests, mediators between God and man; bringing God to men, and by pleading and persuasion, and the presentation of the truth, drawing

men to God. That unction calls and fits you to be kings, exercising authority over the little monarchy of your own natures, and over the men round you, who will bow in submission whenever they come in contact with a man all evidently aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, and filled with His Spirit. The world is hard and rude ; the world is blind and stupid ; the world often fails to know its best friends and its truest benefactors ; but there is no crust of stupidity so crass and dense but that through it there will pass the penetrating shafts of light that ray from the face of a man who walks in fellowship with Jesus. The whole Israel of old were honoured with these sacred names. They were a kingdom of priests ; and the Divine voice said of the nation "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets' no harm." How much more are all Christian men, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, made prophets, priests, and kings to God ! Alas for the difference between what they ought to be and what they are !

And then do not forget also that when the Scriptures speak about Christian men as being anointed, it really speaks of them as being Messiahs. "Christ" means *anointed*, does it not ? "Messiah" means *anointed*. And when we read in such a passage as that of my text, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," we cannot but feel that the words point in the same direction as the great words of our Master Himself, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." By derived authority, no doubt, and in a subordinate and secondary sense, of course, we are Messiahs, anointed with that Spirit which was given to Him not by measure, and which has passed from Him to us. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

So, dear brethren, all these things being certainly so, what are we to say about the present state of Christendom ?

What are we to say about the present state of English Christianity, Church and Dissent alike? Is Pentecost a vanished glory, then? Has that rushing mighty wind blown itself out, and a dead calm followed? Has that leaping fire died down into grey ashes? Has the great river that burst out then, like the stream from the foot of the glaciers of Mont Blanc, full-grown in its birth, been all swallowed up in the sand, like some of those rivers in the East? Has the oil dried in the cruse? People tell us that Christianity is on its death-bed; and to look at a great many professing Christians seems to confirm the statement. But let us thankfully recognise that we are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. To how many of us the question might be put:—"Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?" And how many of us by our lives answer:—"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Let us go where we can get it; and remember the blessed words:—"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."



SERMON IX.



SORROW ACCORDING TO GOD.

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SERMON IX.

SORROW ACCORDING TO GOD.

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death."—2 Cor. vii. 10.

VERY near the close of his missionary career the Apostle Paul summed up his preaching as being all directed to enforcing two points, "Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These two, repentance and faith, ought never to be separated in thought, as they are inseparable in fact. True repentance is impossible without faith, true faith cannot exist without repentance.

Yet the two are separated very often, even by earnest Christian teachers. The tendency of this day is to say a great deal about faith, and not nearly enough in proportion about repentance; and the effect is to obscure the very idea of faith, and not seldom to preach, "Peace! peace! when there is no peace." A Gospel which is always talking about faith, and scarcely ever talking about sin and repentance, is denuded, indeed, of some of its most unwelcome characteristics, but is also deprived of most of its power, and it may very easily become an ally of unright-

cousness, and an indulgence to sin. The reproach that the Christian doctrine of salvation through faith is immoral in its substance derives most of its force from forgetting that "repentance towards God" is as real a condition of salvation as is "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." We have here the Apostle's deliverance about one of these twin thoughts. We have three stages—the root, the stem, the fruit; sorrow, repentance, salvation. But there is a right and a wrong kind of sorrow for sin. The right kind breeds repentance, and thence reaches salvation; the wrong kind breeds nothing, and so ends in death.

Let us, then, trace these stages, not forgetting that this is not a complete statement of the case, and needs to be supplemented in the spirit of the words which I have already quoted, by the other part of the inseparable whole, "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

I.—First, then, consider the true and the false sorrow for sin.

The Apostle takes it for granted that a recognition of our own evil, and a consequent penitent regretfulness, lie at the foundation of all true Christianity. Now, I do not insist upon any uniformity of experience in people, any more than I should insist that all their bodies should be of one shape or of one proportion. Human lives are infinitely different, human dispositions are subtly varied, and because neither the one nor the other are ever reproduced exactly in any two people, therefore the religious experience of no two souls can ever be precisely alike.

We have no right to ask—and much harm has been done by asking—for an impossible uniformity of religious experience, no more than we have a right to expect that all voices shall be pitched in one key, or all plants flower in the same month, or after the same fashion. You can print off as many copies as you like, for instance, of a

drawing of a flower, on a printing-press, and they shall all be alike, petal for petal, leaf for leaf, shade for shade ; but no two hand-drawn copies will be so precisely alike, still less will any two of the real buds that blow on the bush. Life produces resemblance with differences ; it is machinery that makes fac-similes.

So we insist on no pedantic or unreal uniformity ; and yet, whilst leaving the widest scope for divergencies of individual character and experience, and not asking that a man all diseased and blotched with the leprosy of sin for half a life-time, and a little child that has grown up at its mother's knee, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and so has been kept "innocent of much transgression," shall have the same experience ; yet Scripture, as it seems to me, and the nature of the case do unite in asserting that there are certain elements which, in varying proportions indeed, will be found in all true Christian experience, and of these an indispensable one—and in a very large number, if not in the majority of cases, a fundamental one—is this which my text calls "godly sorrow."

Dear brethren, surely a reasonable consideration of the facts of our conduct and character point to that as the attitude that becomes us. Does it not ? I do not charge you with crimes in the eye of the law. I do not suppose that many of you are living in flagrant disregard of the elementary principles of common every day morality. There are some, no doubt. There are, no doubt, unclean men here ; there are some who eat and drink more than is good for them, habitually ; there are, no doubt, men and women who are living in avarice and worldliness, and doing things which the ordinary conscience of the populace point to as faults and blemishes. But I come to you respectable people that can say : "I am not as other men are, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican ;" and pray you, dear friends, to look at your character all round,

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in the light of the righteousness and love of God, and to plead to the indictment which charges you with neglect of many a duty and with sin against Him. How do you plead, "guilty or not guilty, sinful or not sinful?" Be honest with yourselves, and the answer will not be far to seek.

Notice how my text draws a broad distinction between the right and the wrong kind of sorrow for sin. "Godly sorrow" is, literally rendered, "*sorrow according to God,*" which may either mean sorrow which has reference to God, or sorrow which is in accordance with His will; that is to say, which is pleasing to Him. If it is the former, it will be the latter. I prefer to suppose that it is the former—that is, sorrow which has reference to God. And then, there is another kind of sorrow, which the Apostle calls the "sorrow of the world," which is devoid of that reference to God. Here we have the characteristic difference between the Christian way of looking at our own faults and shortcomings, and the sorrow of the world, which has got no blessing in it, and will never lead to anything like righteousness and peace. It is just this—one has reference to God, puts its sin by His side, sees its blackness relieved against the "fierce light" of the Great White Throne, and the other has not that reference.

To expand that for a moment,—there are plenty of us who, when our sin is behind us, and its bitter fruits are in our hands, are sorry enough for our faults. A man that is lying in the hospital, a wreck, with the sins of his youth gnawing the flesh off his bones, is often enough sorry that he did not live more soberly and chastely and temperately in the past days. That fraudulent bankrupt that has not got his discharge and has lost his reputation, and can get nobody to lend him money enough to start him in business again, as he hangs about the streets, slouching in his rags, is sorry enough that he did not

keep the straight road. The "sorrow of the world" has no thought about God in it at all. The consequences of sin set many a man's teeth on edge who does not feel any compunction for the wrong that he did. My brethren, is that the position of any that are listening to me now ?

Again, men are often sorry for their conduct without thinking of it as sin against God. Crime means the transgression of man's law, wrong means the transgression of conscience's law. Sin is the transgression of God's law. Some of us would perhaps have to say—"I have done crime." We are all of us quite ready to say:—"I have done wrong many a time ;" but there are some of us that hesitate to take the other step, and say:—"I have done sin." Sin has, for its correlative, God. If there is no God there is no sin. There may be faults, there may be failures, there may be transgression, breaches of the moral law, things done inconsistent with man's nature and constitution, and so on ; but if there be a God, then we have personal relations to that person and His law ; and when we break His law it is more than crime ; it is more than fault ; it is more than transgression ; it is more than wrong ; it is sin. It is when you lift the shutter off conscience, and let the light of God rush in upon your hearts and consciences, that you have the wholesome sorrow that worketh repentance and salvation and life.

Oh, dear friends, I do beseech you to lay these simple thoughts to heart. Remember, I urge no rigid uniformity of experience or character, but I do say that unless a man has learned to see his sin in the light of God, and in the light of God to weep over it, he has yet to know "the strait gate that leadeth unto life."

I believe that a very large amount of the superficiality and easy-goingness of the Christianity of to-day comes just from this, that so many who call themselves Christians have never once got a glimpse of themselves as they

really are. I remember once peering over the edge of the crater of Vesuvius, and looking down into the pit, all swirling with sulphurous fumes. Have you ever looked into your hearts, in that fashion, and seen the wreathing smoke and the flashing fire there? If you have, you will cleave to that Christ, Who is your sole deliverance from sin.

But, remember, there is no prescription about depth or amount or length of time during which this sorrow shall be felt. If, on the one hand, it is essential, on the other hand there are a great many people who ought to be walking in the light and the liberty of God's Gospel who bring darkness and clouds over themselves by the anxious scrutinising question:—"Is my sorrow deep enough?" Deep enough! What for? What is the use of sorrow for sin? To lead a man to repentance and to faith. If you have as much sorrow as leads you to penitence and trust you have enough. It is not your sorrow that is going to wash away your sin, it is Christ's blood. So let no man trouble himself about the question, Have I sorrow enough? The one question is: "Has my sorrow led me to cast myself on Christ?"

II.—Still further, look now for a moment at the next stage here. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance."

What is repentance? No doubt many of you would answer that it is "sorrow for sin," but clearly this text of ours draws a distinction between the two. There are very few of the great key words of Christianity which have suffered more violent and unkind treatment, and have been more obscured by misunderstandings, than this great word. It has been weakened down into penitence, which in the ordinary acceptance, means simply the emotion that I have already been speaking about, viz., a regretful sense of my own evil. And it has been still further docked and degraded, both in its syllables and in its substance,

into *penance*. But the "repentance" of the New Testament and of the Old Testament—one of the twin conditions of salvation—is neither sorrow for sin nor works of restitution and satisfaction, but it is, as the word distinctly expresses, a change of purpose in regard to the sin for which a man mourns. I have no time to expand and to elaborate this idea as I should like, but let me remind you of one or two passages in Scripture which may show that the right notion of the word is not sorrow but changed attitude and purpose in regard to my sin.

We find passages, some of which ascribe and some deny repentance to the Divine nature. But if there be a repentance which is possible for the Divine nature, it obviously cannot mean sorrow for sin, but must signify a change of purpose. In the Epistle to the Romans we read "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," which clearly means without change of purpose on His part. And I read in the story of the mission of the Prophet Jonah, that, "The Lord repented of the evil which He had said He would do unto them, and He did it not." Here, again, the idea of repentance is clearly and distinctly that of a change of purpose. So fix this on your minds, and lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that the repentance of the New Testament is not idle tears nor the twitchings of a vain regret, but the resolute turning away of the sinful heart from its sins. It is "repentance toward God," the turning from the sin to the Father, and that is what leads to salvation. The sorrow is separated from the repentance in idea, however closely they may be intertwined in fact. The sorrow is one thing, and the repentance which it works is another.

Then, notice that this change of purpose and breaking off from sin is produced by the sorrow for sin, of which I have been speaking; and that the production of this repentance is the main characteristic difference between the

godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. A man may have his paroxysms of regret, but the question is : Does it make any difference in his attitude? Is he standing after the tempest of sorrow has swept over him, with his face in the same direction as before ; or has it whirled him clean round, and set him in the other direction? The one kind of sorrow, which measures my sin by the side of the brightness and purity of God, vindicates itself as true, because it makes me hate my evil and turn away from it. The other, which is of the world, passes over me like the empty wind through an archway, it whistles for a moment and is gone, and there is nothing left to show that it was ever there. The one comes like one of those brooks in tropical countries, dry and white for half the year, and then there is a rush of muddy waters, fierce but transient and leaving no results behind. My brother! when your conscience pricks, which of these two things does it do? After the prick, is the word of command that your Will issues. "Right about face!" or is it, "As you were?" Godly sorrow worketh a change of attitude, purpose, mind; the sorrow of the world leaves a man standing where he was. Ask yourselves the question : Which of the two are you familiar with?

Again, the true means of evoking true repentance is the contemplation of the Cross. Law and the fear of hell may startle into sorrow, and even lead to some kind of repentance. But it is the great power of Christ's love and sacrifice which will really melt the heart into true repentance. You may hammer ice to pieces, but it is ice still. You may bray a fool in a mortar, and his folly will not depart from him. Dread of punishment may pulverise the heart, but not change it ; and each fragment, like the smallest bits of a magnet, will have the same characteristics as the whole mass. But "the goodness of God leads to repentance," as the prodigal is conquered and sees the

true hideousness of the swine's trough, when he bethinks himself of the father's love. I beseech you to put yourselves under the influence of that great love, and look on that Cross till your hearts melt.

III.—We come to the last stage here. Salvation is the issue of repentance. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

What is the connection between repentance and salvation? Two sentences will answer the question. You cannot get salvation without repentance. You do not get salvation by repentance.

You cannot get the salvation of God unless you shake off your sin. It is no use preaching to a man, "Faith, Faith! Faith!!" unless you preach along with it, "Break off your iniquities." "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord." The nature of the case forbids it. It is a clear contradiction in terms, and an absolute impossibility in fact, that God should save a man with the salvation which consists in the deliverance from sin, whilst that man is holding to his sin. Unless, therefore, you have not merely sorrow, but repentance, which is turning away from sin with resolute purpose, as a man would turn from a serpent, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But you do not get salvation for your repentance. It is no case of barter, it is no case of salvation by works, that work being repentance :

"Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Not my penitence, but Christ's death, is the ground of the salvation of everyone that is saved at all. Yet repentance is an indispensable condition of salvation.

What is the connection between repentance and faith? There can be no true repentance without trust in Christ.

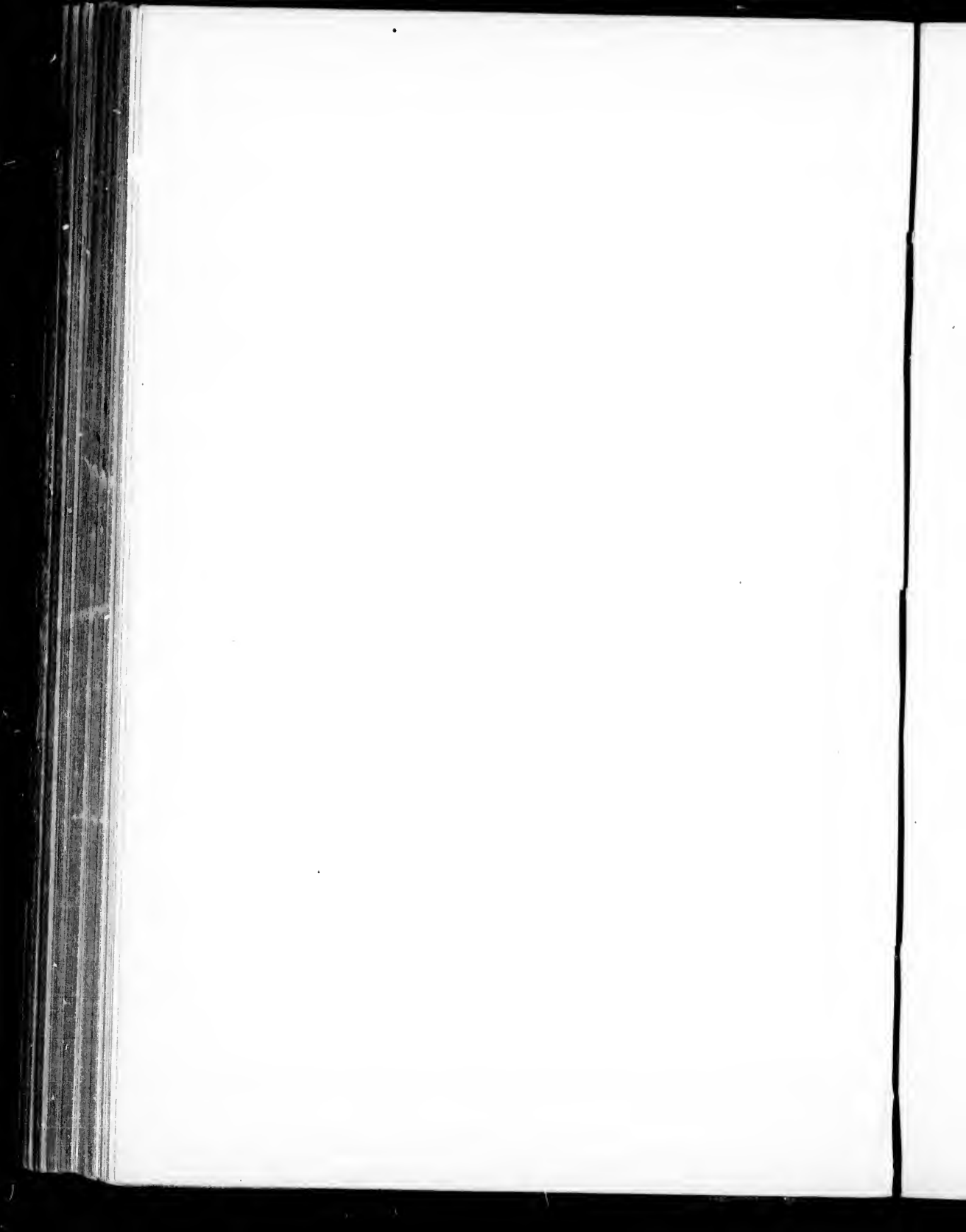
There can be no true trust in Christ without the forsaking of my sin. Repentance without faith, in so far as it is possible, is one long misery ; like the pains of those poor Hindoo devotees that will go all the way from Cape Comorin to the shrine of Juggernaut, and measure every foot of the road with the length of their own bodies in the dust. Men will do anything, and willingly make any sacrifice, rather than open their eyes to see this,—that repentance, clasped hand in hand with faith, leads the guiltiest soul into the forgiving presence of the crucified Christ, from whom Peace flows into the darkest heart.

On the other hand, faith without repentance is not possible, in any deep sense. But in so far as it is possible, it produces a superficial Christianity which vaguely trusts to Christ without knowing exactly what it is trusting Him for, or why it needs Him ; and which has a great deal to say about what I may call the less important parts of the Christian system, and nothing to say about its vital centre ; which preaches a morality which is not a living power to create ; which practises a religion which is neither a joy nor a security. The old word of the Master has a deep truth in it : “These are they which heard the word, and anon with joy received it.” Having no sorrow, no penitence, no deep consciousness of sin, “they have no root in themselves, and in time of temptation they fall away.” If there is to be a profound, an all-pervading, life-transforming sin and devil-conquering faith, it must be a faith rooted deep in penitence and sorrow for sin.

Dear brethren, if, by God’s grace, my poor words have touched your consciences at all, I beseech you, do not trifle with the budding conviction ! Do not seek to have the wound skinned over. Take care that you do not let it all pass in idle sorrow or impotent regret. If you do, you will be hardened, and the worse for it, and come nearer to that condition which the sorrow of the world worketh, the

awful death of the soul. Do not wince from the knife before the roots of the cancer are cut out. The pain is merciful. Better the wound than the malignant growth. Yield yourselves to the Spirit that would convince you of sin, and listen to the voice that calls to you to forsake your unrighteous ways and thoughts. But do not trust to any tears, do not trust to any resolves, do not trust to any reformation. Trust only to the Lord that died on the Cross for you, Whose death for you, Whose life in you, will be deliverance from your sin. Then you will have a salvation which, in the striking language of my text, "is not to be repented of," which will leave no regrets in your hearts in the day when all else shall have faded, and the sinful sweets of this world shall have turned to ashes and bitterness on the lips of the men that feed on them.

"The sorrow of the world works death." There are men and women listening to me now who are half conscious of their sin, and are resisting the pleading voice that comes to them, who at the last will open their eyes upon the realities of their lives, and in a wild passion of remorse, exclaim: "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." Better to make thorough work of the sorrow, and by it to be led to repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and so secure for our own that salvation for which no man will ever regret having given even the whole world, that he might gain his own soul.

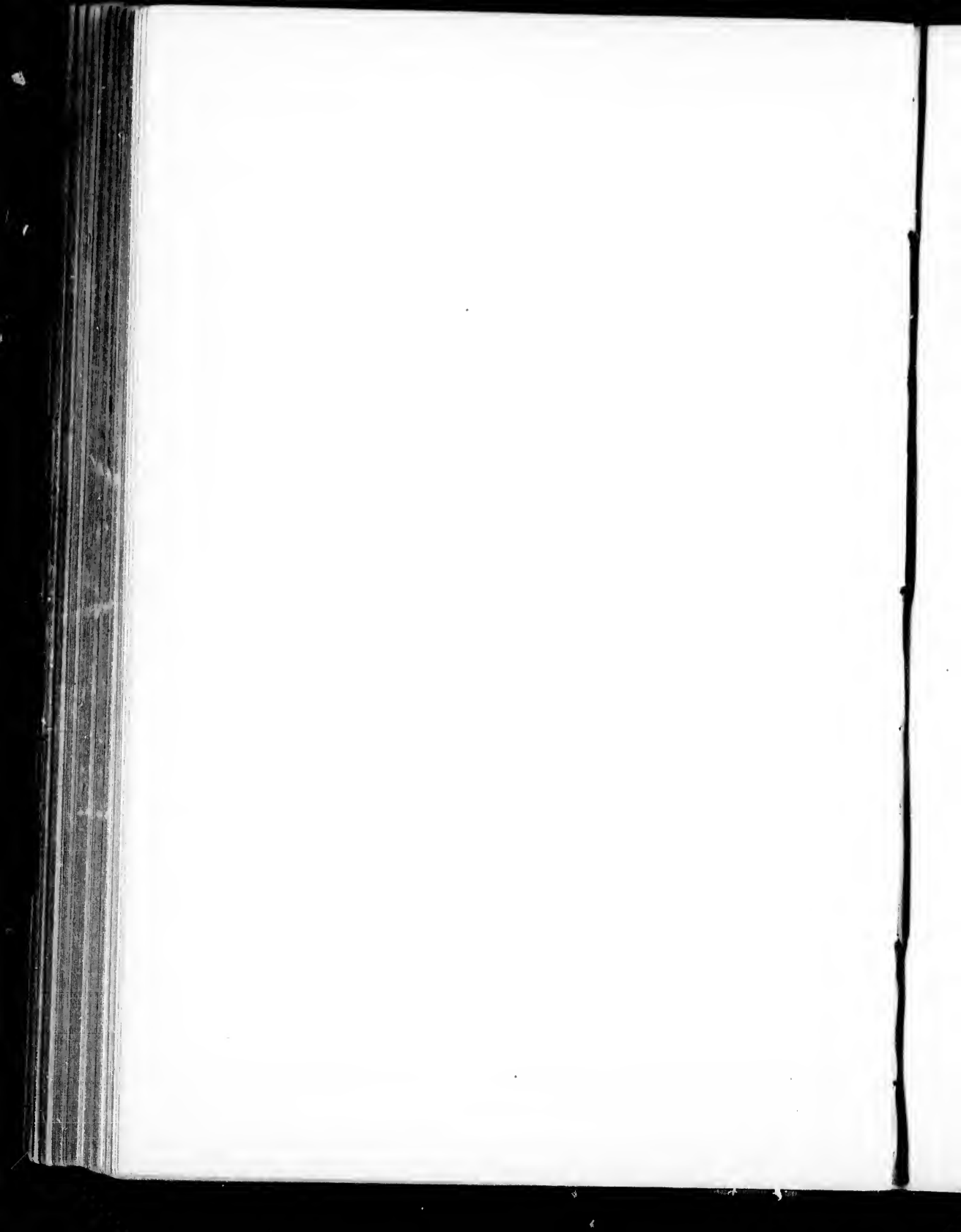


SERMON X.



THE FIRST DISCIPLES.

I. JOHN AND ANDREW.



SERMON X.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.—I. JOHN AND ANDREW.

“And the two disciples heard Him speak and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him; Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest Thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” JOHN i. 37-39.

IN these verses we see the head waters of a great river; for we have before us nothing less than the beginnings of the Christian Church. So simply were the first disciples made. The great society of believers was born like its Master, unostentatiously and in a corner.

Jesus has come back from His six weeks in the wilderness after His baptism, and has presented Himself before John the Baptist for his final attestation. It was a great historical moment when the Last of the Prophets stood face to face with the Fulfilment of all prophecy. In his words: “Behold the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world!” Jewish prophecy sang its swan-song, uttered its last rejoicing “Eureka! I have found Him!” and died as it spoke.

We do not sufficiently estimate the magnificent self-suppression and unselfishness of the Baptist, in that he, with his own lips, here repeats his testimony in order

to point his disciples away from himself, and to attach them to Jesus. If he could have been touched by envy he would not so gladly have recognised it as his lot to decrease while Jesus increased. Rare magnanimity that in a teacher ! The two who hear John's words are Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and an anonymous man ; the latter is probably the Evangelist. For it is remarkable that we never find the names of James and John in this Gospel (though from the other Gospels we know how closely they were associated with our Lord), and that we only find them referred to as "the sons of Zebedee," once near the close of the book. That fact points, I think, in the direction of John's authorship of this Gospel.

These two, then, follow Jesus behind, fancying themselves unobserved, not wanting to speak to Him, and probably with some notion of tracking Him to His home, in order that they may seek an interview at a later period. But He Who notices the first beginnings of return to Him, and always comes to meet men, and is better to them than their wishes, will not let them steal behind Him uncheered, nor leave them to struggle with diffidence and delay. So He turns to them, and the events which I have read in the verses that follow as my text for this morning, ensue.

We have, I think, three things especially to notice here. First, the Master's question to the whole world, "What seek ye ?" Second, the Master's invitation to the whole world, "Come and see !" Lastly, the personal communion which brings men's hearts to Him, "They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with Him that day."

I.—So, then, first look at this question of Christ to the whole world, "What seek ye ?" As it stands, on its surface, and in its primary application, it is the most natural of questions. Our Lord hears footsteps behind

Him, and, as anyone would do, turns about, with the question which anyone would ask, "What is it that you want?" That question would derive all its meaning from the look with which it was accompanied, and the tone in which it was spoken. It might mean either annoyance and rude repulsion of the request, even before it was presented, or it might mean a glad wish to draw out the petition, and more than half a pledge to bestow it. All depends on the smile with which it was asked, and the intonation of voice which carried it to their ears. And if we had been there we should have felt, as they evidently felt, that though in form a question, it was in reality a promise, and that it drew out their shy wishes : made them conscious to themselves of what they desired, and gave them confidence that their desire would be granted. Clearly it had sunk very deep into the Evangelist's mind ; and now, at the end of his life, when his course is nearly run, the never-to-be-forgotten voice sounds still in his memory, and he sees again, in sunny clearness, all the scenes that had transpired on that day by the fords of the Jordan. The first words and the last words of those whom we have learned to love are cut deep on our hearts.

It was not an accident that the first words which the Master spoke in His Messianic office were this profoundly significant question, "What seek ye?" He asks it of us all, He asks it of us to-day. Well for them who can answer, "Rabbi! where dwellest *Thou*?" "It is Thou Whom we seek!" So, venturing to take the words in that somewhat wider application, let me just suggest to you two or three directions in which they seem to point.

I.—First, the question suggests to us this : the need of having a clear consciousness of what is our object in life. The most of men have never answered that question. They live from hand to mouth, driven by circumstances, guided by accidents, impelled by unreflecting passions

and desires, knowing what they want for the moment, but never having tried to shape the whole of their lives into one consistent theory, so as to stand up before God in Christ when He puts the question to them, "What seek ye?" and to answer the question.

These incoherent, instinctive, unreflective lives that so many of you are living are a shame to your manhood, to say nothing more. God has made us for something else than that we should thus be the sport of circumstances. It is a disgrace to any of us that our lives should be like some little fishing boat, with an unskilful or feeble hand at the tiller, yawing from one point of the compass to another, and not keeping a strait and direct course. I pray you, dear brethren, to front this question: "After all, and at bottom, what is it I am living for? Can I formulate the aims and purposes of my life in any intelligible statement of which I should not be ashamed?" Some of you are not ashamed to *do* what you would be very much ashamed to say, and you practically answer the question, "What are you seeking?" by pursuits that you durst not call by their own ugly names.

There may be people in this congregation this morning that are living for their lusts, for their passions, for their ambitions, for avarice, that are living in all uncleanness and godlessness. I do not know. There are plenty of shabby, low aims in all of us, which do not bear being dragged out into the light of day. I beseech you to try and get hold of the ugly things and bring them up to the surface, however much they may seek to hide in the congenial obscurity, and twist their slimy coils round something in the dark. If you dare not put your life's object into words, bethink yourselves whether it ought to be your life's object at all.

Ah, brethren! If we would ask ourselves this question, and answer it with any thoroughness, we should not

make so many mistakes as to the places where we look for the things for which we are seeking. If we knew what we were really seeking, we should know where to go to look for it. Let me tell you what you are seeking, whether you know it or not. You are seeking for rest for your heart, a home for your spirits; you are seeking for perfect truth for your understandings, perfect beauty for your affections, perfect goodness for your conscience. You are seeking for all these three, gathered into one white beam of light, and you are seeking for it all in a person. Many of you do not know this, and so you go hunting in all manner of impossible places for that which you can only find in one. To the question, "What seek ye?" the deepest of all answers, the only real answer is, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." If you know that, you know where to look for what you need! "Do men gather grapes of thorns?" If these are really the things that you are seeking after, in all your mistaken search—oh! how mistaken is the search! Do men look for pearls in cockle-shells, or for gold in coal-pits; and why should you look for rest of heart, mind, conscience, spirit, anywhere and in anything short of God? "What seek ye?" The only answer is, "We seek *Thee!*"

And then, still further, let me remind you how these words are not only a question, but are really a veiled and implied promise. The question, "What do you want of Me?" may either strike an intending suppliant like a blow, and drive him away with his prayer sticking in his throat unspoken, or it may sound like a merciful invitation, "What is thy petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be granted unto thee?" We know which of the two it was here. Christ asks all such questions as this (and there are many of them in the New Testament), not for His information, but for our strengthening. He asks people, not because He does not know before they answer,

but that, on the one hand, their own minds may be clear as to their wishes, and so they may wish the more earnestly because of the clearness ; and that on the other hand, their desires being expressed, they may be the more able to receive the gift which He is willing to bestow. So He here turns to these men, whose purpose He knew well enough, and says to them, "What seek ye?" Herein He is doing the very same thing on a lower level, and in an outer sphere, as is done when He appoints that we shall pray for the blessings which He is yearning to bestow, but which He makes conditional on our supplications, only because by these supplications our hearts are opened into a capacity for receiving them.

We have, then, in the words before us, thus understood, our Lord's gracious promise to give what is desired on the simple condition that the suppliant is conscious of his own wants, and turns to Him for the supply of them. "What seek ye?" It is a blank cheque that He puts into their hands to fill up. It is the key of His treasure-house which He offers to us all, with the assured confidence that if we open it we shall find all that we need.

Who is He that thus stands up before a whole world of seeking, restless spirits, and fronts them with the question which is a pledge, conscious of His capacity to give to each of them what each of them requires? Who is this that professes to be able to give all these men and women and children bread here in the wilderness? There is only one answer—the Christ of God.

And He has done what He promises. No man or woman ever went to Him, and answered this question, and presented their petition for any real good, and was refused. No man can ask from Christ what Christ cannot bestow. No man can ask from Christ what Christ will not bestow. In the loftiest region, the region of inward and spiritual gifts, which are the best gifts, we can get everything that we

want, and our only limit is, not His boundless Omnipotence and willingness, but our own poor, narrow, and shrivelled desires. "Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find."

He stands before us, if I may so say, like some of those fountains erected at some great national festival, out of which pour for all the multitude every variety of draught which they desire, and each man that goes with his empty cup gets it filled, and gets it filled with that which he wishes. "What seek ye?" Wisdom? You students, you thinkers, you young men that are fighting with intellectual difficulties and perplexities, "What seek ye?" Truth? He gives us that. You others, "What seek ye?" Love, peace, victory, self-control, hope, anodyne for sorrow? Whatever you desire, you will find in Jesus Christ. The first words with which He broke the silence when He spake to men as the Messiah, were at once a searching question, probing their aims and purposes, and a gracious promise pledging Him to a task not beyond His power, however far beyond that of all others, even the task of giving to each man his heart's desire. "What seek ye?" "Seek, and ye shall find."

II.—Then, still further, notice how, in a similiar fashion, we may regard here the second words which our Lord speaks as being His merciful invitation to the world. "Come and see."

The disciples' answer was simple and timid. They did not venture to say, "May we talk to You?" "Will You take us to be Your disciples?" All they can muster courage to ask now is, "Where dwellest Thou?" At another time, perhaps, we will go to this Rabbi and speak with him. His answer is, "Come! Come now! Come, and by intercourse with Me, learn to know Me." His temporary home was probably nothing more than some selected place on the river's bank, for He had not where to lay His head; but such as it was He welcomesthem to it. "Come and see!"

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Take a plain, simple truth out of that. Christ is always glad when people resort to Him. When He was here in the world, no hour was inconvenient or inopportune ; no moment was too much occupied ; no physical wants of hunger, or thirst, or slumber were ever permitted to come between Him and seeking hearts. He was never impatient. He was never wearied of speaking, though He was often wearied in speaking. He never denied Himself to anybody, or said, "I have something else to do than to attend to you." And just as in literal fact, whilst He was here upon earth, nothing was ever permitted to hinder His drawing near to anybody that wanted to draw near to Him, so nothing now hinders it ; and He is glad when any of us resort to Him and ask Him to let us speak to Him and be with Him. His weariness or occupation never shut men out from Him then. His glory does not shut them out now.

Then there is another thought here. This invitation of the Master is also a very distinct call to a first-hand knowledge of Jesus Christ. Andrew and John had heard from the Baptist about Him, and now what He bids them to do is to come and hear Himself. That is what he calls you, dear brethren, to do. Do not listen to us, let the Master Himself speak to you. Many who reject Christianity reject it through not having listened to Jesus Himself teaching them, but only to theologians and other human representations of the truth. Go and ask Christ to speak to you with His own lips of truth, and take Him as the expositor of His own system. Do not be contented with traditional talk and second-hand information. Go to Christ, and hear what He Himself has to say to you.

Then, still further, in this "come and see" there is a distinct call to the personal act of faith. Both of these words, "*Come*," and "*see*," are used in the New Testament as standing emblems of faith. Coming to Christ is trust-

ing Him ; trusting Him is seeing Him, looking unto Him. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." There are two metaphors, both of them pointing to one thing, and that one thing is the invitation from the dear lips of the loving Lord to every man, woman, and child in this congregation. "Come and see !" "Put your trust in Me, draw near to Me by desire and penitence, draw near to Me in the fixed thought of your mind, in the devotion of your will, in the trust of your whole being. Come to Me, and see Me by faith ; and then,—and then—your hearts will have found what they seek, and your weary quest will be over, and like the dove you will fold your wings and nestle at the foot of the Cross, and rest for evermore. Come ! Come and see !"

III.—So, lastly, we have in these words a parable of the blessed experience which binds men's hearts to Jesus for ever. "They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour."

"Dwelt" and "abode" are the same words in the original. It is one of John's favourite words, and in its deepest meaning expresses the close, still communion which the soul may have with Jesus Christ, which communion, on that never to be forgotten day, when he and Andrew sat with Him in the quiet, confidential fellowship that disclosed Christ's glory full of grace and truth to their hearts, made them His for ever.

If the reckoning of time here is made according to the Hebrew fashion, the "tenth hour" will be ten o'clock in the morning. So, one long day of talk ! If it be according to the Roman legal fashion, the hour will be four o'clock in the afternoon, which would only give time for a brief conversation before the night fell. But, in any case, sacred reserve is observed as to what passed in that interview. A lesson for a great deal of blatant talk, in this present day, about conversion and the details thereof !

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"Not easily forgiven are those who, setting wide the doors that bar
The secret bridal chambers of the heart,
Let in the day."

John had nothing to say to the world about what the Master said to him and his brother in that long day of communion.

One plain conclusion from this last part of our narrative is that the impression of Christ's own personality is the strongest force to make disciples. The character of Jesus Christ is, after all, the centre and the standing evidence, and the mightiest credential of Christianity. It bears upon its face the proof of its own truthfulness. If such a character was not lived, how did it ever come to be described, and described by such people? And if it was lived, how did it come to be? The historical veracity of the character of Jesus Christ is guaranteed by its very uniqueness. And the Divine origin of Jesus Christ is forced upon us as the only adequate explanation of His historical character. "Truly this man was the Son of God."

I believe that to lift Him up is the work of all Christian preachers and teachers; as far as they can to hide themselves behind Jesus Christ, or at the most to let themselves appear, just as the old painters used to let their own likenesses appear in the great altar-pieces—a little kneeling figure there, away in a dark corner of the background. Present Christ, and He will vindicate His own character; He will vindicate His own nature; He will vindicate His own Gospel. "They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him." And the end of it was that they abode with Him for evermore. And so it will always be.

Once more, personal experience of the grace and sweetness of this Saviour binds men to Him as nothing else will :

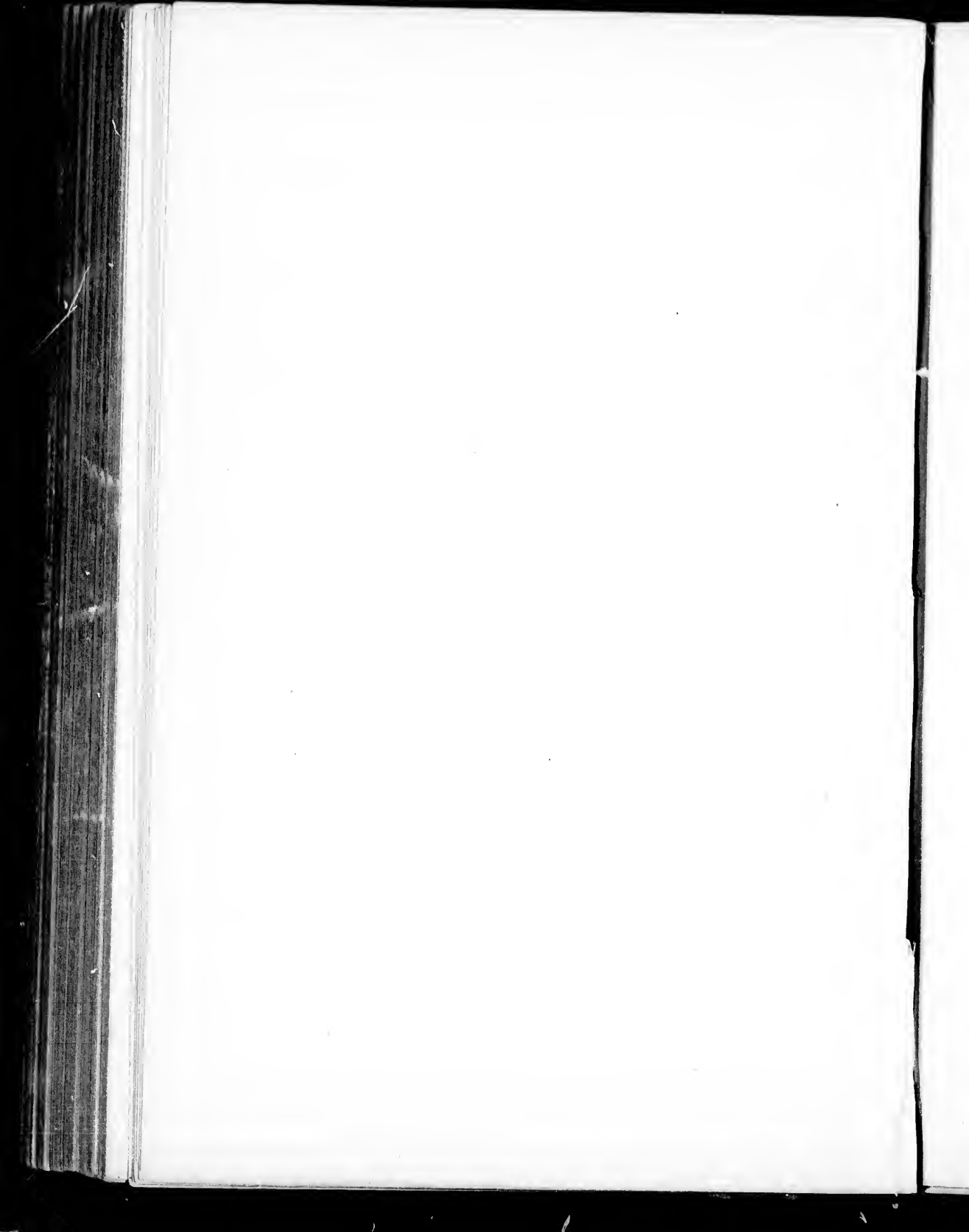
"He must be loved ere that to you
He will seem worthy of your love."

The deepest and sweetest, and most precious part of His

character and of His gifts can only be known on condition of possessing Him and them, and they can be possessed only on condition of holding fellowship with Him. I do not say to any man—"try Trust in order to be sure that Jesus Christ is worthy to be trusted," for by its very nature faith cannot be an experiment or provisional.

I do not say that my experience is evidence to you, but at the same time I do say that it is worth any man's while to reflect upon this, that none who ever trusted in Him have been put to shame. No man has looked to Jesus and has said :—"Ah ! I have found Him out ! His help is vain, His promises empty." Many men have fallen away from Him, I know, but not because they have proved Him a liar, but because they have become unfaithful.

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with the old message :—"Oh ! taste," and thus you will "see that the Lord is good." There must be the faith first, and then there will be the experience, which will make anything seem to you more credible than that He Whom you have loved and trusted, and Who has answered your love and your trust should be anything else than the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind. Come to Him and you will see, The impregnable argument will be put into your mouth, "Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." Look to Him, listen to Him, and when He asks you, "What seek ye ?" answer "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou ? It is Thou Whom we seek." He will welcome you to close blessed intercourse with Him, which will knit you to Him with cords that cannot be broken, and with His loving voice making music in memory and heart, you will be able triumphantly to confess—"Now we believe, not because of any man's saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."



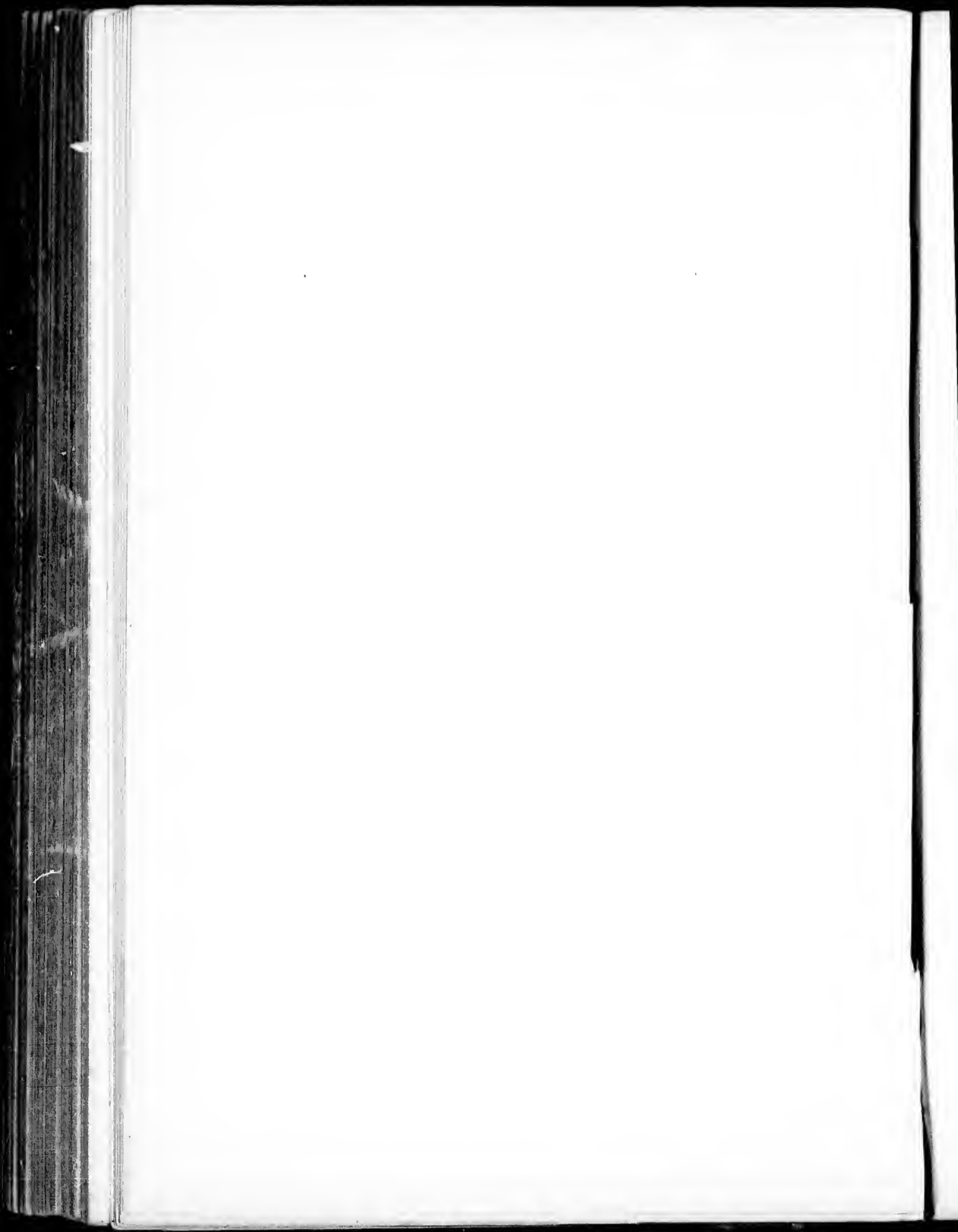
SERMON XI.



THE FIRST DISCIPLES :

II. SIMON PETER.

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SERMON XI.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES : II.—SIMON PETER.

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother, Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus, and when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona, thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." John i. 40-42.

THERE are many ways by which souls are brought to their Saviour. Sometimes, like the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, men seek Him earnestly and find Him. Sometimes, by the intervention of another, the knowledge of Him is kindled in dark hearts. Sometimes He Himself takes the initiative, and finds those that seek Him not. We have illustrations of all these various methods in these simple records of the gathering in of the first disciples. Andrew and his friend, with whom we were occupied in our last sermon, looked for Christ and found Him. Peter, with whom we have to do now, was brought to Christ by his brother; and the third of the group, consisting of Philip, was sought by Christ while he was not thinking of Him, and found an unsought treasure. And then Philip, again, like Andrew, finds a friend, and brings him to Christ.

Each of the incidents has its own lesson, and each of

them adds something to the elucidation of John's two great subjects, the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God and the development of that faith in Him which gives us life. It may be profitable to consider each group in succession, and mark the various aspects of these two subjects presented by each.

In this incident, then, we have two things mainly to consider, first, the witness of the disciple ; second, the self-revelation of the Master.

I.—The witness of the disciple. We have seen that the unknown companion of Andrew was probably the Evangelist himself, who, in accordance with his uniform habit, suppresses his own name, and that that omission points to John's authorship of this Gospel. Another morsel of evidence as to the date and purpose of the Gospel lies in the mention here of Andrew as "Simon Peter's brother." We have not yet heard anything about Simon Peter. The Evangelist has never mentioned his name, and yet he takes it for granted that his hearers knew all about Peter, and knew him better than they did Andrew. That presupposes a considerable familiarity with the incidents of the Gospel story, and is in harmony with the theory that this fourth Gospel is the latest of the four, and was written for the purpose of supplementing, not of repeating, their narrative. Hence a number of the phenomena of the Gospel, which have troubled critics, are simply and sufficiently explained.

But that by the way. Passing that, notice first the illustration that we get here of how instinctive and natural the impulse is, when a man has found Jesus Christ, to tell someone else about Him. Nobody said to Andrew, "Go and look for your brother!" And yet, as soon as he had fairly realised the fact that this Man standing before him was the Messiah, though the evening seems to have come, he hurries away to find his brother, and share with him the glad conviction.

Now, that is always the case. If a man has any real depth of conviction he cannot rest till he tries to share it with somebody else. Why, even a dog that has had its leg mended, will bring other limping dogs to the man that was kind to it. Whoever really believes anything becomes a propagandist.

Look round about us to-day ! and hearken to the Babel, the wholesome Babel of noises, where every sort of opinion is trying to make itself heard. It sounds like a country fair where every huckster is shouting his loudest. That shows that the men believe the things that they profess. Thank God that there is so much earnestness in the world ! And now are Christians to be dumb whilst all this vociferous crowd is calling its wares, and quacks are standing on their platforms shouting out their specifics, which are mostly delusions ? Have you not a medicine that will cure everything, a real heal-all, a veritable pain-killer ? If you believe that you have, certainly you will never rest till you share your boon with your brethren.

If the natural effect of all earnest conviction, viz., a yearning and an absolute necessity to speak it out, is no part of your Christian experience, very grave inferences ought to be drawn from that. This man, before he was four-and-twenty hours a disciple, had made another. Some of you have been disciples for as many years, and have never even tried to make one. Whence comes that silence which is, alas, so common among us ?

It is very plain that, making all allowance for changed manners, for social difficulties, for timidity, for the embarrassment that besets people when they talk to other people about religion, which is "such an awkward subject to introduce into mixed company," and the like ;—making all allowance for that, there is a deplorable number of Christian people who ought to be, in their own circles, evangelists and missionaries, who are, if I may venture

to quote very rude words which the Bible uses, "Dumb dogs lying down, and loving to slumber." "He first findeth his own brother, Simon!"

Now, take another lesson out of this witness of the disciple, as to the channel in which such effort naturally runs. "He *first* findeth *his own brother*." Well, then, there was a second that found somebody or other. The language of the text suggests that the Evangelist's tendency to the suppression of himself, of which I have spoken, hides away, if I may so say, in this singular expression, the fact that he too went to look for a brother, but that Andrew found his brother before John found his. If so, each of the original pair of disciples went to look for one who was knit to him by close ties of kindred and affection, and found him and brought him to Christ; and before the day was over the Christian Church was doubled, because each member of it, by God's grace, had added another. Home, then, and those who are nearest to us, present the natural channels for Christian work. Many a very earnest and busy preacher, or Sunday-school teacher, or missionary, has brothers and sisters, husband or wife, children or parents at home to whom he has never said a word about Christ. There is an old proverb: "The shoemaker's wife is always the worst shod." The families of many very busy Christian teachers suffer woefully for want of remembering "he first findeth his own brother." It is a poor affair if all your philanthropy and Christian energy go off noisily in Sunday-schools and mission-stations, and if your own vineyard, the people at your own fireside, never hear anything from you about the Master whom you say you love. Some of you want that hint; will you take it?

But, then, the principle is one that might be fairly expanded beyond the home circle. The natural relationships into which we are brought by neighbourhood and by

ordinary associations prescribe the direction of our efforts. What, for instance, are we set down in this swarming population of Lancashire for? For business and personal ends? Yes, partly. But is that all? Surely, if we believe that there is a Divinity that shapes our ends and determines the bounds of our habitation, we must believe that other purposes affecting other people are also meant by God to be accomplished through us, and that where a man who knows and loves Christ Jesus is brought into neighbourly contact with thousands who do not, he is thereby constituted his brethren's keeper, and is as plainly called to tell them of Christ as if a voice from Heaven had bid him do it. What is to be said of the depth and vital energy of the Christianity that neither hears the call nor feels the impulse to share its blessing with the famishing Lazarus at its gate? What will be the fate of such a church? Why, if you live in luxury in your own well-drained and ventilated house, and take no heed to the typhoid fever or cholera in the slums at the back, the chances are that seeds of the disease will find their way to you, and kill your wife, or child, or yourself. And if you Christian people, living in the midst of godless people, do not try to heal them, they will infect you. If you do not seek to impress your conviction that Christ is the Messiah upon an unbelieving generation, the unbelieving generation will impress upon you its doubts whether He is; and your lips will falter, and a pallor will come over the complexion of your love, and your faith will become congealed, and turn into ice.

Notice again the simple word which is the most powerful means of influencing most men.

Andrew did not begin to argue with his brother. Some of us can do that and some of us cannot. Some of us are influenced by argument and some of us are not. You may pound a man's mistaken creed to atoms with sledge-

hammers of reasoning, and he is not much the nearer being a Christian than he was before ; just as you may pound ice to pieces and it is pounded ice after all. The mightiest argument that we can use, and the argument that we can all use, if we have got any religion in us at all, is that of Andrew, " We have found the Messias."

I was reading the other day a story in some newspaper or other about a minister that preached a very elaborate course of lectures in refutation of some form of infidelity, for the special benefit of a man that attended his place of worship. Soon after the man came and declared himself a Christian. The minister said to him, " Which of my discourses was it that removed your doubts ?" The reply was, " Oh ! it was not any of your sermons that influenced me. The thing that set me thinking was that a poor woman came out of the chapel beside me, and stumbled on the steps, and I stretched out my hand to help her, and she said, ' Thank you ! ' Then she looked at me and said : ' Do you love Jesus Christ, my blessed Saviour ? ' And I did not, and I went home and thought about it ; and now I can say *I* love Jesus." The poor woman's word, and her frank confession of her experience, was all the transforming power.

If you have found Christ, you can say you have. Never mind about the how ! Any how ! Only say it ! A boy that is sent on an errand by his father has only one duty to perform, and that is to repeat what he was told. Whether we have any eloquence or not, whether we have any logic or not, whether we can speak persuasively and gracefully or not, if we have got hold of Christ at all we can say that we have ; and it is at our peril that we do not. We can say it to somebody. There is surely someone who will listen to you more readily than to anybody else. Surely you have not lived all your life and bound nobody to you by kindness and love, so that they will gladly attend to

what you say. Well, then, *use* the power that is given to you.

Remember the beginnings of the Christian Church—two men ; each of whom found his brother. Two and two make four ; and if every one of us would go, according to the old law of warfare, and each of us slay our man, or rather each of us give life by God's grace to someone, or try to do it, our congregations and our churches would grow as fast as, according to the old problem, the money grew that was paid down for the nails in the horse's shoes. Two snowflakes on the top of a mountain are an avalanche by the time they reach the valley. "He first findeth his brother, Simon."

II.—And now I turn to the second part of this text, the self-revelation of the Master. The bond which knit these men to Christ at first was by no means the perfect Christian faith which they afterwards attained. They recognised Him as the Messiah, they were personally attached to Him, they were ready to accept His teaching and to obey His commandments. That was about as far as they had got. But they were scholars. They had entered the school. The rest will come. We had not, then, to expect that Christ would begin by preaching to them faith in His Divinity and atoning work. He binds them to *Himself*. That is lesson enough for a beginner for one day.

It was the impression which Christ Himself made on Simon which completed the work begun by his brother. What, then, was the impression? He comes all full of wonder and awe, and he is met by a look and a sentence.

The look, which is described by an unusual word, was a penetrating gaze which regarded Peter with fixed attention. It must have been remarkable, to have lived in John's memory for all these years. Evidently, as I think, a more than natural insight is implied. So, also, the saying

with which our Lord received Peter seems to me to be meant to show more than natural knowledge: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas." Christ may, no doubt, have learned the Apostle's name and lineage from his brother, or in some other ordinary way. But if you observe the similar incident which follows in the conversation with Nicodemus, and the emphatic declaration of the next chapter that Jesus knew both "all men," and "what was in man"—both human nature as a whole, and each individual—it is more natural to see here superhuman knowledge.

So, then, the first point in our Lord's self-revelation here is that He shows Himself possessed of supernatural and thorough knowledge. One remembers the many instances where our Lord read men's hearts, and the prayer addressed to him, probably by Peter, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men," and the vision which John saw of eyes like a flame of fire, and the sevenfold "I know thy works."

It may be a very awful thought, "Thou, God, seest me." It is a very unwelcome thought to a great many men, and it will be so to us unless we can give it the modification which it receives from the belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and feel sure that the eyes which are blazing with Divine Omniscience are dewy with Divine and human love.

Do you believe it? Do you feel that Christ is looking at you, and searching you altogether? Do you rejoice in it? Do you carry it about with you as a consolation and a strength in moments of weakness, and in times of temptation? Is it as blessed to you to feel "Thou Christ beholdest me now," as it is for a child to feel that when it is playing in the garden its mother is sitting up at the window watching it, and that no harm can come? There have been men driven mad in prisons because they knew

that somewhere in the wall there was a little pinhole, through which a gaoler's eye was always, or might be always, glaring down at them. And the thought of an absolute Omniscience up there, searching me to the depths of my nature, may become one from which I recoil shudderingly, and will not be altogether a blessed one unless it comes to me in this shape :—"My Christ knows me altogether and loves me better than He knows. And so I will spread myself out before Him, and though I feel that there is much in me which I dare not tell to men, I will rejoice that there is nothing which I need to tell to Him. He knows me through and through. He knew me when He died for me. He knew me when He forgave me. He knew me when He undertook to cleanse me. Like this very Peter I will say :—"Lord thou knowest all things," and, like him, I will cling the closer to His feet, because I know, and He knows, my weakness and my sin."

Another revelation of our Lord's relation to His disciples is given in the fact that he changes Simon's name. Jehovah, in the Old Testament, changes the names of Abraham and of Jacob. Babylonian kings in the Old Testament change the names of their vassal princes. Masters impose names on their slaves : and I suppose that even the marriage custom of the wife's assuming the name of the husband rests originally upon the same idea of absolute authority. That idea is conveyed in the fact that our Lord changes Peter's name, and so takes absolute possession of him, and asserts His mastery over him. We belong to Him altogether, because He has given Himself altogether for us. His absolute authority is the correlative of His utter self-surrender. He Who can come to me and say : "I have spared not my life for thee," and He only, has the right to come to me and say : "yield yourself wholly to Me." So, Christian friends, your Master wants all your service ; do you give yourselves up to Him out and out, not by half and half.

Lastly, that change of name implies Christ's power and promise to bestow a new character and new functions and honours. Peter was by no means a "Peter" then. The name no doubt mainly implies official function, but that official function was prepared for by personal character ; and in so far as the name refers to character, it means firmness. At that epoch Peter was rash, impulsive, headstrong, self-confident, vain, and, therefore, necessarily changeable. Like the granite, all fluid and hot, and fluid because it was hot, he needed to cool in order to solidify into rock. And not until his self-confidence had been knocked out of him, and he had learned humility by falling ; not until he had been beaten from all his presumption, and tamed down, and sobered and steadied by years of difficulty and responsibilities did he become the rock that Christ meant him to be. All *that* lay concealed in the future, but in the change of his name, while he stood on the very threshold of his Christian career, there was preached to him, and there is preached to us, this great truth, that if you will go to Jesus Christ He will make a new man of you. No man's character is so obstinately rooted in evil but Christ can change its set and direction. No man's natural dispositions are so faulty and low but that Christ can develop counterbalancing virtues ; and out of the evil and weakness make strength. He will not make a Peter into a John, or a John into a Paul, but He will deliver Peter from the "defects of his qualities," and lead them up into a higher and a nobler region. There are no outcasts in the view of the transforming Christ. He dismisses no people out of His hospital as incurable, because anybody, everybody, the blackest, the most rooted in evil, those who have longest indulged in any given form of transgression, may all come to Him ; with the certainty that if they will cleave to Him ; He will read all their character and all its weaknesses, and then with a

glad smile of welcome and assured confidence on His face, will ensure to them a new nature, and new dignities. "Thou art Simon—thou shalt be Peter."

The process will be long. It will be painful. There will be a great deal pared off. The sculptor makes the marble image by chipping away the superfluous marble. Ah! and when you have to chip away superfluous flesh and blood it is bitter work, and the chisel is often deeply dyed in gore, and the mallet seems to be very cruel. Simon did not know all that had to be done to make a Peter of him. We have to thank His providence that we do not know all the sorrows and trials of the process of making us what He wills us to be. But we may be sure of this, that if only we keep near our Master, and let Him have His way with us, and work His will upon us, and if only we will not wince from the blows of the Great Artist's chisel, then out of the roughest block He will carve the fairest statue; and He will fulfil for us at last His great promise:—"I will give unto him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it."



SERMON XII.



THE FIRST DISCIPLES :

III.—PHILIP.

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SERMON XII.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES: III.—PHILIP.

“The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him: Follow Me.” John i. 43.

“THE day following”—We have a diary in this chapter, and the next, extending from the day when John the Baptist gives his official testimony to Jesus up till our Lord’s first journey to Jerusalem. The order of events is this. The deputation from the Sanhedrim to John occupied the first day. On the second Jesus comes back to John after his temptation, and receives his solemn attestation. On the third day, John repeats his testimony, and three disciples, probably four, make the nucleus of the church. These are the two pairs of brothers, James and John, Andrew and Peter, who stand first in every catalogue of the Apostles, and were evidently nearest to Christ.

“The day following” of our text is the fourth day. On it our Lord determines to return to Galilee. His objects in His visit to John were accomplished—to receive his public attestation, and to gather the first little knot of His followers. Thus launched upon His course, He desired to return to His native district.

These events had occurred where John was baptising, in a place called in the English version Bethabara, which means "The house of crossing," or as we might say, Ferry-house. The traditional site for John's baptism is near Jericho, but the next chapter (verse i.) shows that it was only a day's journey from Cana of Galilee, and must therefore have been much further north than Jericho. A ford, still bearing the name Abarah, a few miles south of the lake of Gennesaret has lately been discovered. Our Lord then, and His disciples had a day's walking to take them back to Galilee. But apparently before they set out on that morning, Philip and Nathanael were added to the little band. So these two days saw six disciples gathered round Jesus.

Andrew and John sought Christ and found Him. To them He revealed Himself as very willing to be approached, and glad to welcome any to His side. Peter, who comes next, was brought to Christ by his brother, and to him Christ revealed Himself as reading his heart, and promising and giving him higher functions and a more noble character.

Now I come to the third case, "Jesus findeth Philip," who was not seeking Jesus, and who was brought by no one. To him Christ reveals Himself as drawing near to many a heart that has not thought of Him, and laying a masterful hand of gracious authority on the springs of life and character in that autocratic word "Follow Me." So we have a gradually heightening revelation of the Master's graciousness to all souls, to them that seek and to them that seek Him not. It is only to the working out of these simple thoughts that I ask your attention now.

I.—First, then, let us deal with the revelation that is given us here of the seeking Christ.

Everyone who reads this chapter with even the slightest attention must observe how "seeking" and "finding"

are repeated over and over again. Christ turns to Andrew and John with the question, "What *seek* ye?" Andrew, as the narrative says, "*findeth* his own brother, Simon, and saith unto him; 'We have *found* the Messiah!'" Then, again, Jesus *finds* Philip; and again, Philip, as soon as he has been won to Jesus, goes off to *find* Nathanael; and his glad word to him is, once more, "We have *found* the Messiah." It is a reciprocal play of finding and seeking all through these verses.

There are two kinds of finding. There is a casual stumbling upon a thing that you were not looking for, and there is a finding as the result of seeking. It is the latter which is here. Christ did not casually stumble upon Philip, upon that morning, before they departed from the fords of the Jordan on their short journey to Cana of Galilee. He went to look for this other Galilean, one who was connected with Andrew and Peter, a native of the same little village. He went and found him; and whilst Philip was all unexpectant and undesirous, the Master came to him and laid His hand upon him, and drew him to Himself.

Now that is what Christ often does. There are men like the merchantman who went all over the world seeking goodly pearls, who with some eager longing to possess light, or truth, or goodness, or rest, search up and down and find it nowhere, because they are looking for it in a hundred different places. They are expecting to find a little here and a little there, and to piece all together to make of the fragments one all-sufficing restfulness. Then when they are most eager in their search, or, when perhaps it has all died down into despair and apathy, the veil, seems to be withdrawn, and they see Him Whom they have been seeking all the time and knew not that He was there beside them. All, and more than all, that they sought for in the many pearls is stored for them in the

one Pearl of great price. The ancient covenant stands firm to-day as for ever. "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

But then there are others, like Paul on the road to Damascus ; like Matthew the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom, on whom there is laid a sudden hand, to whom there comes a sudden conviction, on whose eyes, not looking to the east, there dawns the light of Christ's presence. Such cases occur all through the ages, for He is not to be confined, bless His name ! within the narrow limits of answering seeking souls, or of showing Himself to people that are brought to Him by human instrumentality ; but far beyond these bounds He goes, and many a time discloses His beauty, and His sweetness to hearts that wist not of Him, and who can only say, "Lo ! God was in this place, and I knew it not." "Thou wast found of them that sought Thee not."

As it was in His miracles upon earth, so it has been in the sweet and gracious works of His grace ever since. Sometimes He healed in response to the yearning desire that looked out of sick eyes, or that spoke from parched lips, and no man that ever came to Him and said, "Heal me !" was sent away beggared of His blessing. Sometimes He healed in response to the beseeching of those who with loving hearts, carried their dear ones and laid them at His feet. But sometimes to magnify the spontaneity and the completeness of His own love, and to show us that He is bound and limited by no human co-operation, and that He is His own motive, He reached out the blessing to a hand that was not extended to grasp it ; and by His question, "Wilt thou be made whole ?" kindled desires that else had lain dormant for ever.

And so in this story before us ; He will welcome and over-answer Andrew and John when they come seeking ; He will turn round to them with a smile on His face, that

converts the question, "What seek ye?" into an invitation, "Come and see." And when Andrew brings his brother to Him, He will go more than half-way to meet him. But when these are won, there still remains another way by which He will have disciples brought into His Kingdom, and that is by Himself going out and laying His hand on the man and drawing him to His heart by the revelation of his Love.

But further, and in a deeper sense He really seeks us all, and unmasked bestows His love upon us.

Whether we seek Him or no, there is no heart upon earth which Christ does not desire; and no man or woman within the sound of His Gospel whom He is not in a very real sense seeking that He may draw them to Himself. His own word is a wonderful one: "The Father *seeketh* such to worship Him;" as if God went all up and down the world looking for hearts to love Him and to turn to Him with reverent thankfulness. And as the Father so the Son—who is for us the revelation of the Father: "The Son of Man is come to *seek* and to save that which was lost." Nobody on earth wanted Him, or dreamed of His coming. When He bowed the heavens and gathered Himself into the narrow space of the manger in Bethlehem and took upon Him the limitations and the burdens, and the weaknesses of manhood, it was not in response to any petition, *it* was in reply to no seeking; but He came spontaneously, unmoved, obeying but the impulse of His own heart, and *because* He would have mercy. He Who is the Beginning, and will be first in all things, was first in this. Before they called He answered, and came upon earth unbesought and unexpected, because His own infinite love brought Him hither. Christ's mercy to a world does not come like water in a well that has to be pumped up, by our petitions, by our search, but like water in some fountain, rising sparkling into the sunlight by its

own inward impulse. He is His own motive ; and came to a forgetful and careless world, like a shepherd who goes after his flock in the wilderness, not because they bleat for him, while they crop the herbage which tempts them ever further from the fold and remember him and it no more, but because he cannot have them lost. Men are not conscious of needing Christ till He comes. The supply creates the demand. He is like the "dew which tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

But not only does Christ seek us all, inasmuch as the whole conception and execution of His great work are independent of man's desires, but He seeks us each in a thousand ways. He longs to have each of us for His disciples. He seeks each of us for His disciples, by the motion of His Spirit on our spirits, by stirring conviction in our consciences, by pricking us often with a sense of our own evil, by all our restlessness and dissatisfaction, by the disappointments and the losses, as by the brightnesses and the goodness of earthly providences, and often through such agencies as my lips and the lips of other men. The Master Himself, Who seeks all mankind, has sought and is seeking you at this moment. Oh ! yield to His search. The shepherd goes out on the mountain side, for all the storm and the snow, and wades knee-deep through the drifts until he finds the sheep. And your Shepherd, Who is also your Brother, has come looking for you, and at this moment is putting out His hand and laying hold of some of you through my poor words, and saying to you, as He said to Philip, "Follow Me !"

II.—And now let us next consider that word of authority, which, spoken to the one man in our text is really spoken to us all. "Jesus findeth Philip, and said unto him : 'Follow Me !'" No doubt a great deal more passed, but no doubt, what more passed was less significant and less important for the development of faith in this

man than what is recorded. The word of authority, the invitation which was a demand, the demand which was an invitation, and the personal impression which He produced upon Philip's heart, were the things that bound him to Jesus Christ for ever. "Follow me," spoken at the beginning of the journey of Christ and His disciples back to Galilee, might have meant merely, on the surface, "Come back with us." But the words have, of course, a much deeper meaning. They mean—be My disciple. Think what is implied in them, and ask yourself whether the demand that Christ makes in these words is an unreasonable one, and then ask yourselves whether you have yielded to it or not.

We lose the force of the image by much repetition. Sheep follow a shepherd. Travellers follow a guide. Here is a man upon some dangerous cornice of the Alps, with a ledge of limestone as broad as the palm of your hand for him, and perhaps a couple of feet of snow above that for him to walk upon, a precipice on either side; and his guide says, as he ropes himself to him, "Now, tread where I tread!" Travellers follow their guides. Soldiers follow their commanders. There is the hell of the battlefield; here a line of wavering, timid, raw recruits. Their commander rushes to the front and throws himself upon the advancing enemy with the one word, "Follow!" And the weakest becomes a hero. Soldiers follow their captains.

Your shepherd comes to you and calls, "Follow me."

Your Captain and Commander comes to you and calls, "Follow Me." In all the dreary wilderness, in all the difficult contingencies and conjunctions, in all the conflicts of life, this Man strides in front of us and proposes Himself to us as Guide, Example, Consoler, Friend, Companion, everything; and gathers up all duty, all blessedness, in the majestic and simple words, "Follow Me."

It is a call at the least to accept Him as a Teacher, but the whole gist of the context here is to show us that from the beginning Christ's disciples did not look upon Him as a Rabbi's disciples did, as being simply a teacher, but recognised Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel. So that they were called upon by this command to accept His teaching in a very special way, not merely as Hillel or Gamaliel asked their disciples to accept theirs. Do you do that? Do you take Him as your illumination about all matters of theoretical truth, and of practical wisdom? Is His declaration of God your theology? Is His declaration of His own Person your creed? Do you think about His Cross as He did when He elected to be remembered in all the world by the broken body and the shed blood, which were the symbols of His reconciling death? Is His teaching, that the Son of Man comes to give His life a ransom for many, the ground of your hope? Do you follow Him in your belief, and following Him in your belief, do you accept Him, as, by His death and passion, the Saviour of your soul? That is the first step—to follow Him, to trust him wholly for what He is, the Incarnate Son of God, the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and therefore for your sins and mine. This is a call to faith.

It is also a call to obedience. "Follow Me" certainly means, "Do as I bid you," but softens all the harshness of that command. Sedulously plant your little feet in His firm footsteps. Where you see His track going across the bog be not afraid to walk after Him, though it may seem to lead you into the deepest and the blackest of it. Follow Him, and you will be right. "Follow Him" and you will be blessed. Do as Christ did, or as according to the best of your judgment it seems to you that Christ would have done if He had been in your circumstances; and you will not go far wrong. "The Imitation of Christ," which the

old anonymous monk wrote his book about, is the sum of all practical Christianity. "Follow Me!" makes discipleship to be something more than intellectual acceptance of His teaching, something more than even reliance for my salvation upon His work. It makes discipleship—springing out of these two—the acceptance of His teaching and the consequent reliance, by faith, upon His word—to be a practical reproduction of His character and conduct in mine.

It is a call to communion. If a man follows Christ he will walk close behind Him, and near enough to Him to hear Him speak, and to be "guided by His eye." He will be separated from other people, and from other things. In these four things, then—Faith, Obedience, Imitation, Communion—lies the essence of discipleship. No man is a Christian who has not in some measure all four. Have you got them?

What right has Jesus Christ to ask me to follow Him? Why should I? Who is He that He should set Himself up as being the perfect Example and the Guide for all the world? What has He done to bind me to Him, that I should take Him for my Master, and yield myself to Him in a subjection that I refuse to the mightiest names in literature, and thought, and practical benevolence? Who is this that assumes thus to dominate over us all? Ah! brethren, there is only one answer. This is none other than the Son of God Who has given Himself a Ransom for me, and therefore, has the right, and only therefore has the right, to say to me, 'Follow Me.'

III.—And now one last word. Think for a moment about this silently and swiftly obedient disciple. Philip says nothing. Of course the narrative is mere sketchy outline. He is silent but he yields.

Ah! brethren, how quickly a soul may be won or lost! That moment, when Philip's decision was trembling in

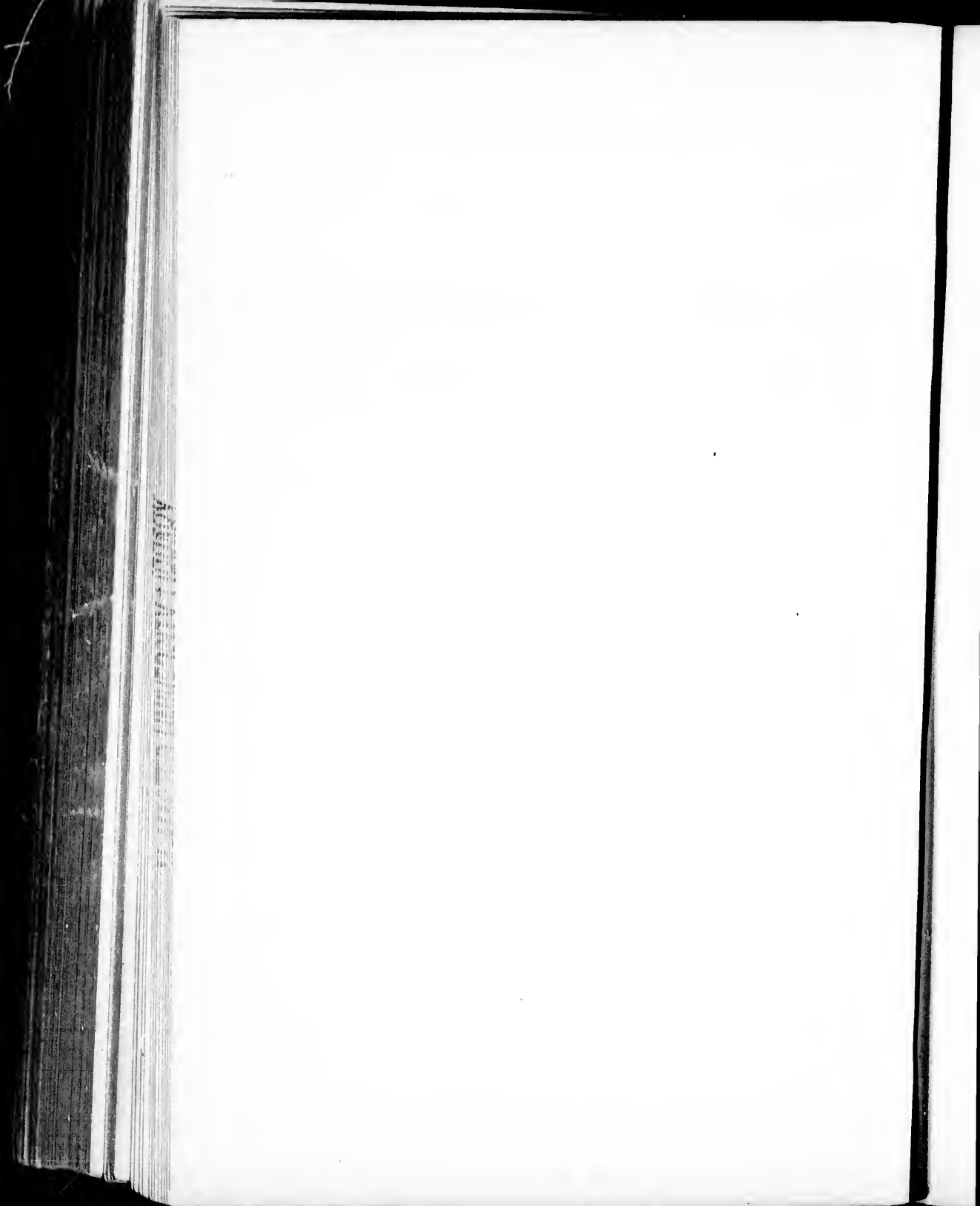
the balance, was but a moment. It might have gone the other way, for Christ has no pressed men in His army; they are all volunteers. It might have gone the other way. A moment may settle for you whether you will be His disciple or not. People tell us that the belief in instantaneous conversions is unphilosophical. It seems to me that the objections to them are unphilosophical. All decisions are matters of an instant. Hesitation may be long, weighing and balancing may be a protracted process, but the decision is always a moment's work, a knife-edge. And there is no reason whatever why anyone listening to me now may not now, if he or she will, do as this man Philip did on the spot, and when Christ says, "Follow Me," turn to Him and answer, "I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest."

There is an old Church tradition which says that the disciple who, at a subsequent period answered Christ:—"Lord! suffer me first to go and bury my father," was this same Apostle. I do not think that is at all likely, but the tradition suggests to us one last thought about the reasons, why people are kept back from yielding this obedience to Christ's invitation. Many of you are kept back as that procrastinating follower was, because there are some other duties, which you feel, or make to be, more important. "I will think about Christianity, and turning religious when this, that, or the other thing has been got over. I have my position in life to make. I have a great many things to do that must be done at once, and really, I have not time to think about it."

Then there are some of you that are kept from following Christ because you have never found out yet that you need a guide at all. Then there are some of you that are kept back because you like very much better to go your way, and to follow your own inclination; and dislike the idea of following the will of another. There are a

host of other reasons that I do not need to deal with now ; but oh ! brethren, none of them are worth pleading. They are excuses, they are not reasons. "They all with one consent began to make excuse." Excuses, not reasons ; and manufactured excuses, in order to cover a decision which has been taken before, and on other grounds altogether, which it is not convenient to bring up to the surface. I am not going to deal with these in detail, but I beseech you, do not let what I venture to call Christ's seeking of you once more, even by my poor words now, be in vain.

Follow Him ! Trust, obey, imitate, hold fellowship with Him. You will always have a Companion, you will always have a Protector. "He that followeth Me," saith He, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." And if you will listen to the Shepherd's voice and follow Him, that sweet old promise will be true, in its Divinest and sweetest sense about your life, in time ; and about your life in the moment of death, the isthmus between two worlds, and about your life in eternity— "They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun nor heat smite them ; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them." Follow thou Me.



SERMON XIII.



THE FIRST DISCIPLES.

III.—NATHANAEI.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.

1877

SERMON XIII.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.—III. NATHANAEL.

“Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him of Whom Moses in the law, and in the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.”—John I, 45-49.

THE words are often the least part of a conversation. The Evangelist can tell us what Nathanael said to Jesus, and what Jesus said to Nathanael, but no evangelist can reproduce the look, the tone, the magnetic influence which streamed out from Christ, and, we may believe, more than anything He said, riveted these men to Him.

It looks as if Nathanael and his companions were very easily convinced, as if their adhesion to such tremendous claims as those of Jesus Christ was much too facile a thing to be a very deep one. But what can be put down in black and white goes a very short way to solve the secret of the power which drew them to Himself.

The incident which is before us now runs substantially on the same lines as the previous bringing of Peter to

Jesus Christ. In both cases the man is brought by a friend, in both cases the friend's weapon is simply the expression of his own personal experience, "We have found the Messiah," although Philip has a little more to say about Christ's correspondence with the prophetic word. In both cases the work is finished by our Lord Himself manifesting His own supernatural knowledge to the inquiring spirit, though in the case of Nathanael that process is a little more lengthened out than in the case of Peter, because there was a little ice of hesitation and of doubt to be melted away. And Nathanael, starting from a lower point than Peter, having questions and hesitations which the other had not, rises to a higher point of faith and certitude, and from his lips first of all comes the full, articulate confession, beyond which the Apostles never went as long as our Lord was upon earth: "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." So that both in regard of the revelation that is given of the character of our Lord, and in regard of the teaching that is given of the development and process of faith in a soul, this last narrative fitly crowns the whole series. In looking at it with you now, I think I shall best bring out its force by asking you to take it as falling into these three portions: first, the preparation—a soul brought to Christ by a brother; then the conversation—a soul fastened to Christ by Himself; and then the rapturous confession—"Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel."

I.—Look, then, first of all, at the preparation—a soul brought to Christ by a brother. "Philip findeth Nathanael." Nathanael, in all probability, as commentators will tell you is the Apostle Bartholomew; and in the catalogues of the Apostles in the Gospels, Philip and he are always associated together. So that the two men, friends before, had their friendship riveted and made more close by this sacredest

of all bonds, that the one had been to the other the means of bringing him to Jesus Christ. There is nothing that ties men to each other like that. If you want to know the full sweetness of association with friends, and of human love, get some heart knit to yours by this sacred and eternal bond that it owes to you its first knowledge of the Saviour. So all human ties will be sweetened, ennobled, elevated, and made perpetual.

“We have found Him of Whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets did write : Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.” Philip knows nothing about Christ’s supernatural birth, nor about its having been in Bethlehem ; to him He is the son of a Nazarene peasant. But, notwithstanding that, He is the great, significant, mysterious Person for Whom the whole sacred literature of Israel had been one long yearning for centuries ; and he has come to believe that this Man standing beside him is the Person on Whom all previous Divine communications for a millennium past focussed and centred.

I need not dwell upon these words, because to do so would be to repeat substantially what I said in a former sermon on these first disciples, about the value of personal conviction as a means of producing conviction in the minds of others, and about the necessity and the possibility of all who have found Christ for themselves saying so to others, and thereby becoming His missionaries and evangelists.

I do not need to repeat what I said on that occasion ; therefore, I pass on to the very natural hesitation and question of Nathanael : “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth ?” A prejudice, no doubt, but a very harmless one ; a very thin ice which melted as soon as Christ’s smile beamed upon him. And a most natural prejudice. Nathanael came from Cana of Galilee, a little hill village, three or four miles from Nazareth. We all

know the bitter feuds and jealousies of neighbouring villages, and how nothing is so pleasant to the inhabitants of one as a gibe about the inhabitants of another. And in Nathanael's words there simply speaks the rustic jealousy of Cana against Nazareth.

It is easy to blame him, but do you think that you or I, if we had been in his place, would have been likely to have said anything very different? Suppose you were told that a peasant out of Ross-shire was a man on whom the whole history of this nation hung. Do you think you would be likely to believe it without first saying, "That is a strange place for such a person to be born in." Galilee was the despised part of Palestine, and Nazareth obviously was a proverbially despised village of Galilee; and this Jesus was a carpenter's son that nobody had ever heard of. It seemed to be a strange head on which the Divine Dove should flutter down, passing by all the Pharisees and the Scribes, all the great people and wise people. Nathanael's prejudice was but the giving voice to a fault that is as wide as humanity, and which we have, every day of our lives, to fight with; not only in regard of religious matters but in regard of all others—namely, the habit of estimating people, and their work, and their wisdom, and their power to teach us, by the class to which they are supposed to belong, or even by the place from which they come.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Can a German teach an Englishman anything that he does not know?" "Is a Protestant to owe anything of spiritual illumination to a Roman Catholic?" "Are we Dissenters to receive any wisdom or example from Churchmen?" "Will a Conservative be able to give any lessons in politics to a Liberal?" "Is there any other bit of England that can teach Lancashire?" Take care that whilst you are holding up your hands in horror against the prejudices of

our Lord's contemporaries, who stumbled at His origin, you are not doing the same thing in regard to all manner of subjects twenty times a day.

That is one very plain lesson, and not at all too secular for a sermon. Take another. This three-parts innocent prejudice of Nathanael brings into clear relief for us what a very real obstacle to the recognition of our Lord's Messianic authority His apparent lowly origin was. We have got over it, and it is no difficulty to us ; but it was so then. When Jesus Christ came into this world Judea was ruled by the most heartless of aristocracies, an aristocracy of cultured pedants. Wherever you get such a class you get people who think that there can be nobody worth looking at, or worth attending to, outside the little limits of their own supercilious superiority. Why did Jesus Christ come from "the men of the earth," as the rabbis called all who had not learned to cover every plain precept with spiders' webs of casuistry ? Why, for one thing, in accordance with the general law that the great reformers and innovators always come from outside these classes, that the Spirit of the Lord shall come on a herdsman like Amos, and fishermen and peasants spread the Gospel through the world ; and that in politics, in literature, in science, as well as in religion, it is always true that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." To the cultivated classes you have to look for a great deal that is precious and good, but for fresh impulse, in unbroken fields, you have to look outside them. And so the highest of all lives is conformed to the general law.

More than that, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph," came thus because He was the poor man's Christ, because He was the ignorant man's Christ, because His word was not for any class, but as broad as the world. He came poor, obscure, unlettered, that all who, like Him, were poor

and untouched by the finger of earthly culture, might in Him find their Brother, their Helper, and their Friend.

“Philip saith unto him, Come and see.” He is not going to argue the question. He gives the only possible answer to it—“You ask me, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” “Come and see whether it is a good thing or no; and if it is, and came out of Nazareth, well then, the question has answered itself.” The quality of a thing cannot be settled by the origin of the thing.

As it so happened, this Man did not come out of Nazareth at all, though neither Philip nor Nathanael knew it; but if He had, it would have been all the same. The right answer was “Come and see.”

Now, although, of course, there is no kind of correspondence between the mere prejudice of this man Nathanael and the rooted intellectual doubts of other generations, yet “Come and see” carries in it the essence of all Christian apologetics. By far the wisest thing that any man who has to plead the cause of Christianity can do is to put Christ well forward, and let people look at Him, and trust Him to produce His own impression. We may argue round, and round, and round about Him for evermore, and we shall never convince as surely as by simply holding Him forth. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” Yet we are so busy proving Christianity that we sometimes have no time to preach it; so busy demonstrating that Jesus Christ is this, that, and the other thing, or contradicting the notion that He is not this, that, and the other thing, that we forget simply to present Him for men to look at. Depend upon it, whilst argument has its function, and there are men that must be approached thereby; on the whole, and for the general, the true way of propagating Christianity is to proclaim it, and the second best way is to prove it. Our arguments do fare very often very much as did that elaborate discourse that a bishop once preached

to prove the existence of a God, at the end of which a simple old woman who had not followed his reasoning very intelligently, exclaimed, "Well, for all he says, I can't help thinking there is a God after all." The errors that are quoted to be confuted often remain more clear in the hearers' minds than the attempted confutations. Hold forth Christ—cry aloud to men, "Come and see!" and some eyes will turn and some hearts cleave to Him.

And, on the other side, dear brethren, you have not done fairly by Christianity until you have complied with this invitation, and submitted your mind and heart honestly to the influence and the impression that Christ Himself would make upon it.

II.—We come now to the second stage—the conversation between Christ and Nathanael, where we see a soul fastened to Christ by Himself.

In general terms, as I remarked, the method by which our Lord manifests his Messiahship to this single soul is a revelation of His supernatural knowledge of him.

But a word or two may be said about the details. Mark the emphasis with which the Evangelist shows us that our Lord speaks this discriminating characterisation of Nathanael before Nathanael had come to Him: "He saw him coming." So it was not with a swift, penetrating glance of intuition that He read his character in his face. It was not that He generalised rapidly from one action which He had seen him do. It was not from any previous personal knowledge of him, for, obviously, from the words of Philip to Nathanael, the latter had never seen Jesus Christ. As Nathanael was drawing near Him, before he had done anything to show himself, our Lord speaks the words which show that He had read his very heart. "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

That is to say, here is a man who truly represents that which was the ideal of the whole nation. The reference

is, no doubt, to the old story of the occasion on which Jacob's name was changed to Israel. And we shall see a further reference to the same story in the subsequent verses. Jacob had wrestled with God in that mysterious scene by the brook Jabbok, and had overcome, and had received instead of the name Jacob, "a supplanter," the name of Israel: "for as a Prince hast thou power with God and hast prevailed." And, says Christ:—This man also is a son of Israel, one of God's warriors, who has prevailed with Him by prayer. "In whom is no guile"—Jacob in his early life had been marked and marred by selfish craft. Subtlety and guile had been the very key-note of his character. To drive that out of him years of discipline and pain and sorrow had been needed. And not until it had been driven out of him could his name be altered, and he become Israel. This man has had the guile driven out of him. By what process? The words are a verbal quotation from Psalm xxxii:—"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Clear, candid openness of spirit, and the freedom of soul from all that corruption which the Psalmist calls "guile," is the property of him only who has received it, by confession, by pardon, and by cleansing, from God. Thus, Nathanael, in his wrestling, had won the great gift. His transgression had been forgiven; his iniquity had been covered; to him God had not imputed his sin; and in his spirit, therefore, there was no guile. Ah, brother! if that black drop is to be cleansed out of your heart, it must be by the same means—confession to God and pardon from God. And then you too, will be a prince with Him, and your spirit will be frank and free, and open and candid.

Nathanael, with astonishment, says, "Lord, whence knowest Thou me?" Not that he appropriates the

description to himself, or recognises the truthfulness of it, but he is surprised that Christ should have means of forming any judgment with reference to him, and so he asks Him, half expecting an answer which will show the natural origin of our Lord's knowledge : " Whence knowest Thou me ? " Then comes the answer, which, to supernatural insight into Nathanael's character, adds supernatural knowledge of Nathanael's secret actions ; " Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." And it is because I saw thee under the fig tree that I knew thee to be " an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." So then, under the fig tree, Nathanael must have been wrestling in prayer ; under the fig tree must have been confessing his sins ; under the fig tree must have been longing and looking for the Deliverer who was to " turn away ungodliness from Jacob." So solitary had been that vigil, and so little would any human eye that had looked upon it have known what had been passing in his mind, that Christ's knowledge of it and of its significance at once lights up in Nathanael's heart the fire of the glad conviction, " Thou art the son of God." If we had seen Nathanael, we should only have seen a man sitting, sunk in thought, under a fig tree ; but Jesus had seen the spiritual struggle which had no outward marks, and to have known which He must have exercised the Divine prerogative of reading the heart.

I ask you to consider whether Nathanael's conclusion was not right, and whether that woman of Samaria was not right when she hurried back to the city, leaving her water-pot, and said : " Come and see a man that told me *all* that ever I did." That " all " was a little stretch of facts, but still it was true in spirit. And her inference was absolutely true : " Is not this the Christ, the Son of God ? " This is the first miracle that Jesus Christ wrought. His supernatural knowledge which cannot be

struck out from the New Testament representations of His character, is as much a mark of Divinity as any of the other of His earthly manifestations. It is not the highest ; it does not appeal to our sympathies as some of the others do, but it is irrefragable. Here is a man to whom all men with whom He came in contact were like those clocks with a crystal face, which shows us all the works. How does he come to have this perfect and absolute knowledge ?

That omniscience, as manifested here, shows us how glad Christ is when He sees anything good, anything that He can praise in any of us. "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." Not a word about Nathanael's prejudice, not a word about any of his faults, (though no doubt he had plenty of them) but the cordial praise that he was an honest, a sincere man, following after God and after truth. There is nothing which so gladdens Christ as to see in us any faint traces of longing for, and love towards, and likeness to, His own self. His omniscience is never so pleased as when beneath heaps and mountains of vanity and sin it discerns in a man's heart some poor germ of goodness and longing for His grace.

And then, again, notice how we have here our Lord's omniscience set forth as cognisant of all our inward crises and struggles. "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." I suppose all of us could look back to some place or other, under some hawthorn hedge, or some boulder by the sea shore, or some mountain-top, perhaps in some back-parlour, or in some crowded street, where some never-to-be-forgotten epoch in our soul's history passed, unseen by all eyes, and which would have shown no trace to any onlooker, except perhaps a tightly compressed lip. Let us rejoice to feel that Christ sees all these moments which no other eye can see. In our hours of crisis, and in our monotonous, uneventful moments, in the rush of the furious waters, when the stream of our lives is

caught among rocks, and in the long, languid reaches of its smoothest flow, when we are fighting with our fears or yearning for His light, or even when sitting dumb and stolid, like snow men, apathetic and frozen in our indifference, He sees us, and pities, and will help the need which He beholds.

"Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Saviour is not by ;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Saviour is not near."

"When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."

III.—One word more about this rapturous confession, which crowns the whole : " Rabbi, thou art the Son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel."

Where had Nathanael learnt these great names ? He was a disciple of John the Baptist, and he had no doubt heard John's testimony as recorded in this same chapter, when he told us how the voice from Heaven had bid him recognise the Messiah by the token of the descending Dove, and how he " saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." John's testimony was echoed in Nathanael's confession. Undoubtedly he attached but vague ideas to the name, far less articulate and doctrinal than we have the privilege of doing. To him " Son of God " could not have meant all that it ought to mean to us, but it meant something that he saw clearly, and a great deal beyond that he saw but dimly. It meant that God had sent, and was in some special sense the Father of, this Jesus of Nazareth.

" Thou art the King of Israel." John had been preaching, " The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The Messiah was to be the theocratic King, the King, not of " Judah," nor of " the Jews," but of Israel, the nation that had entered into covenant with God. So the substance of the confession was the Messiahship of Jesus, as resting upon His special Divine relationship and leading to His Kingly sway.

Notice also the enthusiasm of the confession : one's ear hears clearly a tone of rapture in it. The joy bells of the man's heart are all a-ringing. It is no mere intellectual acknowledgment of Christ as Messiah. The difference between mere head-belief and heart-faith lies precisely in the presence of these elements of confidence, of enthusiastic loyalty, and absolute submission.

So the great question for each of us is, not, Do I believe as a piece of my intellectual creed that Christ is "the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel?" I suppose almost all my hearers here now do that. That will not make you a Christian, my friend. That will neither save your soul nor quiet your heart, nor bring you peace and strength in life, nor open the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to you. A man may be miserable, wholly sunk in all manner of wickedness and evil, die the death of a dog, and go to punishment hereafter, though he believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the King of Israel. You want something more than that. You want just this element of rapturous acknowledgment, of loyal submission, absolute obedience, of unfaltering trust.

Look at these first disciples, six brave men that had all that loyalty and love to Him ; though there was not a soul in the world but themselves to share their convictions. Do they not shame you ? When He comes to you, as He does come, with this question, "Whom do ye say that I am ?" may God give you grace to answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And not only to answer it with your lips, but to trust Him wholly with your hearts, and with enthusiastic devotion to bow your whole being in adoring wonder and glad submission at His feet. If we are "Israelites indeed," our hearts will crown Him as the "King of Israel."

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SERMON XIV.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

V.—BELIEVING AND SEEING.

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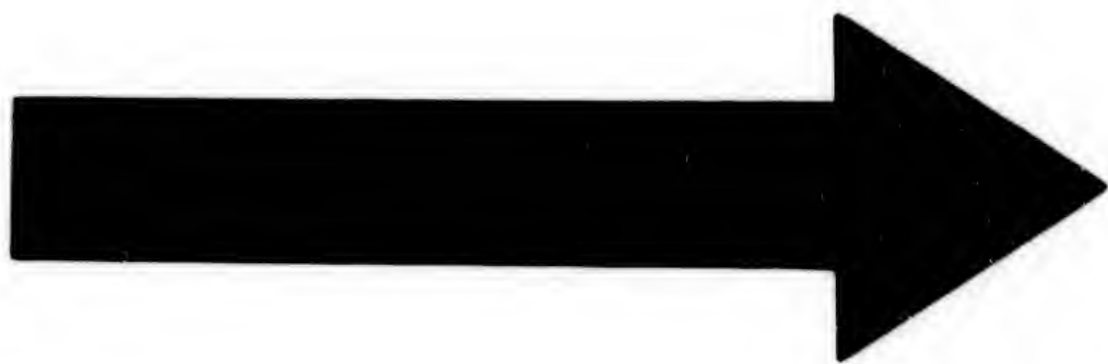
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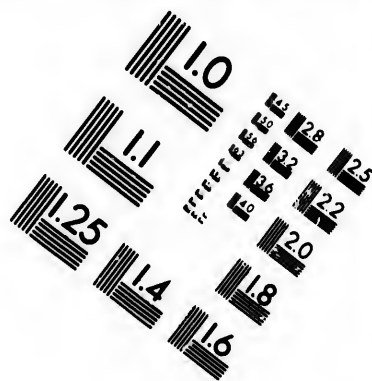
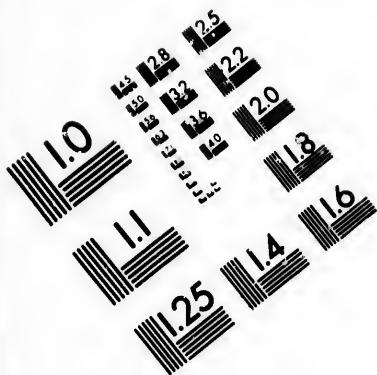
THE FIRST DISCIPLES— V. BELIEVING AND SEEING.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”—John i. 50, 51.

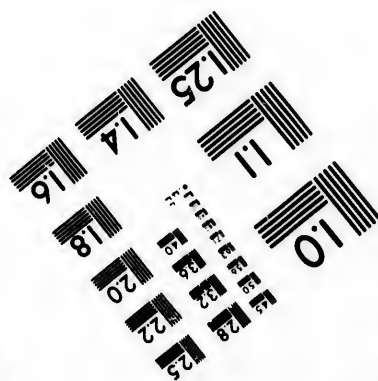
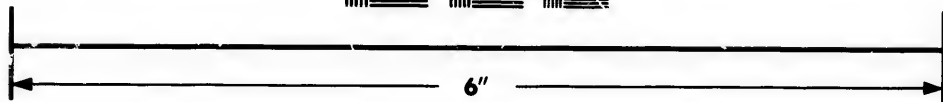
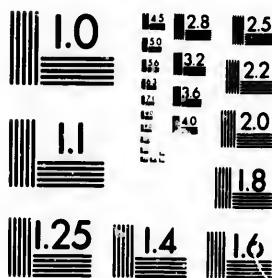
HERE we have the end of the narrative of the gathering together of the first disciples, which has occupied several sermons. We have had occasion to point out how each incident in the series has thrown some fresh light upon two main subjects, namely, upon some phase or other of the character and work of Jesus Christ, and upon the various ways by which faith, which is the condition of discipleship, is kindled in men's souls. These closing words may be taken as the crowning thoughts on both these matters.

Our Lord recognises and accepts the faith of Nathanael and his fellows, but like a wise Teacher, lets His pupils at the very beginning get a glimpse of how much lies ahead for them to learn; and in the act of accepting the faith gives just one hint of the great tract of yet uncomprehended knowledge of Him which lies before them; “Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree,





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believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these." He accepts Nathanael's confession and the confession of his fellows. Human lips have given Him many great and wonderful titles in this chapter. John called Him the Lamb of God ; the first disciples hailed Him as the "Messias, which is the Christ ;" Nathanael fell before Him with the rapturous exclamation, "Thou art the Son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel." All these crowns had been put on His head by human hands, but here He crowns Himself. He makes a mightier claim than any that they had dreamed of, and proclaims Himself to be the medium of all communication and intercourse between Heaven and earth. "Hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

So, then, there are two great principles that lie in these verses, and are contained in, first, our Lord's mighty promise to His new disciples, and second, in our Lord's witness to Himself. Let me say a word or two about each of these.

I.—Our Lord's promise to His new disciples.

Christ's words here may either be translated as a question or as an affirmation. It makes comparatively little difference to the substantial meaning whether we read "believest thou" ? or "thou believest." In the former case there will be a little more vivid expression of surprise and admiration at the swiftness of Nathanael's faith, but in neither case are we to find anything of the nature of blame or of doubt as to the reality of his belief. The question, if it be a question, is no question as to whether Nathanael's faith was a genuine thing or not. There is no hint that he has been too quick with his confession, and has climbed too rapidly to the point that he has attained. But in either case, whether the word be a question or an affirmation, we are to see in it the solemn and glad recog-

dition of the reality of Nathanael's confession and belief.

Here is the first time that that word "belief" came from Christ's lips ; and when we remember all the importance that has been attached to it in the subsequent history of the Church, and the revolution in human thought which followed upon our Lord's demand of our faith, there is an interest in noticing the first appearance of the word. It was an epoch in the history of the world when Christ first claimed and accepted a man's faith.

Of course the second part of this verse, "Thou shalt see greater things than these ;" has its proper fulfilment in the gradual manifestation of His person and character, which followed through the events recorded in the Gospels. His life of service, His words of wisdom, His deeds of power, and of pity, His death of shame and of glory, His resurrection and His ascension, these are the "greater things" which Nathanael is promised. They all lay unrevealed yet, and what our Lord means is simply this : "If you will continue to trust in Me, as you have trusted Me, and stand beside Me, you will see unrolled before your eyes and comprehended by your faith the great facts which will make the manifestation of God to the world." But though that be the original application of the words, yet I think we may fairly draw from them some lessons that are of importance to ourselves ; and I ask you to look at the hint that they give us about three things,—faith and discipleship, faith and sight, faith and progress. "Believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these."

First, here is light thrown upon the relation between faith and discipleship. It is clear that our Lord here uses the word for the first time in the full Christian sense, that He regards the exercise of faith as being practically synonymous with being a disciple, that from the very first, believers were disciples, and disciples were believers.

Then, notice still further that our Lord here employs

the word "belief" without any definition of what or who it is that they were to believe. He Himself, and not certain thoughts about Him, is the true object of a man's faith. We may believe a proposition, but faith must grasp a person. Even when the person is made known to us by a proposition which we have to believe before we can trust the person, still the essence of faith is not the intellectual process of laying hold upon a certain thought, and acquiescing in it, but the moral process of casting myself in full confidence upon the Being that is revealed to me by the thought,—of laying my hand, and leaning my weight on the Man Whom the truth tells me about. And so faith, which is discipleship, has in it for its very essence the personal element of trust in Jesus Christ.

Then, further, notice how widely different from our creed Nathanael's creed was, and yet how identical with our faith, if we are Christians, Nathanael's faith was. He knew nothing about the very heart of Christ's work, His atoning death. He knew nothing about the highest glory of Christ's character, His Divine Sonship, in an unique and lofty sense. These lay unrevealed, and were amongst the greater things which he was yet to see ; but though thus his knowledge was imperfect, and his creed incomplete as compared with ours, his faith was the very same. He laid hold upon Christ, he clave to Him with all his heart, he was ready to accept His teaching, he was willing to do His will, and as for the rest—"Thou shalt see greater things than these." So, dear brethren, from these words of my text here, from the unhesitating attribution of the lofty notion of faith to this man, from the way in which our Lord uses the word, are gathered these three points that I beseech you to ponder. No discipleship without faith. Faith is the personal grasp of Christ Himself. The contents of creeds may differ whilst the element of faith remains the same. I beseech you let

Christ come to you with the question of my text, and as He looks you in the eyes, hear Him say to you "Believest thou?"

Secondly, notice how in this great promise to the new disciples, there is light thrown upon another subject, viz., the connection between faith and sight. There is a great deal about seeing in this context. Christ said to the first two that followed Him, "Come and see." Philip met Nathanael's thin film of prejudice with the same words, "Come and see." Christ greeted the approaching Nathanael with "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee." And now His promise is cast into the same metaphor: "Thou shalt see greater things than these."

There is a double antithesis here: "I saw thee," "Thou shalt see Me." "Thou wast convinced because thou didst feel that thou wert the passive object of My vision. Thou shalt be still more convinced when illuminated by Me. Thou shalt see even as thou art seen. I saw thee, and that bound thee to Me; thou shalt see Me, and that will confirm the bond."

There is another antithesis, namely—between believing and seeing. "Thou believest—that is thy present; thou shalt see, that is thy hope for the future." Now I have already explained that, in the proper primary meaning and application of the words, the sight which they promise is simply the observance with the outward eye of the historical facts of our Lord's life which were yet to be learned. But still we may gather a truth from this antithesis which will be of use to us. "Thou believest—thou shalt see." That is to say, in the loftiest region of spiritual experience you must believe first, in order that you may see.

I do not mean, as is sometimes meant, by that statement that a man has to try to force his understanding into the attitude of accepting religious truth in order that he may

have an experience which will convince him that it is true. I mean a very much simpler thing than that, and a very much truer one, viz., this, that unless we trust to Christ and take our illumination from Him, we shall never behold a whole set of truths which, when once we trust Him, are all plain and clear to us. It is no mysticism to say that. What do you *know* about God?—I put emphasis upon the word “know.”—What do you know about Him, however much you may argue and speculate and think probable, and fear, and hope, and question, about Him? What do you know about Him apart from Jesus Christ? What do you know about human duty, apart from Him? What do you know of all that dim region that lies beyond the grave, apart from Him? If you trust Him, if you fall at His feet and say “Rabbi! Thou art my teacher and mine illumination,” then you will see. You will see God, man, yourselves, duty; you will see light upon a thousand complications and perplexities; and you will have a brightness above that of the noon-day sun, streaming into the thickest darkness of death and the grave and the awful Hereafter. Christ is the light. In that “light shall we see light.” And just as it needs the sun to rise in order that my eye may behold the outer world, so it needs that I shall have Christ shining in my Heaven to illuminate the whole Universe, in order that I may see clearly. “Believe and thou shalt see.” For only when we trust Him do the mightiest truths that affect humanity stand plain and clear before us.

And besides that, if we trust Christ, we get a living experience of a multitude of facts and principles which are all mist and darkness to men except through their faith; an experience which is so vivid and brings such certitude as that it may well be called vision. The world says, “Seeing is believing.” So it is about the

coarse things that you can handle, but about everything that is higher than these invert the proverb, and you get the truth. "Seeing is believing." Yes, in regard to outward things. Believing is seeing in regard to God and spiritual truth. "Believest thou? thou shalt see."

Then, thirdly, there is light here about another matter, the connection between faith and progress. "Thou shalt see greater things than these." A wise teacher stimulates his scholars from the beginning, by giving them glimpses of how much there is ahead to be learnt, That does not drive them to despair; it braces all their powers. And so Christ, as His first lesson to these men, substantially says, "You have learnt nothing yet, you are only beginning." That is true about us all. Faith at first, both in regard of its contents and its quality, is very rudimentary and infantile. A man when he is first converted—perhaps suddenly—knows after a fashion that he himself is a very sinful, wretched, poor creature, and he knows that Jesus Christ has died for him, and is his Saviour, and his heart goes out to Him, in confidence, and love, and obedience. But he is only standing at the door and peeping in yet. He has only mastered the alphabet. He is but on the frontier of the promised land. His faith has brought him into contact with Infinite power, and what will be the end of that? He will indefinitely grow. His faith has started him on a course to which there is no natural end. As long as it keeps alive he will be growing and growing, and getting nearer and nearer to the great centre of all.

So here is a grand possibility opened out in these simple words, a possibility which alone meets what you need, and what you are craving for, whether you know it or not, namely, something that will give you ever new powers and acquirements; something which will ensure your closer and ever closer approach to an absolute object of joy and

truth ; something that will ensure you against stagnation and guarantee unceasing progress. Everything else gets worn out, sooner or later : if not in this world, then in another. There is one course on which a man can enter with the certainty that there is no end to it, that it will open out, and out, and out as he advances—with the certainty that come life, come death, it is all the same.

When the tree grows too tall for the greenhouse they lift the roof, and it grows higher still. Whether you have your growth in this lower world, or whether you have your top up in the brightness and the blue of Heaven, the growth is in one direction. There is a way that secures endless progress, and here lies the secret of it : “Thou believest ! thou shalt see greater things than these.”

Now, brethren, that is a grand possibility, and it is a solemn lesson for some of you. You professing Christian people, are you any taller than you were when you were born ? Have you grown at all ? Are you growing now ? Have you seen any further into the depths of Jesus Christ than you did on that first day when you fell at His feet and said, “Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel !” His promise to you then was, “Thou believest ! thou shalt see greater things.” If you have not seen greater things it is because your faith has broken down, if it has not expired.

II.—Now let me turn to the second thought which lies in these great words. We have here, as I said, our Lord crowning Himself by His own witness to His own dignity. “Hereafter ye shall see the Heavens opened.” Mark how, with superbly autocratic lips, He bases this great utterance upon nothing else but His own word. Prophets ever said, “Thus saith the Lord.” Christ ever said : “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” “Because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself.” He puts His own assurance

instead of all argument and of all support to His words.

"Hereafter." A word which is possibly not genuine, and is omitted, as you will observe, in the Revised Version. If it is to be retained it must be translated, not "hereafter," as if it were pointing to some indefinite period in the future, but "from henceforth," as if asserting that the opening heavens and the descending angels began to be manifested from that first hour of His official work. "Ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending." That is a quotation from the story of Jacob at Bethel. We have found reference to Jacob's history already in the conversation with Nathanael, "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." And here is an unmistakable reference to that story, when the fugitive, with his head on the stony pillow, and the blue Syrian sky, with all its stars, rounding itself above him, beheld the ladder on which the angels of God ascended and descended. So says Christ, you shall see, in no vision of the night, in no transitory appearance, but in a practical waking reality, that ladder come down again, and the angels of God moving upon it in their errands of mercy.

And who, or what, is this ladder? Christ. Do not read these words as if they meant that the angels of God were to come down on Him to help, and to honour, and to succour Him as they did once or twice in His life, but as meaning that they are to ascend and descend by Him for the help and blessing of the whole world.

That is to say, to put it into short words, Christ is the sole medium of communication between Heaven and earth, the ladder with its foot upon the earth, in His humanity, and its top in the Heavens. "No man hath ascended up into Heaven save He Which came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man Which is in Heaven."

My time will not allow me to expand these thoughts as I

meant to have done : let me put them in the briefest outline. Christ is the medium of all communication between Heaven and earth, inasmuch as He is the medium of all revelation. I have spoken incidentally about that in the former part of this sermon, so I do not dwell on it now.

Christ is the ladder between Heaven and earth, inasmuch as in Him the sense of separation, and the reality of separation, are swept away. Sin has shut Heaven ; there comes down from it many a blessing upon unthankful heads, but between it in its purity and the earth in its muddy foulness "there is a great gulf fixed." It is not because God is great and I am small, or because He is Infinite and I am a mere pin-point as against a great continent, it is not because He lives for ever, and my life is but a hand-breadth, it is not because of the difference between His Omniscience and my ignorance, His strength and my weakness, that I am parted from Him : "Your sins have separated between you and your God." And no man, build he Babels ever so high, can reach thither. There is one means by which the separation is at an end, and by which all objective hindrances to union, and all subjective hindrances, are alike swept away. Christ has come, and in Him the Heavens have bended down to touch, and touching to bless, this low earth, and man and God are at one once more.

He is the ladder, or sole medium of communication, inasmuch as by Him all Divine blessings, grace, helps, and favours, come down angel-like, into our weak and needy hearts. Every strength, every mercy, every spiritual power, consolation in every sorrow, fitness for duty, illumination in darkness, all gifts that any of us can need, come to us down that one shining way, the mediation and the work of the Divine-Human Christ, the Lord.

He is the ladder, the sole medium of communication between Heaven and earth, inasmuch as by Him my poor desires, and prayers, and intercessions, my wishes, my sighs, my confessions rise to God. "No man cometh to the Father but by Me." He is the ladder, the means of all communication between Heaven and earth, inasmuch as at the last, if ever we enter there at all, we shall enter through Him and through Him alone, Who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Ah! dear brethren, men are telling us now that there is no connection between earth and Heaven except such as telescopes and spectroscopes can make out. We are told that there is no ladder, that there are no angels, that possibly there is no God, or if that there be, we have nothing to do with Him nor He with us; that our prayers cannot get to His ears, if He have ears, nor His hand be stretched out to help us, if He have a hand. I do not know how this cultivated generation is to be brought back again to faith in God and delivered from that ghastly doubt which empties Heaven and saddens earth to its victims, but by giving heed to the Word which Christ spoke to the whole race while he addressed Nathanael, "Ye shall see the Heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." If He be the Son of God, then all these Heavenly messengers reach the earth by Him. If He be the Son of Man, then every man may share in the gifts which through Him are brought into the world, and His Manhood, which evermore dwelt in Heaven, even while on earth, and was ever girt about by angel presences, is at once the measure of what each of us may become, and the power by which we may become it.

One thing is needful for this wonderful consummation, even our faith. And oh! how blessed it will be if in waste solitudes we can see the open Heavens, and in the blackest

night the blaze of the glory of a present Christ, and hear the soft rustle of angels' wings filling the air, and find in every place a house of God and a gate of Heaven, because He is there. All that may be yours on one condition: "Believest thou? thou shalt see the Heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

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SERMON XV.

CHRIST AND HIS CAPTORS.

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SERMON XV.

CHRIST AND HIS CAPTORS.

"As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked He them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He; if therefore, ye seek Me, let these go their way? That the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none."—JOHN xviii. 1-9.

HIS remarkable incident is narrated by John only. It fits in with the purpose which he himself tells us governed his selection of the incidents which he records. "These things are written," says he, near the end of the Gospel, "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life in His name." The whole of the peculiarities of the substance of John's Gospel are to be explained on the two grounds that he was writing a supplement to, and not a substitute for, or a correction of, the Gospels already in existence; and that his special business was to narrate such facts and words as set forth the glory of Christ as the Only Begotten of the Father.

The incident before us is, as I think, one of these. The Evangelist would have us see in it, as I gather from his manner of narrating it, mainly three things. He em-

phases that strange recoil of the would-be captors before Christ's majestic, calm "I am He." That was a manifestation of Christ's glory. He emphasises our Lord's patient standing there, in the midst of the awe-struck crowd, and even inciting them, as it would seem, to do the work for which they had come out. That was a manifestation of the voluntariness of Christ's sufferings. And He emphasises the self-forgetting care with which at that supreme moment He steps between His faithless, weak friends and danger with the wonderful words, "If ye seek Me, let these go their way." To the Evangelist that little incident is an illustration, on a very low level, and in regard of a comparatively trivial matter, of the very same principle by which salvation from all evil in time and in eternity, is guaranteed to all that believe on Him :—

1.—First, then, consider this remarkable momentary manifestation of our Lord's glory.

"I am He!" When they were thus doubly assured by the traitor's kiss and by His own confession, why did they not lay hands upon Him? There He stood in the midst of them, alone, defenceless; there was nothing to hinder their binding Him on the spot. Instead of that they recoil, and fall in a huddled heap before Him. Some strange awe and terror, of which they themselves could have given no account, was upon their spirits. How came it about? Many things may have conspired to produce it. I am by no means anxious to insist that this was a miracle. Things of the same sort, though much less in degree, have been often enough seen; when some innocent and illustrious victim has for a moment paralysed the hands of his would-be captors, and made them feel, though it were but transiently "how awful goodness is." There must have been many in that band who had heard Him, though, in the uncertain light of quivering moonbeams and smoking torches, they failed to recognise Him till He

spoke. There must have been many more who had heard of Him, and many who suspected that they were about to lay hands on a holy man, perhaps on a prophet. There must have been reluctant tools among the inferiors, and no doubt some among the leaders, whose conscience needed but a touch to be roused to action. To all His calmness and dignity would appeal, and the manifest freedom from fear or desire to flee would tend to deepen the strange thoughts which began to stir in their hearts.

But the impression which the narrative seems intended to leave appears to me to be of something more than this. It looks as if there were something more than human in Christ's look and tone. It may have been the same in kind as the ascendancy which a pure and calm nature has over rude and inferior ones. It may have been the same in kind as has sometimes made the headsman on the scaffold pause before he struck, and has bowed rude gaolers into converts before some greyhaired saint or virgin martyr; yet the difference is so great in degree as practically to become quite another thing. Though I do not want to insist upon any "miraculous" explanation of the cause of this cure, yet I would ask, may it not be that here we see, perhaps apart from Christ's will altogether, rising up for one moment to the surface, the indwelling majesty which was always there?

We do not know the laws that regulated the dwelling of the Godhead bodily within that human frame, but we do know that at one other time there came upon His features a transfiguration, and over His very garments a lustre which was not thrown upon them from without, but rose up from within. And I am inclined to think that here, as there, though under such widely different circumstances and to such various issues, there was for a moment a little rending of the veil of His flesh, and an emission of some flash of the brightness that always tabernacled

within Him ; and that, therefore, just as Isaiah, when He saw the King in His glory, said, "Woe is me, for I am undone !" and just as Moses could not look upon the Face, but could only see the back parts, so here the one stray beam of manifest Divinity that shot through the crevice, as it were, for an instant, was enough to prostrate with a strange awe even those rude and insensitive men. When He had said "I am He," there was something that made them feel, "This is One before whom violence cowers abashed, and in Whose presence impurity has to hide its face." I do not assert that this is the explanation of that panic terror. I only ask, may it not be ?

But, whatever we may think was the reason, at all events the incident brings out very strikingly the elevation and dignity of Christ, and the powerful impressions made by His personality, even at such a time of humiliation. This Evangelist is always careful to bring out the glory of Christ, especially when that glory lies side by side with His lowliness. The blending of these two is one of the remarkable features in the New Testament portraiture of Jesus Christ. Wherever in our Lord's life any incident indicates more emphatically than usual the lowliness of His humiliation, there, by the side of it, you get something that indicates the majesty of His glory. For instance, He is born a weak infant, but angels herald His birth ; He lies in a manger, but a star hangs trembling above it, and leads sages from afar, with their myrrh, and incense, and gold. He submits Himself to the baptism of repentance, but the Heavens open and a voice proclaims, "This is My beloved Son !" He sits wearied on the stone coping of the well, and craves for water from a peasant woman ; but He gives her the Water of Life. He lies down and sleeps, from pure exhaustion, in the stern of the little fishing boat, but He wakes to command the storm, and it is still. He weeps beside the grave, but He

flings His voice into its inmost recesses, and the sheeted dead come forth. He well-nigh faints under the agony in the garden, but an angel from Heaven strengthens Him. He stands a prisoner at a human bar, but He judges and condemns His judges. He dies, and that hour of defeat is His hour of triumph, and the union of shame and glory is most conspicuous in that hour when on the Cross the "Son of Man is *glorified*, and God is glorified in Him."

This strange blending of opposites—the glory in the lowliness, and the abasement in the glory—is the keynote of this singular event. He will be delivered into the hands of men. Yes; but ere He is delivered He pauses for an instant, and in that instant comes a flash above the brightness of the noonday sun to tell of the hidden glory.

Do not forget that we may well look upon that incident as a prophecy of what shall be. As one of the suggestive, old commentators on this verse says: "He will say 'I am He' again, a third time. What will He do coming to reign, when He did this coming to die? And what will His manifestation be as a Judge when this was the effect of the manifestation as He went to be judged?" "Every eye shall see Him;" and they that loved not His appearing shall fall before Him when He cometh to be our Judge; and shall call on the rocks and the hills to cover them.

II.—There is here, secondly, a manifestation of the voluntariness of our Lord's suffering. When that terrified mob recoiled from Him, why did He stand there so patiently? The time was propitious for flight, if He had cared to fly. He might have passed through the midst of them and gone his way, as He did once before, if He had chosen. He comes from the garden; there shall be no difficulty in finding Him. He tells who He is; there shall be no need for the traitor's kiss. He lays them low for a moment, but He will not flee. When Peter draws his sword He rebukes his ill-advised appeal to force, and then

He holds out His hands and lets them bind Him. It was not their fetters, but the cords of love which held Him prisoner. It was not their power, but His own pity which drew Him to the judgment hall and the Cross.

Let us dwell upon that thought for a moment. The whole story of the Gospels is constructed upon the principle, and illustrates the fact, that our Lord's life, as our Lord's death, was a voluntary surrender of Himself for man's sin, and that nothing led Him to, and fastened Him on, the Cross but His own will. He willed to be born. He "came into the world" by His own choice. He "took upon Him the form of a servant." He "took part" of the children's flesh and blood. His birth was His own act, the first of the long series of the acts, by which for the sake of the love which He bore us, He "humbled Himself." Step by step He voluntarily journeyed toward the Cross, which stood clear before Him from the very beginning as the necessary end, made necessary by His love.

As we get nearer and nearer to the close of the history, we see more and more distinctly that He willingly went towards the Cross. Take, for instance, the whole account of the last portion of our Lord's life, and you see in the whole of it a deliberate intention to precipitate the final conflict. Hence the last journey to Jerusalem when "His face was set," and His disciples followed Him amazed. Hence the studied publicity of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Hence the studied, growing severity of His rebukes to the priests and rulers. The same impression is given, though in a somewhat different way, by His momentary retreat from the city and by the precautions taken against premature arrest, that He might not die before the Passover. In both the hastening toward the city and in the retreating from it, there is apparent the same design: that He Himself shall lay down His life, and shall determine the how, and the when, and the where as seems good to Him.

If we look at the act of death itself, Jesus did not die because He must. It was not the nails of the Cross, the physical exhaustion, the nervous shock of crucifixion that killed Him. He died because He would. "I have power to lay down My life," He said, "and I have power"—of course—"to take it again." At that last moment, He was Lord and Master of death when He bowed His head to death. And, if I might so say, He summoned that grim servant with a "Come!" and he came, and He set him his task with a "Do this," and he did it. He was manifested as the Lord of death, having its keys in His hands when He died upon the Cross.

Now I pray you to ask yourselves the question, if it be true that Christ died because He would, why was it that He would die? If because He chose, what was it that determined His choice? And there are but two answers, which two are one. The Divine motive that ruled His life is doubly expressed: "I must do the will of My Father," and "I must save the world."

The taunt that those Jewish rulers threw at Him had a deeper truth than they dreamed, and was an encomium, and not a taunt. "He saved others." Yes, and *therefore*, "Himself He cannot save." He cannot, because His choice and will to die are determined by His free love to us and to all the world. His fixed will bore His body to the Tree, and His love was the strong spring which kept His will fixed?

You and I have our share in these voluntary sufferings, and our place in that loving heart which underwent them for us. Oh! should not that thought speak to all our hearts, and bind us in grateful service and lifelong surrender to Him Who gave Himself for us; and *must* die because He loved us all so much that He *could* not leave us unsaved.

III.—We have, lastly, here, a symbol, or, perhaps, more-

accurately, an instance, on a small scale, of Christ's self-sacrificing care for us. His words: "If ye seek Me, let these go their way," sound more like the command of a prince than the intercession of a prisoner. The calm dignity of them strikes one just as much as the perfect self-forgetfulness of them,

It was a very small matter which He was securing thereby. These men would have to die for Him some day, but they were not ready for it yet. And so He casts the shield of His protection round them for a moment, and interposes Himself between them and the band of soldiers in order that their weakness may have a little more time to grow strong. And though it was wrong and cowardly for them to forsake Him and flee, yet these words of my text more than half gave them permission and warrant for their departure: "Let these go their way."

Now, John did not think that this small deliverance was all that Christ meant by these great words: "Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none!" He saw that it was one case, a very trifling one, a merely transitory one, yet ruled by the same principles which are at work in the immensely higher region to which the words properly refer. Of course, they have their proper fulfilment in the spiritual realm, and are not fulfilled, in the highest sense, till all who have loved and followed Christ are presented faultless before the Father in the home above.

But the little incident may be a result of the same cause as the final deliverance is. A dew-drop is shaped by the same laws which mould the mightiest of the planets. The old divines used to say that God was greatest in the smallest things, and the self-sacrificing care of Jesus Christ, as He gives Himself a prisoner that His disciples may go free, comes from the same deep heart of pitying love, which led Him to die the just for the unjust. It

may then well stand for a partial fulfilment of His mighty words, even though these wait for their complete accomplishments till the hour when all the sheep are gathered into the one fold, and no evil beasts, nor weary journeys, nor barren pastures can harass them any more.

This trivial incident, then, becomes an exposition of highest truth. Let us learn from such an use of such an event to look upon all common and transitory circumstances as governed by the same loving hands, and working to the same ends as the most purely spiritual. The visible is the veil which drapes the invisible and clings so closely to it as to reveal its outline. The common events of life are all parables to the devout heart, which is the wise heart. They speak mystic meanings to ears that can hear. The redeeming love of Jesus is proclaimed by every mercy which perishes in the using; and all things should tell us of His self-forgetting, self-sacrificing care.

Thus, then, we may see in that picture of our Lord's surrendering Himself that His trembling disciples might go free, an emblem of what He does for us, in regard to all our foes. He stands between us and them, receives their arrows into His own bosom, and says, "Let these go their way." God's law comes with its terrors, with its penalties, to us who have broken it a thousand times. The consciousness of guilt and sin threatens us all more or less, and with varying intensity in different minds. The weariness of the world, "the ills that flesh is heir to," the last grim enemy, Death, and that which lies beyond them all, ring you round, my friends!—What are you going to do in order to escape from them?

You are a sinful man, you have broken God's law. That law goes on crashing its way and crushing down all that is opposed to it. You have a weary life before you, however joyful it may sometimes be. Cares and troubles, and sorrows, and tears, and losses, and disappointments,

and hard duties that you will not be able to perform, and dark days in which you will be able to see but very little light, are all certain to come sooner or later ; and the last moment will draw near when the King of Terrors will be at your side ; and beyond death there is a life of retribution in which men reap the things that they have sown here. All that is true, much of it is true about you at this moment, and it will all be true some day. In view of that, what are you going to do ?

I preach to you a Saviour Who has endured all for us. As a mother might fling herself out of the sledge that her child might escape the wolves in full chase, here is One that comes and fronts all your foes, and says to them "Let these go their way. Take Me." "By His stripes we are healed." "On Him was laid the iniquity of us all."

He died because He chose ; He chose because He loved. His love had to die in order that His death might be our life, and that in it we should find our forgiveness and peace. He stands between our foes and us. No evil can strike us unless it strike Him first. He takes into His own heart the sharpest of all the darts which can pierce ours. He has borne the guilt and punishment of a world's sin. These solemn penalties have fallen upon Him that we, trusting in Him, "may go our way," and that there may be no condemnation to us if we are in Christ Jesus. And if there be no condemnation, we can stand whatever other blows may fall upon us. They are easier to bear, and their whole character is different, when we know that Christ has borne them already. Two of the three whom Christ protected in the garden died a martyr's death ; but do you not think that James bowed his neck to Herod's sword, and Peter let them gird him and lead him to his cross more joyfully and with a different heart when they thought of Him that had died before them ? The darkest prison cell will not be so very dark if we remember that Christ

has been there before us, and death itself will be softened into sleep because our Lord has died. "If therefore," says He, to the whole pack of evils baying round us, with their cruel eyes and their hungry mouths, "ye seek Me, let these go their way." So, brother, if you will fix your trust, as a poor, sinful soul in that dear Christ, and get behind Him, and put Him between you and your enemies, then, in time and in eternity, that saying will be fulfilled in you which He spake, "Of them which Thou gavest Me, I have lost none."

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SERMON XVI.

SKY, EARTH, AND SEA : A PARABLE OF GOD.

APPENDIX I. THE HISTORY OF THE
REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST.

SERMON XVI.

SKY, EARTH, AND SEA : A PARABLE OF GOD.

"Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep; O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O Lord! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." Psa. xxxvi. 5-7.

THIS wonderful description of the manifold brightness of the Divine nature is introduced in this psalm with singular abruptness. It is set side by side with a vivid picture of an evildoer, a man who mutters in his own heart his godlessness, and with obstinate determination plans and plots in forgetfulness of God. Without a word to break the violence of the transition, side by side with that picture, the Psalmist sets before us these thoughts of the character of God. He seems to feel that that was the only relief in the contemplation of the miserable sights of which the earth is only too full. We should go mad when we think of man's wickedness unless we could look up and see, with one quick turn of the eye, the Heaven opened and the throned Love that sits up there gazing on all the chaos, and working to soothe sorrow, and to purify evil.

Perhaps there is another reason for this dramatic and striking swiftness of contrast between the godless man and the revealed God. The true test of a life is its power to bear the light of God being suddenly let in upon it. How would yours look, my friend, if all at once a window in Heaven was opened, and God glared in upon you? Set your lives side by side with Him. They always are side by side with Him whether you know it or not; but you had better bring your "deeds to the light that they may be made manifest" now, than to have to do it as suddenly, and a great deal more sorrowfully, when you are dragged out of the shows and illusions of time, and He meets you on the threshold of another world. Would a beam of light from God, coming in upon your life, be like a light falling upon a gang of conspirators, that would make them huddle all their implements under their cloaks, and scuttle out of the way as fast as possible? Or would it be like a gleam of sunshine upon the flowers, opening out their petals and wooing from them fragrance? Which?

But I turn from such considerations as these to the more immediate subject of my contemplations this morning. I have ventured to take so great words for my text, though each clause would be more than enough for many a sermon, because my aim now is a very modest one. I desire simply to give, in the briefest way, the connection and mutual relation of these wonderful words; not to attempt any adequate treatment of the great thoughts which they contain, but only to set forth the meaning and interdependence of these manifold names for the beams of the Divine light, which are presented here. The chief part of our text sets before us God in the variety and boundlessness of His loving nature, and the close of it shows us man sheltering beneath God's wings. These are the two main themes for our present consideration.

I.—We have, first, God in the boundlessness of His loving nature.

The one pure light of the Divine nature is broken up, in the prism of the psalm, into various rays, which theologians call, in their hard, abstract way, Divine attributes. These are "mercy, faithfulness, righteousness." Then we have two sets of Divine acts—judgments, and the preservation of man and beast; and finally we have again "lovingkindness," as our version has unfortunately been misled, by its love for varying its translation, to render the same word which begins the series and is there called "mercy."

Now that "mercy" or "lovingkindness" of which my text thus speaks, is very nearly equivalent to the New Testament "love"; or, perhaps, still more nearly equivalent to the New Testament "grace." Both the one and the other mean substantially this—active love communicating itself to creatures that are inferior and that might have expected something else to befall them. Mercy is a modification of love, inasmuch as it is love to an inferior. The hand is laid gently upon the man, because if it were laid with all its weight it would crush him. It is the stooping goodness of a king to a beggar. And mercy is likewise love in its exercise to persons that might expect something else, being guilty. As a general coming to a body of mutineers with pardon and favour upon his lips, instead of with condemnation and death; so God comes to us forgiving and blessing. All His goodness is forbearance, and His love is mercy, because of the weakness, the lowliness, and the ill desert of us on whom the love falls.

Now notice that this same "quality of mercy" stands here at the beginning and at the end. All the attributes of the Divine nature, all the operations of the Divine hand lie within the circle of His mercy—like diamonds

set in a golden ring. Mercy, or love flowing out in blessings to inferior and guilty creatures is the root and ground of all God's character ; it is the foundation and impulse of all His acts. Modern science reduces all modes of physical energy to one, for which it has no name but—energy. We are taught by God's own revelation of Himself—and most especially by His final and perfect revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ—to trace all forms of Divine energy back to one which David calls mercy, which John calls love.

It is last as well as first, the final upshot of all revelation. The last voice that speaks from Scripture has for its special message "God is Love." The last voice that sounds from the completed history of the world will have the same message, and the ultimate word of all revelation, the end of the whole of the majestic unfolding of God's purposes will be the proclamation to the four corners of the universe, as from the trump of the Archangel, of the name of God as Love. The northern and the southern pole of the great sphere are one and the same, a straight axle through the very heart of it, from which the bounding lines swell out to the equator, and towards which they converge again on the opposite side of the world. So mercy is the strong axletree, the northern pole and the southern, on which the whole world of the Divine perfections revolves and moves. The first and last, the Alpha and Omega of God, beginning and crowning and summing up all His being and His work, is His mercy, His lovingkindness.

But next to mercy comes faithfulness. "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." God's faithfulness is in its narrowest sense His adherence to His promises. It implies, in that sense, a verbal revelation, and definite words from Him pledging Him to a certain line of action. "He hath said, and shall He not do it." "He will not alter the thing that is gone out of His lips." It is only a

God who has actually spoken to men who can be a "faithful God." He will not palter with a double sense, keeping His word of promise to the ear, and breaking it to the hope.

But not only His articulate promises, but also His own past actions, bind Him. He is always true to these; and not only continues to do as He has done, but discharges every obligation which His past imposes on Him. The ostrich was said to leave its eggs to be hatched in the sand. Men bring men into positions of dependence, and then lightly shake responsibility from careless shoulders. But God accepts the cares laid upon Him by His own acts, and discharges them to the last jot. He is a "faithful Creator." Creation brings obligations with it; obligations on the creature; obligations on the Creator. If God makes a being, God is bound to take care of the being that He has made. If He makes a being in a given fashion, He is bound to provide for the necessities that He has created. According to the old proverb, if He makes mouths it is His business to feed them. And He recognises the obligation. His past binds Him to certain conduct in His future. We can lay hold on the former manifestation, and we can plead it with Him. "Thou hast been, and Therefore Thou must be." "Thou hast taught me to trust in Thee; vindicate and warrant my trust by thy unchangeableness." So His word, His acts, and His own nature, bind God to bless and help. His faithfulness is the expression of His unchangeableness. "Because He could swear by no greater, He swears by Himself."

Take then these two thoughts of God's lovingkindness and of God's faithfulness and weave them together, and see what a strong cord they are to which a man may cling, and in all his weakness be sure that it will never give nor break. Mercy might be transient, and arbitrary, but when you braid in "faithfulness" along with it, it becomes

fixed as the pillars of Heaven, and immutable as the throne of God. Only when we are sure of God's faithfulness can we lift up thankful voices to Him, "because His mercy endureth for ever." A despotic monarch may be all full of tenderness at this moment, and all full of wrath and sternness the next. He may have a whim of favour to-day, and a whim of severity to-morrow, and no man can say, "What doest thou?" But God is not a despot. He has so to, speak "decreed a constitution." He has limited Himself. He has marked out His path across the great, wide region of possibilities of the Divine action ; He has buoyed out His channel on that ocean, and declared to us His purposes. So we can reckon on God, as astronomers can foretell the motions of the stars. We can plead His faithfulness along with His love, and feel that the one makes sure that the other shall be from everlasting to everlasting.

The next beam of the Divine brightness is righteousness. "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." Righteousness is not to be taken here in its narrow sense of stern retribution which gives to the evildoer the punishment that he deserves. There is no thought here, whatever there may be in other places in Scripture, of any opposition between mercy and righteousness, but the notion of righteousness here is a broader and greater one. It is just this, to put it into other words, that God has a law for His being to which He conforms ; and that whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and good, and pure down here, those things are fair, and lovely, and good, and pure up there ; that He is the archetype of all excellence, the ideal of all moral completeness : that we can know enough of Him to be sure of this that what we call right He loves, and what we call right He practises.

Brethren, unless we have that for the very foundation of our thoughts of God, we have no foundation to rest on.

Unless we feel and know that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right, and is right, and law and righteousness have their home and seat in His bosom, and are the expression of His inmost being, then I know not where our confidence can be built. Unless 'Thy righteousness, like the great mountains,' surrounds and guards the low plain of our lives, they will lie open to all foes.

Then, next, we pass from the Divine character to the Divine acts. Mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness all converge and flow into the great river of the Divine "Judgments."

By judgments are not meant merely the acts of God's punitive righteousness, the retributions that destroy evil-doers, but all God's decisions and acts in regard to man. Or, to put it into other and briefer words, God's judgments are the whole of the "ways," the methods of the Divine government. So Paul, alluding to this very passage when he says "How unsearchable are Thy judgments," adds, as a parallel clause, meaning the same thing, "and Thy ways past finding out." That includes all which men call, in a narrower sense, judgments, but it includes, too, all acts of kindness and loving gifts. God's judgments are the expressions of His thoughts, and these thoughts are thoughts of good and not of evil.

But notice, in the next place, the boundlessness of all these characteristics of the Divine nature.

"Thy mercy is in the heavens," towering up above the stars, and dwelling there, like some Divine æther filling all space. The heavens are the home of light, the source of every blessing, arching over every head, rimming every horizon, holding all the stars, opening into abysses as we gaze, with us by night and by day, undimmed by the mist and smoke of earth, unchanged by the lapse of centuries; ever seen, never reached, bending over us always, always far above us. So the mercy of God towers

above us, and stoops down towards us, rims us all about and arches over us all, sheds down its dewy benedictions by night and by day; is filled with a million stars and light-points of beauty and of splendour; is near us ever to bless and succour, and help, and holds us all in its blue round.

“Thy faithfulness reacheth to the clouds.” Strange that God’s fixed faithfulness should be compared to the very emblems of mutation. The clouds are unstable, they whirl and melt and change. Strange to think of the unalterable faithfulness as reaching to them! May it not be that the very mutability of the mutable may be the means of manifesting the unalterable sameness of God’s faithful purpose, of His unchangeable love, and of His ever consistent dealings? May not the apparent incongruity be a part of the felicity of the bold words? Is it not true that earthly things, as they change their forms and melt away, leaving no track behind, phantomlike as they are, do still obey the behests of that Divine faithfulness, and gather and dissolve and break in the brief showers of blessing, or short, sharp crashes of storm at the bidding of that steadfast purpose which works out one unalterable design by a thousand instruments, and changeth all things, being in itself unchanged? The thing that is eternal, even the faithfulness of God, dwells amid, and shows itself through, the things that are temporal, the flying clouds of change.

Again, “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.” Like these, its roots are fast and stable; like these, it stands firm for ever; like these, its summits touch the fleeting clouds of human circumstance; like these, it is a shelter and a refuge, inaccessible in its steepest peaks, but affording many a cleft in its rocks, where a man may hide and be safe. But, unlike these, it knew no beginning, and shall know no end. Emblems of permanence as they

are, though Olivet looks down on Jerusalem as it did when Melchizedek was its king, and Tabor and Hermon stand as they did, before human lips had named them, they are wearing away by winter storms and summer heats. But, as Isaiah has taught us, when the earth is old, God's might and mercy are young; for "the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee." "The earth shall wax old like a garment, but My righteousness shall not be abolished." It is more stable than the mountains, and firmer than the firmest things upon earth.

Then, with wonderful poetical beauty and vividness of contrast, there follows upon the emblem of the great mountains of God's righteousness the emblem of the "mighty deep" of His judgments. Here towers Vesuvius; there at its feet lie the waters of the bay. So the Righteousness springs up like some great cliff, rising sheer from the water's edge, while its feet are laved by the sea of the Divine judgments, unfathomable and shoreless. The mountains and the sea are the two grandest things in nature, and in their combination sublime; the one the home of calm and silence, the other in perpetual motion. But the mountain's roots are deeper than the depths of the sea, and though the judgments are a mighty deep, the righteousness is deeper, and is the bed of the ocean.

The metaphor, of course, implies obscurity, but what sort of obscurity? The obscurity of the sea. And what sort of obscurity is that? Not that which comes from mud, or anything added, but that which comes from depth. As far as a man can see down into its blue-green depths they are clear and translucent; but where the light fails and the eye fails, there comes what we call obscurity. The sea is clear, but our sight is limited.

And so there is no arbitrary obscurity in God's dealings, and we know as much about them as it is possible for us

to know ; but we cannot see to the bottom. A man on the cliff can look much deeper into the ocean than a man on the level beach. The further you climb the further you will see down into the "sea of glass mingled with fire" that lies placid before God's throne. Let us remember that it is a hazardous thing to judge of a picture before it is finished ; of a building before the scaffolding is pulled down, and it is a hazardous thing for us to say about any deed or any revealed truth that it is inconsistent with the Divine character. Wait a bit ; wait a bit ! " Thy judgments are a great deep." The deep will be drained off one day, and you will see the bottom of it. Judge nothing before the time.

But as an aid to patience and faith hearken how the Psalmist finishes up his contemplations : " O Lord ! Thou preservest man and beast." Very well then, all this mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, judgment, high as the heavens, deep as the ocean, firm as the hills, it is all working for this—to keep the millions of living creatures round about us, and ourselves, in life and well-being. The mountain is high, the deep is profound. Between the mountain and the sea there is a strip of level land. God's righteousness towers above us ; God's judgments go down beneath us ; we can scarcely measure adequately the one or the other. But upon the level where we live there are the green fields, where the cattle browse, and the birds sing, and men live, and till, and reap, and are fed. That is to say, we have all enough in the plain, patent facts of creation and preservation of man and animal life in this world to make us quite sure of what is the principle that prevails up to the very top of the inaccessible mountains, and down to the very bottom of the unfathomable deep. What we know of Him, in the blessings of His love and providence, ought to interpret for us all that is perplexing. What we understand is good and loving. Let us be sure that what we do not yet understand

is good and loving too. The web is of one texture throughout. The least educated ear can catch the music of the simpler melodies which run through the Great Composer's work. We shall one day be able to appreciate the yet fuller music of the more recondite parts, which to us seem only jangling and chaos at present. It is not His melody but our ears that are at fault. But we may well accept the obscurity of the mighty deep of God's judgment, when we can see plainly that, after all, the earth is full of His mercy, and that the eyes of all things wait on God, and He giveth them their meat in due season.

II.—So much, then, for the great picture here of these boundless characteristics of the Divine nature. Now let us look for a moment at the picture of man sheltering beneath God's wings.

“How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.” God's lovingkindness, or mercy, as I explained the word might be rendered, is *precious*, for that is the true meaning of the word translated “excellent.” We are rich when we have that for ours; we are poor without it. Our true wealth is to possess God's love, and to know in thought and realise in feeling and reciprocate in affection His grace and goodness, the beauty and perfectness of His wondrous character. That man is wealthy who has God on his side; that man is a pauper who has not God for his.

“How precious is Thy lovingkindness, *therefore* the children of men put their trust.” There is only one thing that will ever win a man's heart to love God, and that is that God should love him first, and let him see it. “We love Him because He first loved us,” is the New Testament teaching. Is it not all adumbrated and foretold in these words: “How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust?”

We may be driven to worship after a sort by power; we may be smitten into some cold admiration, into some kind of reluctant subjection and trembling reverence, by the manifestation of Divine perfections. But there is one thing that wins a man's heart, and that is the sight of God's heart; and it is only when we know how precious His lovingkindness is that we shall be drawn towards Him.

And then this last verse tells us how we can make God our own : "They put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings." The word here rendered, and accurately rendered, "put their trust," has a very beautiful literal meaning. It means to flee for refuge, as the man-slayer might flee into the strong city, or as Lot did out of Sodom to the little city on the hill, or as David did into the cave from his enemies. So, with such haste, with such intensity, staying for nothing, and with the effort of your whole will and nature, flee to God. That is trust. Go to Him for refuge from all evil, from all harm, from your own souls, from all sin, from hell, and death, and the devil.

Put your trust under "the shadow of his wing." That is a beautiful image, drawn, probably, from the grand words of Deuteronomy, where God is likened to the "eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young," with tenderness in her fierce eye, and protecting strength in the sweep of her mighty pinion. So God spreads the covert of his wing, strong and tender, beneath which we may all gather ourselves and nestle.

And how can we do that? By the simple process of fleeing unto Him, as made known to us in Christ our Saviour; to hide ourselves there. For let us not forget how even the tenderness of this metaphor was increased by its shape on the tender lips of the Lord : "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." The Old Testament took the emblem of the eagle, sovereign, and strong, and fierce ;

the New Testament took the emblem of the domestic fowl, peaceable, and gentle, and affectionate. Let us flee to that Christ, by humble faith, with the plea on our lips—

“Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing;”

and then all the Godhead in its mercy, its faithfulness, its righteousness, and its judgments will be on our side; and we shall know how precious is the lovingkindness of the Lord, and find in Him the home and hiding-place of our hearts for ever.

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SERMON XVII.



WHAT MEN FIND BENEATH THE WINGS
OF GOD.

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SERMON XVII.

WHAT MEN FIND BENEATH THE WINGS OF GOD.

"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.

"For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light shall we see light." Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9.

IN the preceding verses we saw a wonderful picture of the boundless perfections of God; His lovingkindness, faithfulness, righteousness, and of His two-fold act, the depths of His judgments and the plainness of His merciful preservation of man and beast. In these verses we have an equally wonderful picture of the blessedness of the godly, the elements of which consists in four things: satisfaction, represented under the emblem of a feast; joy, represented under the imagery of full draughts from a flowing river of delight; life, pouring from God as a fountain; light, streaming from Him as source.

And this picture is connected with the previous one by a very simple link. Who are they who "shall be abundantly satisfied?" The men "who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings." That is to say, the simple exercise of confidence in God is the channel through

which all the fulness of Divinity passes into, and fills our emptiness."

Observe, too, that the whole of the blessings here promised are to be regarded as present and not future. "They shall be abundantly satisfied" would be far more truly rendered in consonance with the Hebrew: "They *are* satisfied"; and so also we should read "Thou *dost* make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures; in Thy light *do* we see light." The Psalmist is not speaking of any future blessedness, to be realised in some far-off, indefinite day to come, but of what is possible even in this cloudy and sorrowful life. My text was true on the hills of Palestine, on the day when it was spoken; it may be true amongst the alleys of Manchester to-day. My purpose this morning is simply to deal with the four elements in which this blessedness consists—satisfaction, joy, life, light.

I.—Satisfaction; "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house." Now, I suppose, there is a double metaphor in that. There is an allusion, no doubt, to the festal meal of priests and worshippers in the temple, on occasion of the peace-offering. And there is also the simpler metaphor of God as the host at His table, at which we are guests. "Thy house" may either be, in the narrower sense, the temple; and then all life is represented as being a glad sacrificial meal in His presence, of which "the meek shall eat and be satisfied." Or Thy "house" may be taken in a more general sense; and then all life is represented as the gathering of children round the abundant board which their Father's providence spreads for them, and as glad feasting in the mansions of the Father's house.

In either case the plain teaching of the text is, that by the might of a calm trust in God the whole mass of a man's desires are filled and satisfied. What do we want to satisfy us? It is something almost awful to think of the

multiplicity, and the variety, and the imperativeness of the raging desires which every human soul carries about within it. The heart is like a nest of callow fledgelings, every one of them a great, wide open, gaping beak, that ever needs to have food put into it. Heart, mind, will, appetites, tastes, inclinations, weaknesses, bodily wants—the whole crowd of these are crying for their meat. The Book of Proverbs says there are three things that are never satisfied: the grave, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire that never says "It is enough." And we may add a fourth, the human heart, insatiable as the grave; thirsty as the sands, on which you may pour Niagara, and it will drink it all up and be ready for more; fierce as the fire that licks up everything within reach and still hungers.

So, though we be poor and weak creatures, we want much to make us restful. We want no less than that every appetite, desire, need, inclination shall be filled to the full; that all shall be filled to the full at once, and that by one thing; that all shall be filled to the full at once, by one thing that shall last for ever. Or else we shall be like men whose store of provision gives out before they are halfway across the desert. And we need that all our desires shall be filled at once by one thing that is so much bigger than ourselves that we shall grow up towards it, and towards it, and towards it, and yet never be able to exhaust or surpass it.

Where are you going to get that? There is only one answer, dear brethren, to the question, and that is—God, and God alone is the food of the heart; God, and God alone, will satisfy your need. Let us bring the full Christian truth to bear upon the illustration of these words. Who was it that said, "I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger?" Christ will feed my mind with truth if I will accept His revelation of Himself, of

God, and of all things. Christ will feed my heart with love if I will open my heart for the entrance of His love. Christ will feed my will with blessed commands if I will submit myself to His sweet and gentle, and yet imperative, authority. Christ will satisfy all my longings and desires with His own great fulness. Other food palls upon man's appetite, and we wish for change; and physiologists tell us that a less wholesome and nutritious diet, if varied, is better for a man's health than a more nutritious one if uniform and monotonous. But in Christ there are all constituents that are needed for the building up of the human spirit. And so we never weary of Him if we only know His sweetness. After a world of hungry men have fed upon Him, He remains inexhaustible as at the beginning; like the bread in His own miracles, of which the pieces that were broken, and ready to be given to the eaters were more than the original stock, as it appeared when the meal began. Or like the fabled feast in the Norse Walhalla, to which the gods sit down to-day, and to-morrow it is all there on the board, as abundant and full as ever. So if we have Christ to live upon, we shall know no hunger; and "in the days of famine we shall be satisfied."

Oh! brethren, do you know what it is ever to feel that your hungry heart is at rest? Did you ever know what it is to say, "It is enough"? Have you anything that satisfies your appetite and makes you blessed? Surely men's eager haste to get more of the world's dainties shows that there is no satisfaction at its table. Why will you spend "your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfies not," as Indians in famine eat clay which fills their stomachs, but neither stays their hunger, nor ministers strength? Eat and your soul shall live.

II.—Now, turn to the next of the elements of blessedness here, joy. "Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."

There may be a possible reference here, couched in the word "pleasures," to the Garden of Eden, with the river that watered it parting into four heads; for "Eden" is the singular of the word which is here translated "pleasures," or "delight." If we take that reference, which is very questionable, there would be suggested the thought that amidst all the pain and weariness of this desert life of ours, though the gates of Paradise are shut against us, they who dwell beneath the shadow of the Divine wing really have a paradise blooming around them; and have flowing ever by their side, with tinkling music the paradisaical river of delights, in which they may bathe and swim, and of which they may drink. Certainly the joys of communion with God surpass any which unfallen Eden could have boasted.

But, at all events, the plain teaching of the text is that the simple act of trusting beneath the shadow of God's wings brings to us an ever fresh and flowing river of gladness, of which we may drink. The whole conception of religion in the Bible is gladsome. There is no puritanical gloom about it. True, a Christian man has sources of sadness which other men have not. There is the consciousness of his own sin, and the contest that he has daily to wage; and all things take a soberer colouring to the eye that has been accustomed to look, however dimly, upon God. Many of the sources of earthly felicity are dammed up and shut off from us if we are living beneath the shadow of God's wings. Life will seem to be sterner, and graver, and sadder than the lives "that ring with idiot laughter solely," and have no music because they have no melancholy in them. That cannot be helped. But what does it matter though two or three surface streams, which are little better than drains for sewage, be stopped up, if the pure river of the water of life is turned into your hearts? Surely it will be a gain

if the sadness, which has joy for its very foundation, is yours, instead of the laughter which is only a mocking mask for a death's head, and of which it is true that even "in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Better to be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," than to be glad on the surface, with a perpetual sorrow and unrest gnawing at the root of your life.

And if it be true that the whole Biblical conception of religion is of a glad thing, then, my brother, it is your duty, if you are a Christian man, to be glad, whatever temptations there may be in your way to be sorrowful. It is a hard lesson, and one which is not always insisted upon. We hear a great deal about other Christian duties. We do not hear so much as we ought about the Christian duty of gladness. It takes a very robust faith to say, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." But unless we can say it we have an attainment of Christian life yet unreached, to which we have to aspire.

But be that as it may, my point is simply this—that all real and profound possession of, and communion with, God in Christ will make us glad; glad with a gladness altogether unlike that of the world round about us; far deeper, far quieter, far nobler, the sister and the ally of all great things, of all pure life, of all generous and lofty thought.

And where is it all to be found? Only in fellowship with Him. "The river of thy pleasures" may mean something yet more solemn and wonderful than pleasures of which He is the Author. It may mean pleasures *which He shares*, the very delights of the Divine nature itself. The more we come into fellowship with Him, the more shall we share in the very joy of God Himself. And what is His joy? He delights in mercy; He delights in

self-communication ; He is the blessed, the happy God because He is the giving God. "He delights in His love. He rejoices over" His penitent child "with singing."

In that blessedness we may share ; or if that be too high and mystical a thought, may we not remember Who it was that said : "These things speak I unto you, that My joy may remain in you ;" and Who it is that will one day say to the faithful servant : "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" ? Christ makes us drink of the river of His pleasures. The Shepherd and the sheep drink from the same stream, and the gladness which filled the heart of the Man of Sorrows, and lay deeper than all His sorrows, He imparts to all them that put their trust in Him.

So, dear brethren, what a blessing it is for us to have, as we may have, a source of joy, frozen by no winter, dried up by no summer, muddied and corrupted by no iridescent scum of putrefaction which ever mantles over the stagnant ponds of earthly joys ! Like some citadel that has an unfailing well in its courtyard, we may have a fountain of gladness within ourselves which nothing that touches the outside can cut off. We have but to lap a hasty mouthful of earthly joys as we run, but we cannot drink too full draughts of this pure river of water which makes glad the city of God.

III.—We have the third element of the blessedness of the godly represented under the metaphor of life, pouring from the fountain, which is God. "With Thee is the fountain of life." The words are true in regard of the lowest meaning of "life"—physical existence,—and they give a wonderful idea of the connection between God and all living creatures. The fountain rises, the spray on the summit catches the sunlight for a moment, and then falls into the basin, jet after jet springing up into the light, and in its turn recoiling into the darkness. The water in the fountain, the water in the spray, the water in the basin,

are all one. Wherever there is life there is God. The creature is bound to the Creator by a mystic bond and tie of kinship, by the fact of life. The mystery of life knits all living things with God. It is a spark, wherever it burns, from the central flame. It is a drop, wherever it is found, from the great fountain. It is in man a breath of God's nostrils. It is not a gift given by a Creator who dwells apart, having made living things, as a watchmaker might a watch, and then "seeing them go." But there is a deep mystic union between the God who has life in Himself and all the living creatures who draw their life from Him, which we cannot express better than by that image of our text, "With Thee is the fountain of life."

But my text speaks about a blessing belonging to the men who put their trust under the shadow of God's wing, and therefore it does not refer merely to physical existence, but to something higher than that, namely, to that life of the spirit in communion with God, which is the true and the proper sense of "life;" the one, namely, in which the word is almost always used in the Bible.

There is such a thing as death in life; living men may be "dead in trespasses and sins," "dead in pleasure," dead in selfishness. The awful vision of Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner," of dead men standing up and pulling at the ropes, is only a picture of the realities of life; where, as on some Witches' Sabbath, corpses move about and take part in the activities of this dead world. There are people full of energy in regard of worldly things, who yet are all dead to that higher region, the realities of which they have never seen, the actions of which they have never done, the emotions of which they have never felt. Am I speaking to such living corpses now? There are some of them here alive to the world, alive to animalism, alive to lust, alive to passion, alive to earth, alive perhaps to thought, alive to duty, alive to conduct

of a high and noble kind, but yet dead to God, and, therefore, dead to the highest and noblest of all realities. Answer for yourselves the question—do you belong to this class ?

There is life for you in Jesus Christ, who “*is* the Life.” Like the great aqueducts that stretch from the hills across the Roman Campagna, His Incarnation brings the waters of the fountain from the mountains of God into the lower levels of our nature, and the fetid alleys of our sins. The cool, sparkling treasure is carried near to every lip. If we drink, we live. If we will not, we die in our sins, and are dead whilst we live. Stop the fountain, and what becomes of the stream ? It fades there between its banks, and is no more. You cannot live the life of the animal except that life were joined to Him. If it could be broken away from God it would disappear as the clouds melt in the sky, and there would be nobody, and you would be nowhere. You cannot break yourself away from God *physically* so completely as to annihilate yourself. You can do so *spiritually*, and some of you do it, and the consequence is that you are dead, *dead*, DEAD ! You can be made alive from the dead, if you will lay hold on Jesus Christ, and get His life-giving spirit into your hearts.

IV.—Light. “In Thy light shall we see light.”

God is “the Father of lights.” The sun and all the stars are only lights kindled by Him. It is the very crown of revelation that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Light seems to the unscientific eye, which knows nothing about undulations of a luminiferous æther, to be the least material of material things. All joyous things come with it. It brings warmth and fruit, fulness and life. Purity, and gladness, and knowledge have been symbolised by it in all tongues. The Scripture uses light, and the sun, which is its source, as an emblem

for God in His holiness, and blessedness, and omniscience. This great word here seems to point chiefly to light as knowledge.

This saying is true, as the former clause was, in relation to all the light which men have. The inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. The faculty by which men know, and all the exercise of that faculty, is His gift. It is in the measure in which God's light comes to the eye that the eye beholds. "Light" may mean not only the faculty, but the medium of vision. It is in the measure in which God's light comes, and because His light comes, that all light of reason in human nature sees the truth which is its light. God is the author of all true thoughts in all mankind. The spirit of man is a candle kindled by the Lord.

But as I said about life, so I say about light. The material or intellectual aspects of the word are not the main ones here. The reference is to the spiritual gift which belongs to the men "who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings." In communion with Him Who is the Light as well as the Life of men, we see a whole universe of glories, realities, and brightnesses. Where other eyes see only darkness, we behold "the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off." Where other men see only cloudland and mists, our vision will pierce into the unseen, and there behold "the things which are," the only real things, of which all that the eye of sense sees are only the fleeting shadows, seen as in a dream, while these are the true, and the sight of them is sight indeed. They who see by the light of God, and see light therein, have a vision which is more than imagination, more than opinion, more than belief. It is certitude. Communication with God does not bring with it superior intellectual perspicuity, but it does bring a perception and experience of spiritual realities and relations, which, in

respect of clearness and certainty, may be called sight. Many of us walk in darkness, who, if we were but in communion with God, would see the lone hill-side blazing with chariots and horses of fire. Many of us grope in perplexity, who, if we were but hiding under the shadow of God's wings, would see the truth and walk at liberty in the light, which is knowledge and purity and joy.

In communication with God, we see light upon all the paths of duty. It is wonderful how, when a man lives near God, he gets to know what he ought to do. That great Light, which is Christ, is like the star that hung over the Magi, blazing in the heavens, and yet stooping to the lowly task of guiding three wayfaring men along a muddy road upon earth. So the highest Light of God comes down to be a Lantern for our paths and a Light for our feet.

And in the same communion with God, we get light in all seasons of darkness and of sorrow. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness;" and the darkest hours of earthly fortune will be like a Greenland summer night, when the sun scarcely dips below the horizon, and even when it is absent, all the heaven is aglow with a calm twilight.

All these great blessings belong to-day to those who take refuge under the shadow of His wings. But blessed as the present experience is, we have to look for the perfecting of it when we pass from the forecourt to the inner sanctuary, and in that higher house sit with Christ at His table and feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here we drink from the river, but there we shall be carried up to the source. The life of God in the soul is here often feeble in its flow, a fountain sealed and all but shut up in our hearts, but then it will pour through all our being, a fountain springing up into everlasting life. The darkness is scattered even here by beams of the true light, but

here we are only in the morning twilight, and many clouds still fill the sky, and many a deep gorge lies in sunless shadow, but there the light shall be a broad universal blaze, and there shall be nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Now, dear brethren, the sum of the whole matter is, that all this four-fold blessing of satisfaction, joy, life, light, is given to you, if you will take Christ. He will feed you with the bread of God; He will give you His own joy to drink; He will be in you the life of your lives, and "the master-light of all your seeing." And if you will not have Him, you will starve, and your lips will be cracked with thirst; and you will live a life which is death, and you will sink at last into outer darkness.

Is that the fate which you are going to choose? Choose Christ, and He will give you satisfaction, and joy, and life, and light.

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SERMON XVIII.



THE LOVE THAT CALLS US SONS.

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SERMON XVIII.

THE LOVE THAT CALLS US SONS.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” 1 John. iii. 1.

ONE or two points of an expository character will serve to introduce what else I have to say on these words.

The text is, I suppose, generally understood as if it pointed to the fact that we are called the sons of God, as the great exemplification of the wonderfulness of His love. That is a perfectly possible view of the connection and meaning of the text. But if we are to translate with perfect accuracy we must render, not “that we should be called,” but “*in order that* we should be called the Sons of God.” The meaning then is that the love bestowed is the means by which the design that we should be called His sons is accomplished. What John calls us to contemplate with wonder and gratitude is not only the fact of this marvellous love, but also the glorious end to which it has been given to us and works. There seems no reason for slurring over this meaning in favour of the more vague “that” of our version. God gives His great and

wonderful love in Jesus Christ, and all the gifts and powers which live in Him like fragrance in the rose. All this lavish bestowal of love, unspeakable as it is, may be regarded as having one great end, which God deems worthy of even such expenditure, namely, that men should become, in the deepest sense, His children. It is not so much to the contemplation of our blessedness in being sons, as to the devout gaze on the love which, by its wonderful process, has made it possible for us to be sons, that we are summoned here.

Again, you will find a remarkable addition to our text in the Revised Version, namely, "and such we are." Now these words come with a very great weight of manuscript authority, and of internal evidence. They are parenthetical, a kind of rapid "aside" of the writer's, expressing his joyful confidence that he and his brethren are sons of God, not only in name, but in reality. They are the voice of personal assurance, the voice of the spirit "by which we cry Abba, Father," breaking in for a moment on the flow of the sentence, like an irrepressible glad answer to the Father's call. With these explanations let us look at the words.

I.—The love that is given.

We are called upon to come with our little vessels to measure the contents of the great ocean, to plumb with our short lines the infinite abyss, and not only to estimate the quantity but the quality of that love, which, in both respects, surpasses all our means of comparison and conception.

Properly speaking, we can do neither the one nor the other, for we have no line long enough to sound its depths, and no experience which will give us a standard with which to compare its quality. But all that we can do, John would have us do,—that is, look and ever look at the working of that love till we form some not wholly inadequate idea of it.

We can no more "behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us" than we can look with undimmed eyes right into the middle of the sun. But we can in some measure imagine the tremendous and beneficent forces that ride forth horsed on his beams to distances which the imagination faints in trying to grasp, and reach their journey's end unwearied and ready for their tasks as when it began. Here are we, ninety odd millions of miles from the centre of the system, yet warmed by its heat, lighted by its beams, and touched for good by its power in a thousand ways. All that has been going on for no one knows how many æons. How mighty the Power which produces these effects! In like manner, who can gaze into the fiery depths of that infinite Godhead, into the ardours of that immeasurable, incomparable, inconceivable love? But we can look at and measure its activities. We can see what it does, and so can, in some degree, understand it, and feel that after all we have a measure for the Immeasurable, a comparison for the Incomparable, and can *thus* "behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us."

So we have to turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. According to John's constant teaching, that is the great proof that God loves us. The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man, of the depths of that Divine heart, lies in the gift of Jesus Christ. The Apostle bids me "behold what manner of love." I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, but gives "Him up to death for us all." I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which is evoked by no lovableness on my part, but comes from the depth of His own Infinite Being, Who loves because He must, and Who must because He is God. I turn to the Cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which

desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love that will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of Man died there for sin, I "behold," and I hear, the "manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us," stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure measureless in its quality transcendent—the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Saviour.

In like manner we have to think, if we would estimate the "manner of this love," that through and in the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ there comes to us the gift of a Divine life like His own. Perhaps it may be too great a refinement of interpretation; but it certainly does seem to me that that expression "to bestow His love upon" us, is not altogether the same as "to love us," but that there is a greater depth in it. There may be some idea of that love itself being as it were infused into us, and not merely of its consequences or tokens being given to us; as Paul speaks of "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts" by the spirit which is given to us. At all events this communication of Divine life, which is at bottom Divine love—for God's life is God's love—is His great gift to men.

Be that as it may, these two are the great tokens, consequences and measures of God's love to us—the gift of Christ, and that which is the sequel and outcome thereof, the gift of the Spirit which is breathed into Christian spirits. These two gifts, which are one gift, embrace all that the world needs. Christ for us and Christ in us must both be taken into account if you would estimate the manner of the love that God has bestowed upon us.

We may gain another measure of the greatness of this love if we put an emphasis—which I dare say the writer did not intend—on one word of this text, and think of the love given to “*us*,” such creatures as we are. Out of the depths we cry to Him. Not only by the voice of our supplications, but even when we raise no call of entreaty, our misery pleads with His merciful heart, and from the heights there comes upon our wretchedness and sin the rush of this great love, like a cataract, which sweeps away all our sins, and floods us with its own blessedness and joy. The more we know ourselves, the more wonderingly and thankfully shall we bow down our hearts before Him, as we measure His mercy by our unworthiness.

From all His works the same summons echoes. They all call us to see mirrored in them His loving care. But the Cross of Christ and the gift of a Divine Spirit cry aloud to every ear in tones of more beseeching entreaty and of more imperative command to “behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.”

II.—Look next at the sonship which is the purpose of His given Love.

It has often been noticed that the Apostle John uses for that expression “the Sons of God,” another word from that which his brother Paul uses. John’s phrase would perhaps be a little more accurately translated “Children of God,” whilst Paul, on the other hand, very seldom says “children,” but almost always says “sons.” Of course the children are sons and the sons are children, but still, the slight distinction of phrase is characteristic of the men, and of the different points of view from which they speak about the same thing. John’s word lays stress on the children’s kindred nature with their father and on their immature condition.

But without dwelling on that, let us consider this great gift and dignity of being children of God, which is the

object that God has in view in all the lavish bestowment of His goodness upon us.

That end is not reached by God's making us men. Over and above that He has to send this great gift of His love, in order that the men whom He has made may become His sons. If you take the context here you will see very clearly that the writer draws a broad distinction between "the Sons of God" and "the world" of men who do not comprehend them, and so far from being themselves sons, do not even know God's sons when they see them. And there is a deeper and solemn word still in the context. John thinks that men (within the range of light and revelation, at all events) are divided into two families,—“the children of God and the children of the devil.” There *are* two families amongst men.

Thank God! the prodigal son, in his rags amongst the swine, and lying by the swine-troughs in his filth and his husks, and his fever, *is* a son. No doubt about that! He has these three elements and marks of sonship that no man ever gets rid of: he is of a Divine origin, he has a Divine likeness in that he has got mind, and will, spirit, and he is the object of a Divine love.

The doctrine of the New Testament about the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of man does not in the slightest degree interfere with these three great truths, that all men, though the features of the common humanity may be almost battered out of recognition in them, are all children of God because He made them; that they are children of God because still there lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and, blessed be His name! that they are all children of God because He loves, and provides, and cares for everyone of them.

All that is blessedly and eternally true; but it is also true that there is a higher relation than that to which the name "children of God" is more accurately given, and to which

in the New Testament that name is confined. If you ask what that relation is, let me quote to you three passages in this Epistle, which will answer the question. "Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," that is the first; "Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of God," that is the second; "Everyone that loveth is born of God," that is the third. Or, to put them all into one expression which holds them all, in the great words of his prologue in the first chapter of John's Gospel you find this:—"To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Believing in Christ with loving trust produces, and doing righteousness and loving the brethren, as the result of that belief prove the fact of sonship in its highest and its truest sense.

What is implied in that great word by which the Almighty gives us a name and a place as of sons and daughters? Clearly, first, a communicated life, therefore, second, a kindred nature which shall be "pure as He is pure," and, third, growth to full maturity.

This sonship, which is no mere empty name, is the aim and purpose of God's dealings, of all the revelation of His love, and most especially of the great gift of His love in Christ. Has that purpose been accomplished in you? Have you ever looked at that great gift of love that God has given you on purpose to make you His child? If you have, has it made you one? Are you trusting to Jesus Christ, Whom God has sent forth that we might receive the standing of sons in Him? Are you a child of God because a brother of that Saviour? Have you received the gift of a Divine life through Him? My friend! remember the grim alternative. A child of God or a child of the devil! Bitter words, narrow words, uncharitable words—as people call them! And I believe, and therefore, I am bound to say it, *true* words, which it concerns *you* to lay to heart.

III.—Now, still further, let me ask you to look at the glad recognition of this sonship by the child's heart.

I have already referred to the clause added in the Revised Version, "and such we are." As I said, it is a kind of "aside," in which John adds the Amen for himself and for his poor brothers and sisters, toiling and moiling obscure among the crowds of Ephesus, to the great truth. He asserts his and their glad consciousness of the reality of the fact of their sonship, which they know to be no empty title. He asserts, too, the present possession of that sonship, realising it as a fact, amid all the commonplace vulgarities and carking cares and petty aims of life's little day. "Such we are" is the "Here am I, Father," of the child answering the Father's call, "My Son."

He turns doctrine into experience. He is not content with merely having the thought in his creed, but his heart clasps it, and his whole nature responds to the great truth. I ask you, do you do that? Do not be content with hearing the truth, or even with assenting to it, and believing it in your understandings. The truth is nothing to you, unless you have made it your very own by faith. Do not be satisfied with the orthodox confession. Unless it has touched your heart and made your whole soul thrill with thankful gladness and quiet triumph, it is nothing to you. The mere belief of thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles is nothing; but when a man has a true heart-faith in Him, Whom all articles are meant to make us know and love, then dogma becomes life, and the doctrine feeds the soul. Does it do so with you, my brother? Can *you* say, "And such we are?"

Take another lesson. The Apostle was not afraid to say "I know that I am a child of God." There are many very good people, whose tremulous, timorous lips have never ventured to say "I know." They will say, "Well, I hope," or sometimes, as if that was not uncertain enough,

they will put in an adverb or two, and say "I humbly hope that I am." It is a far robuster kind of Christianity, a far truer one, aye, and a humbler one, too, that throws all considerations of my own character and merits, and all the rest of that rubbish, clean behind me, and when God says "My son!" says "My Father;" and when God calls us His children, leaps up and gladly answers, "And we are!" Do not be afraid of being too confident, if your confidence is built on God, and not on yourselves; but be afraid of being too diffident, and be afraid of having a great deal of self-righteousness masquerading under the guise of such a profound consciousness of your own unworthiness that you dare not call yourself a child of God. It is not a question of worthiness or unworthiness. It is a question in the first place, and mainly, of the truth of Christ's promise and the sufficiency of Christ's Cross; and in a very subordinate degree of anything belonging to you.

IV.—We have here, finally, the loving and devout gaze upon this wonderful love. "Behold," at the beginning of my text is not the mere exclamation which you often find both in the Old and in the New Testaments, which is simply intended to emphasise the importance of what follows, but it is a distinct command to do the thing, to look, and ever to look, and to look again, and live in the habitual and devout contemplation of that infinite and wondrous love of God.

I have but two remarks to make about that, and the one is this, that such a habit of devout and thankful meditation upon the love of God, as manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of the Divine Spirit, joined with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God thereby, lies at the foundation of all vigorous and happy Christian life. How can a thing which you do not touch with your hands and see with your eyes

produce any effect upon you, unless you think about it? How can a religion which can only influence through thought and emotion do anything in you, or for you, unless you occupy your thoughts and your feelings with it? It is sheer nonsense to suppose it possible. Things which do not appeal to sense are real to us, and indeed we may say, *are* at all for us, only as we think about them. If you had a dear friend in Australia, and never thought about him, he would even cease to be dear, and it would be all one to you as if he were dead. If he were really dear to you, you *would* think about him. We may say, (though of course, there are other ways of looking at the matter,) that in a very intelligible sense, the degree in which we think about Christ, and in Him behold the love of God, is a fairly accurate measure of our Christianity.

Now will you apply that sharp test to yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and decide how much of your life was pagan, and how much of it was Christian? You will never make anything of your professed Christianity, you will never get a drop of happiness or any kind of good out of it; it will neither be a strength, nor a joy, nor a defence to you unless you make it your habitual occupation to "behold the manner of love;" and look, and look, and look, until it warms and fills your heart.

The second remark is that we cannot keep that great sight before the eye of our minds without effort. You will have very resolutely to look away from something else, if, amid all the dazzling gauds of earth you are to see the far-off lustre of that heavenly love. Just as timorous people in a thunder-storm will light a candle that they may not see the lightning, so many Christians have their hearts filled with the twinkling light of some miserable tapers of earthly care and pursuits, which, though they be dim and smoky, are bright enough to make it hard to see

the silent depths of Heaven, though it blaze with a myriad stars. If you hold a sixpence close enough up to the pupil of your eye, it will keep you from seeing the sun. And if you hold the world close to mind and heart, as many of you do, you will only see, round the rim of it, the least tiny ring of the overlapping love of God. What the world lets you see you will see, and the world will take care that it will let you see very little—not enough to do you any good, not enough to deliver you from its chains. Wrench yourselves away, my brethren, from the absorbing contemplation of Birmingham jewellery and paste, and look at the true riches. If you have ever had some glimpses of that wondrous love, and have ever been drawn by it to cry, Abba, Father, do not let the trifles which belong not to your true inheritance fill your thoughts, but renew the vision, and by determined turning away of your eyes from beholding vanity, look off from the things that are seen, that you may gaze upon the things that are not seen, and chiefest among them, upon the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have never looked on that love, I beseech you now to turn aside and see this great sight. Do not let that brightness burn unnoticed while your eyes are fixed on the ground, like the gaze of men absorbed in gold digging, while a glorious sunshine is flushing the Eastern sky. Look to the unspeakable, incomparable, immeasurable love of God, in giving up His Son to death for us all. Look and be saved. Look and live. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you," and beholding, you will become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

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SERMON XIX.



THE UNREVEALED FUTURE OF THE SONS
OF GOD.

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SERMON XIX

THE UNREVEALED FUTURE OF THE SONS OF GOD.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."—1 John iii. 2.

I HAVE hesitated, as you may well believe, whether I should take these words for a text. They seem so far to surpass anything that can be said concerning them, and they cover such immense fields of dim thought that one may well be afraid lest one should spoil them by even attempting to dilate on them. And yet they are so closely connected with the words of the previous verse, which formed the subject of my last sermon, that I felt as if my work were only half done unless I followed that sermon with this.

The present is the prophet of the future, says my text: "Now we are the sons of God, *and*" (not "*but*") "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Some men say: "Ah! *Now are* we, but we shall be—*nothing!*" John does not think so. John thinks that if a man is a son of God he

will always be so. There are three things in this verse how, if we are God's children, our sonship makes us quite sure of the future; how our sonship leaves us largely in ignorance of the future, but how our sonship flings one bright, all-penetrating beam of light on the only important thing about the future, the clear vision of and the perfect likeness to Him Who is our life. "Now are we the sons of God," therefore we shall be. We are the sons: we do not know what we shall be. We are the sons, and therefore, though there be a great circumference of blank ignorance as to our future, yet, blessed be His name! there is a great light burning in the middle of it. "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

1.—The fact of sonship makes us quite sure of the future.

I am not concerned to appraise the relative value of the various arguments and proofs, or, it may be, presumptions, which may recommend the doctrine of a future life to men, but it seems to me that the strongest reasons for believing in another world are these two:—first, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has gone up there; and, second, that a man here can pray, and trust, and love God, and feel that he is His child. As was noticed in the preceding sermon, the word rendered "sons" might more accurately be translated "children." If so, we may fairly say, "We are the *children* of God now—and if we are children now, we shall be grown up some time." Childhood leads to maturity. The infant becomes a man.

That is to say, he that here, in an infantile way, is stammering with his poor, unskilled lips the name "Abba! Father!" will one day come to speak it fully. He that dimly trusts, he that partially loves, he that can lift up his heart in some more or less unworthy prayer and aspiration after God, in all these emotions and exercises, has the

great proof in himself that such emotions, such relationship, can never be put an end to. The roots have gone down through the temporal, and have laid hold of the Eternal. Anything seems to me to be more credible than that a man who can look up and say, "My Father" shall be crushed by what befalls the mere outside of him; anything seems to me to be more believable than to suppose that the nature which is capable of these elevating emotions and aspirations of confidence and hope, which can know God and yearn after Him, and can love Him, is to be wiped out like a gnat by the finger of Death. The material has nothing to do with these feelings, and if I know myself, in however feeble and imperfect a degree, to be the son of God, I carry in the conviction the very pledge and seal of eternal life. That is a thought "whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality." "We are the sons of God," therefore we shall always be so, in all worlds, and whatsoever may become of this poor wrappage in which the soul is shrouded.

We may notice, also, that not only the fact of our sonship avails to assure us of immortal life, but that also the very form which our religious experience takes points in the same direction.

As I said, infancy is the prophecy of maturity. "The child is father of the man;" the bud foretells the flower. In the same way, the very imperfections of the Christian life, as it is seen here, argue the existence of another state, where all that is here in the germ shall be fully matured, and all that is here incomplete shall attain the perfection which alone will correspond to the power that works in us. Think of the ordinary Christian character. The beginning is there, and evidently no more than the beginning. As one looks at the crudity, the inconsistencies, the failings, the feebleness of the Christian life of others, or of oneself, and then thinks that such a poor, imperfect

exhibition is all that so Divine a principle has been able to achieve in this world, one feels that there must be a region and a time where we shall be all which the transforming power of God's spirit can make us. The very inconsistencies of Christians are as strong reasons for believing in the perfect life of heaven as their purities and virtues are. We have a right to say Mighty principles are at work upon Christian souls—the power of the Cross, the power of love issuing in obedience, the power of an indwelling Spirit; and is this all that these great forces are going to effect on human character? Surely a seed so precious and Divine is somewhere, and at some time, to bring forth something better than these few poor, half-developed flowers, something with more lustrous petals and richer fragrance. The plant is clearly an exotic; does not its obviously struggling growth here tell of warmer suns and richer soil, where it will be at home?

There is a great deal in every man, and most of all in Christian men and women, which does not fit this present. All other creatures correspond in their capacities to the place where they are set down; and the world in which the plant or the animal lives, the world of their surroundings, stimulates to activity all their powers. But that is not so with a man. "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests." They fit exactly, and correspond to their "environment." But a man!—there is an enormous amount of waste faculty about him if he is only to live in this world. There are large capacities in every nature, and most of all in a Christian nature, which are like the packages that emigrants take with them, marked "Not wanted on the voyage." These go down into the hold, and they are only of use after landing in the new world. If I am a son of God I have much in me that is "not wanted on the voyage," and the more I grow into His likeness, the more I am thrown out of harmony with the

things round about me, in proportion as I am brought into harmony with the things beyond.

That consciousness of belonging to another order of things, because I am God's child, will make me sure that when I have done with earth, the tie that binds me to my Father will not be broken, but that I shall go home, where I shall be fully and for ever all that I so imperfectly began to be here, where all gaps in my character shall be filled up, and the half-completed circle of my heavenly perfectness shall grow like the crescent moon, into full-orbed beauty. "Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature" shall be able to break that tie, and banish the child from the conscious grasp of a Father's hand. Dear brother and sister, can you say, "Now am I a child of God!" Then you may patiently and peacefully front that dim future.

11.—Now I come to the second point, namely, that we remain ignorant of much in that future.

That happy assurance of the love of God resting upon me, and making me His child through Jesus Christ, does not dissipate all the darkness which lies on that beyond. "We are the sons of God, *and*," just because we are, "it does not yet appear what we shall be." Or, as the words are rendered in the Revised Version, "it is not yet made manifest what we shall be."

The meaning of that expression, "It doth not yet appear," or, "It is not made manifest," may be put into very plain words. John would simply say to us, "There has never been set forth before men's eyes in this earthly life of ours an example, or an instance, of what the sons of God are to be in another state of being." And so, because men have never had the instance before them, they do not know much about that state.

In some sense there has been a manifestation through

the life of Jesus Christ. Christ has died ; Christ is risen again. Christ has gone about amongst men upon earth after resurrection. Christ has been raised to the right hand of God, and sits there in the glory of the Father. So far it has been manifested what we shall be. But the risen Christ is not the glorified Christ, and although He has set forth before man's senses irrefragably the fact of another life, and to some extent given glimpses and gleams of knowledge with regard to certain portions of it, I suppose that the "glorious body" of Jesus Christ was not assumed by Him till the cloud "received Him out of their sight," nor, indeed, could it be assumed, while He moved among the material realities of this world, and did eat and drink before them. So that, while we thankfully recognise that Christ's Resurrection and Ascension have "brought life and immortality to light," we must remember that it is the fact, and not the manner of the fact, which they make plain ; and that, even after His example, it has not been manifested what is the body of glory which He now wears, and therefore it has not yet been manifested what we shall be when we are fashioned after its likeness.

There has been no manifestation, then, to sense, or to human experience, of that future, and, therefore, there is next to no knowledge about it. You can only know facts when the facts are communicated. You may speculate, and argue, and guess as much as you like, but that does not thin the darkness one bit. The unborn child has no more faculty or opportunity for knowing what the life upon earth is like than man here, in the world, has for knowing that life beyond. The chrysalis' dreams about what it would be when it was a butterfly would be as reliable as a man's imagination of what a future life will be.

So let us feel two things :—Let us be thankful that we do not know, for the ignorance is the sign of the greatness ; and then, let us be sure that just the very mixture of

knowledge and ignorance which we have about another world is precisely the food which is most fitted to nourish imagination and hope. If we had more knowledge, supposing it could be given, of the conditions of that future life, it would lose some of its power to attract. Ignorance does not always prevent the occupation of the mind with a subject. Blank ignorance does ; but ignorance, shot with knowledge like a tissue which, when you hold it one way seems all black, and when you tilt it another, seems golden, stimulates desire, hope, and imagination. So let us thankfully acquiesce in the limited knowledge.

Fools can ask questions which wise men cannot answer, and will not ask. There are questions which, sometimes, when we are thinking about our own future, and sometimes when we see dear ones go away into the mist, become to us almost torture. It is easy to put them ; it is not so easy to say : "Thank God, we cannot answer them yet !" If we could it would only be because the experience of earth was adequate to measure the experience of Heaven ; and that would be to bring the future down to the low levels of this present. Let us be thankful then that so long as we can only speak in language derived from the experiences of earth, we have yet to learn the vocabulary of Heaven. Let us be thankful that our best help to know what we shall be is to reverse much of what we are, and that the loftiest and most positive declarations concerning the future lie in negatives like these :—"I saw no temple therein," "There shall be no night there." "There shall be no curse there." "There shall be no more sighing nor weeping, for the former things are passed away."

The white mountains keep their secret well ; not until we have passed through the black rocks that make the throat of the pass on the summit, shall we see the broad and shining plains beyond the hills. Let us be thankful

for, and own the attractions of, the knowledge that is wrapt in ignorance, and thankfully say, "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be."

III.—Now I must be very brief with the last thought that is here, and I am the less unwilling to be so because we cannot travel one inch beyond the revelations of the Book in reference to the matter. The thought is this, that our sonship flings one all-penetrating beam of light on that future, in the knowledge of our perfect vision and perfect likeness. "We know that when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

"When He shall be manifested"—to what period does that refer? It seems most natural to take the manifestation here as being the same as that spoken of only a verse or two before. "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall be manifested, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (ii. 28.) That "coming," then, is the "manifestation" of Christ: and it is at the period of His coming in His glory that His servants "shall be like Him, and see Him as He is." Clearly then it is Christ whom we shall see and become like, and not the Father invisible.

To behold Christ will be the condition and the means of growing like Him. That way of transformation by beholding, or of assimilation by the power of loving contemplation, is the blessed way of ennobling character, which even here, and in human relationships, has often made it easy to put off old vices and to clothe the soul with unwonted grace. Men have learned to love and gaze upon some fair character, till some image of its beauty has passed into their ruder natures. To love such and to look on them has been an education. The same process is exemplified in more sacred regions, when men here learn to love and look upon Christ by faith, and so become like Him, as the sun stamps a tiny copy of its blazing sphere

on the eye that looks at it. But all these are but poor far-off hints and low preludes of the energy with which that blessed vision of the glorified Christ shall work on the happy hearts that behold Him, and of the completeness of the likeness to Him which will be printed in light upon their faces.

It matters not, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, if to all the questionings of our own hearts we have this for our all sufficient-answer, "we shall be like Him." As good old Richard Baxter has it :—

"My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim ;
But, 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be like Him !"

"It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord."

There is no need to go into the dark and difficult questions about the manner of that vision. He Himself prayed, in that great intercessory prayer, "Father, I will that these Whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." That vision of the glorified manhood of Jesus Christ—certain, direct, clear, and worthy, whether it come through sense or through thought, to be called vision is all the sight of God that men in Heaven ever will have. And through the milleniums of a growing glory, Christ as He is will be the manifested Deity. Likeness will clear sight, and clearer sight will increase likeness. So in blessed interchange these two will be cause and effect, and secure the endless progress of the redeemed spirit towards the vision of Christ which never can behold all His Infinite Fulness, and the likeness to Christ which never can reproduce all his Infinite Beauty.

As a bit of glass when the light strikes it flashes into sunny glory, or as every poor little muddy pool on the pavement, when the sunbeams fall upon it, has the sun mirrored even in its shallow mud, so into your poor heart and mine

the vision of Christ's glory will come, moulding and transforming us to its own beauty. With unveiled face reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, we "shall be changed into the same image." "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Dear brethren! all begins with this, love Christ and trust Him and you are a child of God. "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

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SERMON XX.

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING
SHEPHERD.

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SERMON XX.

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD.

"If a man hath an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety-and-nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" Matt. xviii, 12.

WE find this simple parable, or germ of a parable, in a somewhat more expanded form, as the first of the incomparable three in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. Perhaps our Lord repeated the parable more than once. It is an unveiling of His deepest heart, and therein a revelation of the very heart of God. It touches the deepest things in His relation to men, and sets forth thoughts of Him, such as man never dared to dream. It does all this by the homeliest image and by an appeal to the simplest instincts. The most prosaic shepherd looks for lost sheep, and everybody has peculiar joy over lost things found. They may not be nearly so valuable as things that were not lost. The unstrayed may be many, and the strayed be but one. Still there is a keener joy in the recovery of the one than in the unbroken possession of the ninety-and-nine. That feeling in a man may be only selfishness, but homely as it is—when the loser is

God, and the lost are men, it becomes the means of uttering and illustrating that truth concerning God which no religion but the Cross has ever been bold enough to proclaim, that He cares most for the wanderers, and rejoices over the return of the one that went astray more than over the ninety-and-nine who never wandered.

There are some significant differences between this edition of the Parable and the form which it assumes in the Gospel according to Luke. There it is spoken in vindication of Christ's consorting with publicans and sinners; here it is spoken in order to point the lesson of not despising the least and most insignificant of the sons of men. There the seeking Shepherd is obviously Christ; here the seeking Shepherd is rather the Divine Father; as appears by the words of the next verse: "For it is not the will of your Father which is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." There the sheep is lost; here the sheep goes astray. There the shepherd seeks till he finds, here the shepherd, perhaps, fails to find; for our Lord says: "*If so be* that he finds it."

But I am not about to venture on all the thoughts which this parable suggests, nor even to deal with the main lesson which it teaches. I wish merely to look at the two figures—the wanderer and the seeker.

I.—First, then, let us look at that figure of the one wanderer.

Of course I need scarcely remind you that in the immediate application of the parable in Luke's Gospel, the ninety-and-nine were the respectable people who thought the publicans and harlots altogether too dirty to touch, and regarded it as very doubtful conduct on the part of this young Rabbi from Nazareth to be mixed up with people whom nobody with a proper regard for whited sepulchres would have anything to do with. To them He answers, in effect—I am a shepherd. That is my vindi-

ation. Of course a shepherd goes after and cares for the lost sheep. He does not ask about its worth, or anything else. He simply follows the lost because it is lost. It may be a poor little creature after all, but it is lost, and that is enough. And so He vindicates Himself to the ninety-and-nine: "You do not need Me, you are found. I take you on your own estimation of yourselves, and tell you that My mission is to the wanderers."

I do not suppose, however, that any of us have need to be reminded that upon a closer and deeper examination of the facts of the case, every hoof of the ninety-and-nine belonged to a stray sheep too: and that *all* men are wanderers in the wider application of the parable. Remembering then this universal application, I would point out two or three things about the condition of these strayed sheep, which include the whole race. The ninety-and-nine may shadow for us a number of beings in unfallen worlds immensely greater than even the multitudes of wandering souls that have lived here through weary ages of sin and tears, but that does not concern us now.

The first thought I gather from the parable is that all men are Christ's sheep. That sounds a strange thing to say. What? All these men and women who having run away from Him are plunged in sin, like sheep mired in a black bog, the scoundrels and the profligates, the scum and the outcasts of great cities like this; people with narrow foreheads, and blighted, blasted lives, the despair of our modern civilisation, are they all His? And those great wide lying heathen lands where men know nothing of His name and of His love, are they all His too? Let Him answer, "Other sheep I have;"—though they look like goats to-day,—“which are not of this fold, them also must I bring, and they shall hear My voice.” All men are Christ's, because He has been the Agent of Divine creation, and the grand words of the Hundredth Psalm are true

about Him. "It is He that hath made us, and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture." They are His, because His sacrifice has bought them for His. Erring, straying, lost, they still belong to the Shepherd.

Notice next, the picture of the sheep as wandering. The word is, literally, "which *goeth* astray," not "which is gone astray." It pictures the process of wandering, not the result as accomplished. We see the sheep, poor, silly creature, not going anywhere in particular, only there is a sweet tuft of grass here, and it crops that; and here is a bit of ground where there is soft walking, and it goes there; and so, step by step, not meaning anything, not knowing where it is going, or that it *is* going anywhere; it goes, and goes, and goes, and at last it finds out that it is away from its beat on the hillside—for sheep keep to one bit of hillside generally, as any shepherd will tell you—and then it begins to bleat, and most helpless of creatures, fluttering and excited, rushes about amongst the thorns and brambles, or gets mired in some quag or other, and it will never find its way back of itself until somebody comes for it.

"So," says Christ to us, "there are a great many of you that do not mean to go wrong; you are not going anywhere in particular, you do not start on your course with any intentions either way, of doing either right or wrong, of keeping near God, or going away from Him, but you simply go where the grass is sweetest, or the walking easiest; and look at the end of it; where you have got to. You have got away from Him.

Now, if you take that series of parables in Luke xv. and read the stories there, you will see three different sides given of the process by which a man's heart strays away from God. There is the sheep that wanders. That is partly conscious, and voluntary, but in a large measure, simply yielding to inclination and temptation. Then

there is the coin that trundles away under some piece of furniture, and is lost—that is a picture of the manner in which a man, without volition, almost mechanically sometimes, slides into sins and disappears as it were, and gets covered over with the dust of evil. And then there is the worst of all, the lad that had full knowledge of what he was doing. “I am going into a far off country; I cannot stand this any longer—all restraint and no liberty, and no power of doing what I like with my own; and always obliged to obey and be dependent on my father for my pocket money! Give me what belongs to me, for good and all, and let me go! That is the picture of the worst kind of wandering, when a man knows what he is about, and looks at the merciful restraint of the law of God, and says: “No! I had rather be far away: and my own master, and not always be ‘cribbed, cabined and confined’ with these limitations.”

The straying of the half-conscious sheep may seem more innocent, but it carries the poor thing away from the shepherd as completely as if it had been wholly intelligent and voluntary. Let us learn the lesson. In a world like this, if a man does not know very clearly where he is going, he is sure to go wrong. If you do not exercise a distinct determination to do God’s will, and to follow in His footsteps Who has set us an example; and if your main purpose is to get succulent grass to eat and soft places to walk in, you are certain before long to wander tragically from all that is right and noble and pure. It is no excuse for you to say; “I never meant it;” “I did not intend any harm, I only followed my own inclinations.” “More mischief is wrought”—to the man himself, as well as to other people—“from want of thought than is wrought by” an evil will. And the sheep has strayed as effectually, though, when it set out on its journey, it never thought of straying. Young men and women beginning life! remember and take this lesson.

But then there is another thing that I must touch for a moment. In the Revised Version you will find a very tiny alteration in the words of my text, which, yet, makes a large difference in the sense. The last clause of our text, as it stands in our Bible, is, "and seeketh that which is *gone* astray;" the Revised Version, more correctly, reads:—"and seeketh that which *is going* astray."

Now, look at the difference in these two renderings. In the former, the process is represented as finished, in the correct rendering it is represented as going on. And that is what I would press on you, the awful, solemn, necessarily progressive character of our wanderings from God. A man never gets to the end of the distance that separates between him and the Father, if his face is turned away from God. Every moment the separation is increasing. Two lines start from each other at the acutest angle and diverge further apart from each other the further they are produced, until at last the one may be away up by the side of God's throne, and the other away down in the deepest depths of hell. So accordingly my text carries with solemn pathos, in a syllable, the tremendous lesson: "The sheep is not gone, *going* astray." Ah! there are some of my hearers who are daily and hourly increasing the distance between themselves and their merciful Father.

Now the last thing here in this picture is the contrast between the description given of the wandering sheep in our text, and that in St. Luke. Here it is represented as wandering, there it is represented as lost. That is very beautiful and has a meaning often not noticed by hasty readers. Who is it that has lost it? We talk about the lost soul and the lost man, as if it were the man that had lost *himself*, and that is true, and a dreadful truth it is! But that is not the truth that is taught in this parable, and meant by us to be gathered from it. Who is it that has lost it? He to Whom it belonged.

That is to say, wherever a heart gets ensnared and entangled with the love of the treasures and pleasures of this life, and so departs in allegiance and confidence and friendship from the living God, there God the Father regards Himself as the poorer by the loss of one of His children, by the loss of one of His sheep. He does not care to possess you by the hold of mere creation and supremacy and rule. He wants you to love Him, and then He thinks He has you. And if you do not love Him, He thinks He has lost you. There is something in the Divine heart that goes out after His lost property. We touch here upon deep things that we cannot speak about intelligibly, only remember this, that what looks like self-regard in man is the purest love in God; and that there is nothing in the whole revelation which Christianity makes of the character of God more wonderful than this, that He judges that He has lost His child when His child has forgotten to love Him.

II.—So much, then, for one of the great pictures in this text. I can spare but a sentence or two for the other—the picture of the Seeker. I said that in the one form of the parable it was more distinctly the Father, and in the other more distinctly the Son, who is represented as seeking the sheep. But these two do still coincide in substance, inasmuch as God's chief way of seeking us poor wandering sheep is through the work of His dear Son Jesus, and the coming of Christ is the Father's searching for His sheep in the "cloudy and dark day."

In these words of my text God leaves the ninety-and-nine and goes into the mountains where the wanderer is, and seeks him. And thus, couched in veiled form, is the great mystery of the Divine love, the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. Here is the answer by anticipation to the sarcasm that is often levelled at evangelical Christianity:—"You must think a good deal

of human nature, and must have a very arrogant notion of the inhabitants of this little speck that floats in the great sea of the heavens, if you suppose that with all these millions of orbs, the Divine nature came down upon this little tiny molehill, and took your nature and died."

Yes! says Christ, not because man was so great, not because man was so valuable in comparison with the rest of creation—he was but one amongst ninety-nine unfallen and un sinful—but because he was so wretched, because he was so small, because he had gone so far away from God: *therefore*, the seeking love came after him, and would draw him to itself. That, I think, is answer enough.

And then, there is the difference between these two versions of the Parable in respect to their representation of the end of the seeking. The one says "seeks until He finds." Oh! the patient, incredible inexhaustibleness of the Divine love. God's long-suffering, if I may take such a metaphor, like a sleuth-hound will follow the object of its search through all its windings and doublings, until it comes up to it. So that great seeking Shepherd follows us through all the devious courses of our wayward wandering footsteps doubling back upon themselves, until He finds us. Though the sheep may increase its distance the Shepherd follows. The further away we get the more tender His appeal; the more we stop our ears the louder the voice with which He calls. You cannot wear out Jesus Christ, you cannot exhaust the resources of His bounteousness, of His tenderness. However we may have been going wrong, however far we may have been wandering, however vehemently we may be increasing, at every moment, our distance from Him, He is coming after us, serene, loving, long-suffering, and will not be put away.

Dear friend! would you only believe that a loving, living Person is really seeking you, seeking you by my

poor words now, seeking you by many a providence, seeking you by His Gospel, by His Spirit ; and will never be satisfied till He has found you in your finding Him and turning your soul to Him !

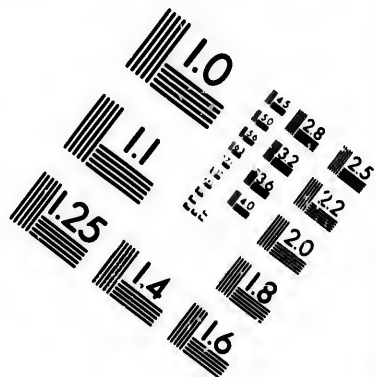
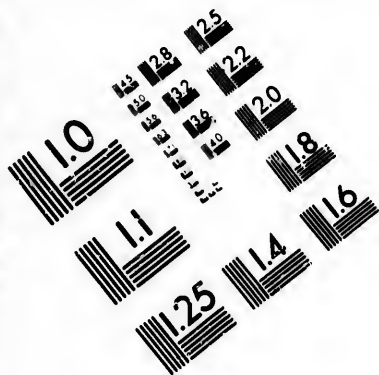
But, I beseech you, do not forget the solemn lesson drawn from the other form of the parable which is given in my text :—*if so be that He find it*. There is a possibility of failure ! What an awful power you have of burying yourself in the sepulchre as it were, of your own self-will, and hiding yourself in the darkness of your own unbelief ! You can frustrate the seeking love of God. Some of you have done so—some of you have done so all your lives ! Some of you, perhaps, at this moment are trying to do it, and consciously endeavouring to steel your hearts against some softening that may have been creeping over them whilst I have been speaking. Are you yielding to His seeking love, or wandering further and further from Him ? He has come to find you. Let Him not seek in vain, but let the Good Shepherd draw you to Himself, when, lifted on the Cross, He giveth His life for the sheep. He will restore your soul and carry you back on His strong shoulder or in His bosom near His loving heart to the green pastures and the safe fold. There will be joy in His heart, more than over those who have never wandered ; and there will be joy in the heart of the returning wanderer, such as they who had not strayed and learned the misery could never know, for, as the profound Jewish saying has it, “ In the place where the penitents stand, the perfectly righteous cannot stand.”

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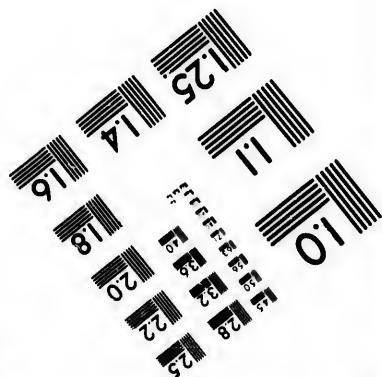
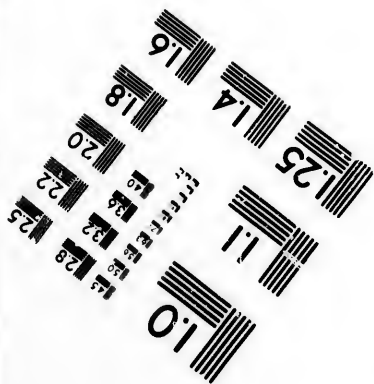
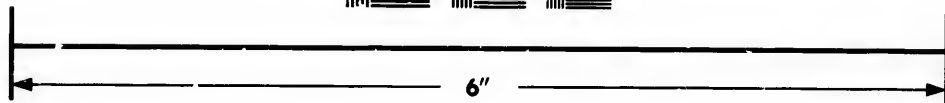
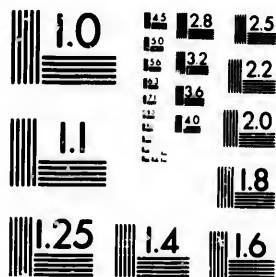
SERMON XXI.

THE TWO-FOLD ASPECT OF THE DIVINE
WORKING.





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MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SERMON XXI.

THE TWO-FOLD ASPECT OF THE DIVINE WORKING.

"The way of the Lord is strength to the upright; but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity."—Prov. x. 29.

YOU observe that the words "shall be," in the last clause, are a supplement. They are quite unnecessary, and in fact they rather hinder the sense. They destroy the completeness of the antithesis between the two halves of the verse. If you leave them out, and suppose that the "way of the Lord" is what is spoken of in both clauses, you get a far deeper and fuller meaning. "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright; but destruction to the workers of iniquity." It is the same way which is strength to one man and ruin to another, and the moral nature of the man determines which it shall be to him. That is a penetrating word, which goes deep down. The unknown thinkers, to whose keen insight into the facts of human life we are indebted for this book of Proverbs, had pondered for many an hour over the perplexed and

complicated fates of men, and they crystallised their reflexions at last in this thought. They have in it struck upon a principle which explains a great many things, and teaches us a great many solemn lessons. Let us try to get a hold of what is meant, and then to look at some applications and illustrations of the principle.

I.—First, then, let me just try to put clearly the meaning and bearing of these words. "The way of the Lord" means, sometimes in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New, religion, considered as the way in which God desires a man to walk. So we read in the New Testament of "the way" as the designation of the profession and practice of Christianity; and "the way of the Lord" is often used in the Psalms for the path which He traces for man by His sovereign will.

But that, of course, is not the meaning here. Here it means, not the road in which God prescribes that we should walk, but that road in which He Himself walks; or, in other words, the sum of the Divine action, the solemn footsteps of God through Creation, Providence, and History. His goings forth are from everlasting. His way is in the sea. His way is in the sanctuary. Modern language has a whole set of phrases which mean the same thing as the Jew meant by "the way of the Lord," only that God is left out. They talk about the "current of events," "the general tendency of things," "the laws of human affairs," and so on. I, for my part, prefer the old-fashioned "Hebraism." To many modern thinkers the whole drift and tendency of human affairs affords no sign of a person directing these. They hear the clashing and grinding of opposing forces, the thunder as of falling avalanches, and the moaning as of a homeless wind, but they hear the sound of no footfalls echoing down the ages. This ancient teacher had keener ears. Well for us if we share his faith, and see in all the else distracting mysteries of life and history, "the way of the Lord!"

But not only does the expression point to the operation of a personal Divine Will in human affairs, but it conceives of that operation as one, a uniform and consistent whole. However complicated, and sometimes apparently contradictory, the individual events were, there was a unity in them, and they all converged on one result. The writer does not speak of "ways," but of "the way," as a grand unity. It is all one continuous, connected, consistent mode of operation from beginning to end.

The author of this proverb believed something more about the way of the Lord. He believed that although it is higher than our way, still, a man can know something about it; and that whatever may be enigmatical, and sometimes almost heart-breaking, in it, one thing is sure—that, as we have been taught of late years in another dialect, it "makes for righteousness." Clouds and darkness are round about Him, but the Old Testament writers never falter in the conviction, which was the soul of all their heroism and the life blood of their religion, that in the hearts of the clouds and darkness, "justice and judgment are the foundations of His throne." The way of the Lord, says this old thinker, is hard to understand, very complicated, full of all manner of perplexities and difficulties, and yet on the whole the clear drift and tendency of the whole thing is discernible, and it is this: it is all on the side of good. Everything that is good, and everything that does good, is an ally of God's, and may be sure of the Divine favour and of the Divine blessing resting upon it.

And just because that is so clear, the other side is as true; the same way, the same set of facts, the same continuous stream of tendency, which is all with and for every form of good, is all against every form of evil. Or, as one of the Psalmists puts the same idea, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open

unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." The same eye that beams in lambent love on "the righteous" burns terribly to the evil doer. "The face of the Lord" means the side of the Divine nature which is turned to us, and is manifested by His self-revealing activity, so that the expression comes near in meaning to "the way of the Lord," and the thought in both cases is the same, that by the eternal law of His Being, God's actions must all be for the good and against the evil.

They do not change, but a man's character determines which aspect of them he sees and has to experience. God's way has a bright side and a dark. You may take which you like. You can lay hold of the thing by which ever handle you choose. On the one side it is convex, on the other concave. You can approach it from either side, as you please. "The way of the Lord" must touch *your* "way." You cannot alter that necessity. Your path must either run parallel in the same direction with His, and then all His power will be an impulse to bear you onward; or it must run in the opposite direction, and then all His power will be for your ruin, and the collision with it will crush you as a ship is crushed like an egg-shell, when it strikes an iceberg. You *can* choose which of these shall befall you.

And there is a still more striking beauty about the saying, if we give the full literal meaning to the word "strength." It is used by our translators, I suppose, in a somewhat archaic and peculiar signification, namely, that of a stronghold. At all events the Hebrew means a fortress, a place where men may live safe and secure; and if we take that meaning, the passage gains greatly in force and beauty. This "way of the Lord" is like a castle for the shelter of the shelterless good man, and behind those strong bulwarks he dwells impregnable and safe. Just as a fortress is a security to the garrison, and a frowning

menace to the besiegers or enemies, so the "name of the Lord is a strong tower," and the "way of the Lord" is a fortress. If you choose to take shelter within it, its massive walls are your security and your joy. If you do not, they frown down grimly upon you, a menace and a terror. How differently, eight hundred years ago, Normans and Saxons looked at the square towers that were built all over England to bridle the inhabitants! To the one they were the sign of the security of their dominion; to the other they were the sign of their slavery and submission. Torture and prison houses they might become; frowning portents they necessarily were. "The way of the Lord" is a castle fortress to the man that does good, and to the man that does evil it is a threatening prison, which may become a hell of torture. It is "ruin to the workers of iniquity." I pray you, settle for yourself which of these it is to be to you.

11.—And now let me say a word or two by way of application, or illustration, of these principles that are here.

First, let me remind you how the order of the universe is such that righteousness is life and sin is death. This universe and the fortunes of men are complicated and strange. It is hard to trace any laws, except purely physical ones, at work. Still, on the whole, things do work so that goodness is blessedness, and badness is ruin. That is, of course, not always true in regard of outward things, but even about them it is more often and obviously true than we sometimes recognise. Hence all nations have their proverbs, embodying the generalised experience of centuries, and asserting that, on the whole, "honesty is the best policy," and that it is always a blunder to do wrong. What modern phraseology calls "laws of nature," the Bible calls "the way of the Lord;" and the manner in which these help a man who conforms to them, and hurt or kill him if he does not, is an illustration on a

lower level of the principle of our text. This tremendous congeries of powers in the midst of which we live does not care whether we go with it or against it, only if we do the one we shall prosper, and if we do the other we shall very likely be made an end of. Try to stop a train, and it will run over you and murder you; get into it, and it will carry you smoothly along. Our lives are surrounded with powers, which will carry our messages and be our slaves if we know how to command nature by obeying it, or will impassively strike us dead if we do not.

Again, in our physical life, as a rule, virtue makes strength, sin brings punishment. "Riotous living" makes diseased bodies. Sins in the flesh are avenged in the flesh, and there is no need for a miracle to bring it about that he who sows to the flesh shall "of the flesh reap corruption." God entrusts the punishment of the breach of the laws of temperance and morality in the body to the "natural" operation of such breach. The inevitable connection between sins against the body and disease in the body, is an instance of the way of the Lord—the same set of principles and facts—being strength to one man and destruction to another. Hundreds of young men in Manchester—some of whom are listening to me now, no doubt—are killing themselves, or at least are ruining their health, by flying in the face of the plain laws of purity and self-control. They think that they must "have their fling," and "obey their instincts," and so on. Well, if they must, then another "must" will insist upon coming into play—and they must reap as they have sown, and drink as they have brewed, and the grim saying of this book about profligate young men will be fulfilled in many of them. "His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the grave." Be not deceived, God is not mocked, and His way avenges bodily transgressions by bodily sufferings.

And then, in higher regions, on the whole, goodness makes blessedness, and evil brings ruin. All the powers of God's universe, and all the tenderness of God's heart are on the side of the man that does right. The stars in their courses fight against the man that fights against Him; and, on the other hand, in yielding thyself to the will of God and following the dictates of His commandments, "Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee." All things serve the soul that serves God, and all war against him who wars against his Maker. The way of the Lord cannot but further and help all who love and serve Him. For them all things must work together for good. By the very laws of God's own being, which necessarily shape all His actions, the whole "stream of tendency without us makes for righteousness." In the one course of life we go with the stream of Divine activity which pours from the throne of God. In the other we are like men trying to row a boat *up* Niagara. All the rush of the mighty torrent will batter us back. Our work will be doomed to destruction, and ourselves to shame. For ever and ever to be good is to be well. An eternal truth lies in the facts that the same word "good" means pleasant and right, and that sin and sorrow are both called "evil." All sin is self-inflicted sorrow, and every "rogue is a roundabout fool." So ask yourselves the question: "Is my life in harmony with, or opposed to, these Omnipotent laws which rule the whole field of life?"

Still further, this same fact of the two-fold aspect and operation of the one way of the Lord will be made yet more evident in the future. It becomes us to speak very reverently and reticently about the matter, but I can conceive it possible that the one manifestation of God in a future life may be in substance the same, and yet that it may produce opposite effects upon oppositely disposed

asuls. According to the old mystical illustration, the same heat that melts wax hardens clay, and the same apocalypse of the Divine nature in another world may to one man be life and joy, and to another man may be terror and despair. I do not dwell upon that ; it is far too awful a thing for us to speak about to one another, but it is worth your taking to heart when you are indulging in easy anticipations that of course God is merciful and will bless and save everybody after he dies. Perhaps—I do not go any further than a perhaps—perhaps God cannot, and perhaps if a man has got himself into such a condition as it is possible for a man to get into, perhaps, like light upon a diseased eye, the purest beam may be the most exquisite pain, and the natural instinct may be to “call upon the rocks and the hills to fall upon them” and cover them up in a mercurial darkness from that Face, to see which should be life and blessedness.

People speak of future rewards and punishments as if they were given and inflicted by simple and Divine volition, and did not stand in any necessary connection with holiness on the one hand or with sin on the other. I do not deny that some portion of both bliss and sorrow may be of such a character. But there is a very important and wide region in which our actions here must automatically bring consequences hereafter of joy or sorrow, without any special retributive action of God's.

We have only to keep in view one or two things about the future which we know to be true, and we shall see this. Suppose a man with his memory of all his past life perfect, and his conscience stimulated to greater sensitiveness and clearer judgment, and all opportunities ended of gratifying tastes and appetites, whose food is in this world, while yet the soul has become dependent on them for ease and comfort. What more is needed to make a hell? And the supposition is but the statement of a fact. We seem to forget much ; but when the waters are drained off

all the lost things will be found at the bottom. Conscience gets dulled and sophisticated here. But the icy cold of death will wake it up, and the new position will give new insight into the true character of our actions. You see how often a man at the end of life has his eyes cleared to see his faults. But how much more will that be the case hereafter! When the rush of passion is past, and you are far enough from your life to view it as a whole, holding it at arm's length, you will see better what it looks like. There is nothing improbable in supposing that inclinations and tastes which have been nourished for a life time may survive the possibility of indulging them in another life, as they often do in this; and what can be worse than such a thirst for one drop of water, which never can be tasted more? These things are certain, and no more is needed to make sin produce, by necessary consequence, misery and ruin; while similarly, goodness brings joy, peace, and blessing.

But again, the self-revelation of God has this same double aspect.

"The way of the Lord" may mean His process by which He reveals His character. Every truth concerning Him may be either a joy or a terror to men. All His "attributes" are builded into "a strong tower, into which the righteous runneth, and is safe," or else they are builded into a prison and torture-house. So the thought of God may either be a happy and strengthening one, or an unwelcome one. "I remembered God, and was troubled," says one Psalmist. What an awful confession—that the thought of God disturbed him! The thought of God to some of us is a very unwelcome one, as unwelcome as the thought of a detective to a company of thieves. Is not that dreadful? Music is a torture to some ears; and there are people who have so alienated their hearts and wills from God that the Name which should be "their dearest faith" is not only their

"ghastliest doubt," but their greatest pain. O, brethren ! the thought of God and all that wonderful complex of mighty attributes and beauties which make His Name should be our delight, the key to all treasures, the end of all sorrows, our light in darkness, our life in death, our all in all. It is either that to us, or it is something that we would fain forget. Which is it to you ?

Especially the Gospel has this double aspect. Our text speaks of the distinction between the righteous and evil doers ; but how to pass from the one class to the other, it does not tell us. The Gospel is the answer to that question. It tells us that though we are all "workers of iniquity," and must, therefore, if such a text as this were the last word to be spoken on the matter, share in the ruin which smites the opponent of the Divine will, we may pass from that class ; and by simple faith in Him who died on the Cross for all workers of iniquity, may become of those righteous on whose side God works in all His way, who have all His attributes drawn up like an embattled army in their defence, and have His mighty name for their refuge.

As the very crown of the ways of God, the work of Christ and the record of it in the Gospel have most eminently this double aspect. God meant nothing but the salvation of the whole world when He sent us this Gospel. His "way" therein was pure, unmingled, universal love. We can make that great message untroubled blessing by simply accepting it. Nothing more is needed but to take God at His word, and to close with His sincere and earnest invitation. Then Christ's work becomes the fortress in which we are guarded from sin and guilt, from the arrows of conscience, and the fiery darts of temptation. But if not accepted, then it is not passive, it is not nothing. If rejected, it does more harm to a man than anything else can, just because, if accepted,

it would have done him more good. The brighter the light, the darker the shadow. The pillar which symbolised the presence of God sent down influences on either side ; to the trembling crowd of the Israelites on the one hand, to the pursuing ranks of the Egyptians on the other ; and though the pillar was one, opposite effects streamed from it, and it was " a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these." Everything depends on which side of the pillar you choose to see. The ark of God, which brought dismay and death among false gods and their worshippers, brought blessing into the humble house of Obed Edom, the man of Gath, with whom it rested for three months before it was set in its place in the city of David. That which is meant to be the savour of life unto life must either be that or the savour of death unto death.

Jesus Christ is *something* to each of us. For you who have heard His name ever since you were children, your relation to Him settles your condition and your prospects, and moulds your character. Either He is for you the tried Corner-stone, the sure Foundation, on which whosoever builds will not be confounded, or He is the stone of stumbling, against which whosoever stumbles will be broken, and which will crush to powder whomsoever it falls upon. "This Child is set for the rise" or for the fall of all who hear His name. He leaves no man at the level at which He found him, but either lifts him up nearer to God, and purity and joy, or sinks him into an ever-descending pit of darkening separation from all these. Which is He to you? Something He must be—your strength or your ruin. If you commit your souls to Him in humble faith, He will be your Peace, your Life, your Heaven. If you turn from His offered grace, He will be your Pain, your Death, your Torture. "What maketh Heaven, that maketh hell." Which do you choose Him to be?

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SERMON XXII.



THE UNWEARIED GOD AND WEARIED MEN.

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SERMON XXII.

THE UNWEARIED GOD AND WEARIED MEN.

"The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth; fainteth not, neither is weary. . . . He giveth power to the faint. . . . Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . . but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."—ISAIAH xl., 28-31.

THIS magnificent chapter is the prelude or overture to the grand music of the second part of the prophecies of Isaiah. Whatever differences of opinion there may be as to the date or the authorship of that half of the book, there can be no question that it forms a connected whole, and that it is spoken as if from the midst, and for the encouragement of the exiles in Babylon. Its first words are its keynote: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people." That purpose is kept steadily in view throughout; and in this introductory chapter the prophet points as the only foundation of hope and consolation for Babylonian exiles, or for modern Englishmen, to that grand vision of the enthroned God "sitting on the circle of the earth, before Whom the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers."

"They build too low, who build beneath the sky.

For nations and for individuals, in view of political disasters or of private sorrows, the only holdfast to which cheerful hope may cling is the old conviction, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

The final verses of this introductory chapter are remarkable for the frequent occurrence of "fainteth" and "is weary." They come in every sentence, and if we note their use we shall get the essence of the hope and consolation which the prophet was anointed to pour into the wounds of his own people, and of every heavy-laden soul since then. Notice how, first, the prophet points to the unwearied God; and then his eyes drop from Heaven to the clouded, saddened earth, where there are the faint and the weak, and the strong becoming faint, and the youths fading and becoming weak with age. Then he binds together these two opposites—the unwearied God and the fainting man—in the grand thought that He is the Giving God, who bestows all His power on the weary. And see how, finally, he rises to the blessed conception of the wearied man becoming like the Unwearied God. "*They shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*"

So the recurrence of these two significant words shapes the flow of the prophet's thoughts. And my object now is simply to follow his meditations, and to gather for ourselves their abundant lessons of hope and encouragement.

I.—We have, first, his appeal to the familiar thought of an unchangeable God, as the antidote to all despondency, and the foundation of all hope. "Hast thou not known; hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

To whom is he speaking? The words of the previous verse tell us, in which he addresses himself to Jacob, or Israel, who is represented as complaining: "My way is

hid from the Lord." That is to say, he speaks to the believing, but despondent part of the exiles in Babylon ; and to them He comes with this vehement question in our text, which implies that they were in danger, in their despondency, of practically forgetting the great thought. There is wonder in the question, there is a tinge of rebuke in it, and there is distinctly implied this : that whensoever there steals over our spirits despondency or perplexity about our own individual history, or about the peace and the fortunes of the Church or the world, the one sovereign antidote against gloom and low spirits, and the one secret of unbroken cheer and confidence, is to lift our eyes to the unwearied God. The prophet takes his stand upon the most elementary truths of Revelation. His appeal to His people is : "What do you call God? You call Him the Lord, do you not? What do you mean by calling Him that? Do you ever ask yourselves that question? You mean this if you mean anything : "He fainteth not, neither is wearied."

And that is a philological truth, and theological truth, and a truth all round. "Jehovah" is interpreted from the lips of God Himself : "I am that I am." That is the expression of what metaphysicians call absolute, undervived, eternal Being, shaped and determined by none else, flowing from none else ; eternal, lifted up above the fashions of time. Of Him men cannot say "He was," or "He will be," but only "HE IS" ; by Himself, of Himself, for ever unchanged.

The life of men and of creatures is like a river, with its source and its course and its end. The life of God is like the ocean, with joyous movement of tides and currents of life and energy and purpose, but ever the same, and ever returning upon Itself. "The Everlasting God" is "the Lord." Jehovah, the Unchanged, Unchangeable, Inexhaustible Being, spends, and is unspent ; gives, and is

none the poorer ; works, and is never wearied ; lives, and with no tendency to death in His life ; flames with no tendency to extinction in the blaze. The bush burned and was not consumed : " He fainteth not, neither is weary."

And let me say, before I go further, here is a lesson for us to learn, of meditative reflection upon the veriest commonplaces of our religion. There is a tendency among us all to forget the indubitable, and to let our religious thought be occupied with the disputable and secondary parts of revelation, rather than with the plain deep verities which form its heart and centre. The commonplaces of religion are the most important. Everybody needs air, light, bread and water. Dainties are for the few, but the table which our " religion " sometimes spreads for us is like that at a rich man's feast—plenty of rare dishes but never a bit of bread ; plenty of wine and wine-glasses, but not a tumbler-full of spring water to be had. There are parts of our faith that are of less importance. The most valuable parts are the well-worn truths, the familiar commonplaces that every little child knows.

Meditate, then, upon the things most surely believed, and ever meditate until the dry stick of the commonplace truth puts forth buds and blossoms like Aaron's rod. Every pebble that you kick with your foot, if thought about and treasured, contains the secret of the universe. The commonplaces of our faith are the food upon which our faith will most richly feed.

And so here, dear brethren, in the old, old truth, that we all take for granted, as being so true that we do not need to think about it, lies the source of all consolation, and hope for men, for churches, for the world. We all have times, depending on mood or circumstances, when things seem black and we are weary. This great truth will shine into our gloom, like a star into a dungeon. Are

our hearts to tremble for God's truth to-day? Are we to share in the pessimist views of some faint-hearted and little-faith Christians? Surely as long as we can remember the name of the Lord, and His unwearied arm, we have nothing to do with fear or sadness for ourselves or for His Church, or for His world.

II.—But we turn next to notice the unwearied God giving strength to wearied man.

The eye that looked hopefully and buoyantly up to Heaven, falls to earth and is shaded and sad as it sees the contrast between the serene and immortal strength above, and the burdened fainting souls here. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young man shall utterly fall." Earth knows no independent strength. All earthly power is limited in range and duration, and, by the very law of its being, is steadily tending to weakness.

But though that has a sad side, it has also a grand and blessed one. Man's needs are the open mouth—if I may so say—into which God puts His gifts. The more sad and pathetic the condition of feeble humanity by contrast with the strength, the immortal strength of God, the more wondrous that grace and power of His which are not contented with hanging there in the heavens above us, but bend right down to bless us, and to turn us into their own likeness. The low earth stretches, grey and sorrowful, flat and dreary, beneath the blue arched heaven, but the heaven stoops to encompass—ay! to touch it. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

All creatural life digs its own grave. The youths shall faint with the weakness of physical decay, the weakness of burdened hearts, the weakness of consciously distracted natures, the weakness of agonising conscience. They shall be weary with the weariness of dreary monotony, of uncongenial tasks, of long-continued toil, of hope de-

ferred, of disappointed wishes, of bitter disenchantments, of learning the lesson that all is vanity—the weariness that creeps over us all as life goes on. All these are the occasions for the inward strength of God to manifest itself even in us; according to the great word that He spoke once and means ever: “My grace is sufficient for thee, and My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Notice the words preceding my text, “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold Who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number. He calleth them all by name by the greatness of His might; for that He is strong in power, not one faileth.” There in those heavens, that unwearied strength brings forth their embattled hosts like a ranked army; and every one of the mighty orbs answers to the call of the Commander, like a legion to the muster-roll.

In the simple astronomy of those early times, there was no failure nor decay, nor change in the calm heavens. The planets, year by year, returned punctually to their places; and, unhasting and unresting, rolled upon their way. Weakness and weariness had no place there, and the power by which “the most ancient heavens” were upheld and maintained was God’s unwearied might.

And then Israel, with singular self-tormenting ingenuity, having obeyed the prophet’s injunction to “lift up the eyes on high” and look at the ordained order and undecaying bright strength there, finds in it all the exacerbation of the bitterness of his own lot. He complains that his path is hid, his course on earth seems so sad, and cloudy, and weary, as compared with the paths of those great stars that move without friction, effort, confusion, dust, or noise, while all these things—friction, effort, confusion, dust, noise—beset our little carts as we tug them along the dreary road of life.

But, says Isaiah, His power does not show itself so

nobly up there as it does down here. It is not so much to keep the strong in their strength as to give strength to the weak. It is much to "preserve the stars from wrong," it is more to restore and to bring power to feeble men. It is much to uphold all those that are falling so that they may not fall: but it is more to raise up all those that have fallen and are bowed down. So, brethren, what God does with poor, weak men like us, when He lifts up our weakness and replenishes our weariness; pouring oil and wine into our wounds and a cordial into our lips, and sending us, with the joy of pardon, upon our road again—that is a greater thing than when He rolls Neptune in its mighty orbit round the central sun, or upholds with unwearied arms, from cycle to cycle, the circle of the heavens with all its stars. To give "power to the faint" is His divinest work.

Isaiah did not know—or, if he did, he knew it very dimly—what every Christian child knows: that the highest revelation of the power of Him that "fainteth not, neither is weary," is found in Him Who "being weary with His journey, sat thus on the well," and being worn out with the long work and excitement of a hard day slept the sleep of the labouring man, on the wooden pillow of the little boat amid the whistle of the tempest and the dash of the waves.

And Isaiah did not know—or if he did, he knew it very dimly and as from afar—that the highest fulfilment of his own word:—"He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength"—would be found when a gentle voice from amidst the woes of humanity said: "Come unto Me! all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

III.—And so the last thing in these words is: the wearied man lifted to the level of the unwearied God,

and to His likeness—"They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew their strength.*" That phrase means, of course, the continuous bestowment in unintermitting sequence of fresh gifts of power, as each former gift becomes exhausted, and more is required. Instant by instant, with unbroken flow, as golden shafts of light travel from the central sun, and each beam is linked with the source from which it comes by a line that stretches through millions and millions of miles, so God's gift of strength pours into us as we need. Grace abhors a vacuum, as nature does; and just as the endless procession of the waves rises on the beach, or as the restless network of the moonlight irradiation of the billows stretches all across the darkness of the sea, so that unbroken continuity of strength after strength gives grace for grace according to our need, and as each former supply is expended and used up, God pours Himself into our hearts anew.

That continuous communication leads to the perpetual youth of the Christian soul. For the words of the text, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles," might, perhaps more accurately be rendered, "They shall put forth their pinions as eagles"—the allusion being to the popular belief that in extreme old age the eagle moulted, and renewed its feathers—that popular belief, which is referred to in Psalm ciii. (which is itself later in date than this chapter). "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

According to the law of physical life, decaying strength and advancing years tame and sober and disenchant, and often make weary, because we become familiar with all things and the edge is taken off everything. Though these tell upon us whether we are Christians or not, and in some important respects tell upon us all alike, yet, if we are "waiting upon God," keeping our hearts near Him, living on His love, trying to realise His inward presence

and His outstretched hand, then we shall have such a continuous communication of His grace, strength, and beauty, as that we shall grow younger as we grow older, and, as the good old Scotch psalm has it—

"In old age, when others fade,
They fruit still forth shall bring."

"The oldest angels are the youngest," said Swedenborg. They that wait upon the Lord have drunk of the fountain of perpetual youth, for the buoyancy and the inextinguishable hope which are the richest possessions of youth may abide with them whose hopes are set on things beyond the sky.

And then, still further, my text goes on to portray the blessed consequences of this continuous communication of Divine strength in these words: "They shall run and not be weary." That is to say: this strength of God's, poured into our hearts, if we wait upon Him, shall fit us for the moments of special hard effort, for the crises which require more than an ordinary amount of energy to be put forth. It will fit us too for the long, dreary hours which require nothing but keeping doggedly at monotonous duties, "They shall walk and not faint." It is a great deal easier to be up to the occasion in some shining moment of a man's life, when he knows that a supreme crisis has come, than it is to keep that high tone when plodding over all the dreary plateaux of uneventful, monotonous travel and dull duties. It is easier to run fast for five minutes than to grind along the dusty road for a day.

Many a vessel has stood the tempest and then has gone down in the harbour, because its timbers have been gnawed by dry rot. And many a man can do what is wanted in the trying moments, and yet make shipwreck of his faith in uneventful times—

"Like ships that have gone down at sea,
When heaven was all tranquillity."

Soldiers who could stand firm and strike with all their might in the hour of battle will fall asleep or have their courage ooze out at their fingers' ends when they have to keep solitary watch at their posts through a long winter's night. We have all a few moments in life of hard, glorious running, but we have days and years of walking, the uneventful discharge of small duties. We need strength for both ; but, paradoxical as it may sound, we need it most for the multitude of smaller duties. We know where to get it. Let us keep close to "Christ, the Power of God," and open our hearts to the entering in of His unwearied strength. "Then shall the lame man leap as a hart," and we shall "run with patience the race that is set before us," if we look to Jesus, and follow in His steps.

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SERMON XXIII.

CHRIST'S PRESENT LOVE AND ITS
GREAT ACT.

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SERMON XXIII.

CHRIST'S PRESENT LOVE AND ITS GREAT ACT.

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."—Rev. i. 5.

THERE are two alterations made upon these words in the Revised Version which present the true reading of the original. They are very slight in themselves, but they make a considerable difference in the meaning. In the first clause we ought to read not "Unto Him that loved," but "Unto Him that loveth." The alteration in the Greek is about equivalent in magnitude to the alteration in English,—a "th" instead of a "d,"—but the deepening of the sense is wonderful. We are pointed, not to a past love, however precious that may be, but to the ever present love, timeless and changeless, with which Jesus Christ holds the whole world in His grasp.

In the second clause the omission of one letter in the original turns "washed" into "loosed." Though that change does not materially affect the meaning, it substitutes another metaphor. Both are directly Apocalyptic. We read a great deal in this Book of the Revelation of men washing their robes and making them white in the

blood of the Lamb, and equivalent expressions. But we also read about men being redeemed and loosed from sin by the blood of the Lamb. The one expression regards sin as a stain from which we have to be cleansed ; the other as a bondage or chain, from which we have to be set free. In the present case, the authority of manuscripts is in favour of "loosed," and the context, perhaps, slightly favours it also, as the contrast between emancipated slaves and "kings and priests," who are spoken of in the next clause, heightens the conception of the love which, not content with setting us free, goes on to place on our heads the mitre of the priest and the diadem of the king.

Taking, then, the clauses thus read and rendered, and remembering that they form the first words of a doxology which bursts irrepressibly from the lips of the seer as he contemplates what he and his brethren owe to Jesus Christ, we have brought before us the ever-present, timeless love of Jesus, the great act which is the outcome and proof of His love, and the praise which it should call out.

I.—First, then, consider the ever-present, timeless love of Jesus Christ.

John is writing these words of our text nearly half a century after Jesus Christ was buried. He is speaking to Asiatic Christians, Greeks and foreigners, most of whom had not been born when Jesus Christ died, none of whom had probably ever seen Him in this world. To these people he proclaims, not a past love, not a Christ that loved long ago, but a Christ that loves now, a Christ that loved these Asiatic Greeks at the moment when John was writing, a Christ that loves us nineteenth century Englishmen at the moment when we read.

Another thing must be remembered. He who thus speaks is "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Is it not beautiful that he thus takes all his brethren up to the

same level as himself, and delights to sink all that was special and personal in that which was common to all? He unites himself with his brethren, in that significant "us," which in effect says to the seven churches of Asia, "I stood no nearer the Master than you do. I had nothing which you may not possess if you will."

Of course all this is unintelligible, and has really no meaning at all unless we believe Christ to be Divine. Did he who wrote these words, "unto Him that *loveti* us," think of his Master as dead and in His grave half-a-century ago? Did he think of Him even as a man who lived still, no doubt in the spirit-world, and perhaps might be or perhaps might not be cognisant of what passed on earth? Could he have thought of Him as only human, and attributed to Him an actual love to men whom He had never seen in His earthly life? What exaggerated unreality it would be to look back over the centuries to the purest and noblest souls who gave themselves for their fellows, and to say that they, dead and gone, had any knowledge of or any love for men who had not been born till long after they had died! Why, the benevolence with which the warmest lover of his kind looks on the multitudes in far-off lands who are his own contemporaries, is much too tepid a sentiment to be called love, or to evoke answering thanks. Still less warm and substantial must be the ghost of the same feeling which such a man cherishes for coming generations. But if he is dead and gone, who would think of believing that his heart still throbbed with love for men on earth? The heart that can hold all the units of all successive generations, and so love each that each may claim a share in the grandest issues of its love, must be a Divine heart, for only there is there room for the millions to stand, all distinguishable and all enriched and blessed by that love. Is there anything but unmeaning exaggeration in this word of my

text, anything that will do for a poor heart struggling with its own evil, and with the world's miseries and devilries, to rest upon, unless we believe that Christ is Divine, and loves us with an everlasting love, because He is God manifest in the flesh ?

That Divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is woven through the whole of the Book of Revelation, like a golden thread, and manifestly is needed to explain the fact of this solemn ascription of praise to Him, as well as to warrant the application of each clause of it to His work. For John to lift up his voice in this grand Doxology to Jesus Christ was blasphemy, if it was not adoration of Him as Divine. He may have been right or wrong in his belief, but surely the man who sang such a hymn to his Master believed Him to be the Incarnate Word, God manifest in the flesh. If we share that faith, we can believe in Christ's present love to us all. It is no misty sentiment or rhetorical exaggeration to believe that every man, woman, and child that is or shall be on the earth till the end of time has a distinct place in His heart, and is an object of His knowledge and of His love.

This one word, then, is the revelation to us of Christ's love, as unaffected by time. Our thoughts are carried by it up into the region where dwells the Divine nature, above the various phases of the fleeting moments which we call past, present, and future. These are but the lower layer of clouds which drive before the wind, and melt from shape to shape. He dwells above in the naked, changeless blue.

As of all His nature, so, blessed be His name, of His love; we can be sure that time cannot bound it. We say not, "It was," or "It will be," but "It is." Our text proclaims the changeless, timeless, majestic present of that love which burns, and is not consumed, but glows with as warm a flame for the latest generations as for those men

who stood within the reach of its rays while He was on earth. "I am the first and the last," says Christ, and His love partakes of that eternity. It is like a golden fringe which keeps the web of creation from ravelling out. Before the earliest of creatures was this love. After the latest it shall be. It circles them all around, and locks them all in its enclosure. It is the love of a Divine heart, for it is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. It is the love of a human heart, for that heart could shed its blood, to loose us from our sins. Shall we not take this love for ours? The foundation of all our hopes and all our joys, and all our strength in our work should be this firm conviction, that we are wrapped about by, and evermore in, an endless ocean of the present Divine love of the present loving Christ.

Then, further, that love is not disturbed or absorbed by multitudes. He loveth *us*, says John to these Asiatic Christians; and he speaks to all ages and people. The units of each generation and of every land have a right to feel themselves included in that word, and every human being is entitled to turn the "us" into "me." For no crowds block the access to His heart, nor empty the cup of His love before it reaches the thirsty lips on the farthest outskirts of the multitude. When He was here on earth, the multitude thronged Him and pressed Him, but the wasted forefinger of one poor timid woman could reach the garment's hem for all the crowd. He recognised the difference between the touch that had sickness and supplication in it and the jostlings of the mob, and His healing power passed at once to her who needed and asked it, though so many were surging round Him. So He still knows and answers the silent prayer of the loving and the needy heart. Howsoever tremulous and palsied the finger; howsoever imperfect and ignorant the faith, His love delights to answer and to over answer

it, as He did with that woman, who not only got the healing which she craved, but bore away besides the consciousness of His love and the cleansing of her sins. He does with all the multitude who hang on Him as he did when he fed the thousands. He ranks them all on the grass, and in order ministers to each his portion in due season. We do not jostle each other. There is room in that heart of Christ for us all.

"The glorious sky, embracing all,
Is like its Maker's love;
Wherewith encircled, great and small
In peace and order move."

Every star has its separate place in the great round, 'and He calleth them all by name,' and holds them in His mind. So we, and all our brethren, have each our own orbit and our station in the Heaven of Christ's heart, and it embraces, distinguishes, and sustains us all, "Unto Him that loveth us."

Another thought may be suggested, too, of how this present timeless love of Christ is unexhausted by exercise, pouring itself ever out, and ever full notwithstanding. They tell us that the sun is fed by impact of fuel from without, and that the day will come when its furnace-flames shall be quenched into grey ashes. But this love is fed by no contributions from without, and will outlast the burnt-out sun and gladden the ages of ages for ever. All generations, all thirsty lips and ravenous desires, may slake their thirst and satisfy themselves at that great fountain, and it shall not sink one inch in its marble basin. Christ's love, after all creatures have received from it, is as full as at the beginning; and unto us upon whom the ends of the earth are come, this precious and all-sufficing love pours as full a tide as when first it blessed that little handful that gathered round about Him on earth. Other rivers run shallow as they broaden, but this

“river of God” is as deep when it spreads over the world as if it were poured through the narrows of one heart.

Again, it is a love unchilled by the sovereignty and glory of His exaltation. There is a wonderful difference between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Revelation. People have exaggerated the difference into contradiction, and then, running to the other extreme others have been tempted to deny that there was any. But one thing is not different. The Nature behind the circumstances is the same. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ in His lowliness, bearing the weight of man’s sins ; the Christ of the Apocalypse is the Christ in His loftiness, ruling over the world and time. But it is the same Christ. The one is surrounded by weakness and the other is girded with strength, but it is the same Christ. The one is treading the weary road of earth, the other is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; but it is the same Christ. The one is the “ Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” the other is the Man glorified and a Companion of Divinity ; but it is the same Christ. The hand that holds the seven stars is as loving as the hand that was laid in blessing upon little children. The face that is as the sun shining in its strength beams with as much love as when it drew publicans and harlots to His feet. The breast that is girt with the golden girdle is the same breast upon which John leaned his happy head. The Christ is the same, and the love is unaltered. From the midst of the glory and the sevenfold brilliancy of the light which is inaccessible, the same tender heart bends down over us that bent down over all the weary and the distressed when He Himself was weary ; and we can lift up our eyes above stars, and systems, and material splendours, right up to the central point of the universe, where the throned Christ is, and see “ Him that loveth us ”—even *us* !

II.—Notice, secondly the great act in time which is the outcome and proof of this endless love.

“He loosed us from our sins by His own blood.” The metaphor is that of bondage. “He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.” Every wrong thing that we do tends to become our master and our tyrant. We are held and bound in the chains of our sins. The awful influence of habit, the dreadful effect of a corrupted conscience, the power of regretful memories, the pollution arising from the very knowledge of what is wrong—these are some of the strands out of which the ropes that bind us are twisted. We know how tight they grip. I am speaking now, no doubt, to people who are as completely manacled and bound by evils of some sort—evils of flesh, of sense, of lust, of intemperance, of pride, and avarice, and worldliness, of vanity, and frivolity, and selfishness—as completely manacled as if there were iron gyves upon their wrists, and fetters upon their ankles.

You remember the old story of the prisoner in his tower, delivered by his friend, who sent a beetle to crawl up the wall, fastening a silken thread to it, which had a thread a little heavier attached to the end of that, and so on, and so on, each thickening in diameter until they got to a cable. That is how the devil has got hold of a great many of us. He weaves round us silken threads to begin with, slight, as if we could break them with a touch of our fingers, and they draw after them, as certainly as destiny, “at each remove a” thickening “chain,” until, at last, we are tied and bound, and our captor laughs at our mad plunges for freedom, which are as vain as a wild bull’s in the hunter’s net. Some of you have made an attempt at shaking off sin—how have you got on with it? As a man would do who with a file made out of an old soft knife tried to work through his fetters. He might make a little impression on the surface, but he would

mostly scratch his own skin, and wear his own fingers, and to very little purpose.

But the chains can be got off. Christ looses them by "His blood." Like corrosive acid, that blood, falling upon the fetters, dissolves them, and the prisoner goes free, emancipated by the Son. That death has power to deliver us from the guilt and penalty of sin. The Bible does not give us the whole theory of an atonement, but the fact is plainly proclaimed that Christ died for us, and that the bitter consequences of sin in their most intense bitterness, even that separation from God which is the true death, were borne by Him for our sakes, on our account, and in our stead. By the shedding of His blood is remission of our sins. His blood looses the fetters of our sins, inasmuch as His death, touching our hearts, and also bringing to us new powers through His Spirit, which is shed forth in consequence of His finished work, frees us from the power of sin, and brings into operation new powers and motives which deliver us from our ancient slavery. The chains which bound us shrivel and melt as the ropes that bound the Hebrew youths in the fire, before the warmth of His manifested love and the glow of His Spirit's power.

I beseech each heart that listens to me now to yield to the redeeming power of the blood which cleanses from all sin. You cannot deliver yourselves from the slavery of sin, but Jesus Christ, by His own blood, has delivered the whole world, and you amongst the rest. He did it because he loves us, and He has done it once and for all.

The one act in time, which is the proof and outcome of His love, is this deliverance from sin by His blood. What a pathos that thought gives to His death! It was the willing token of His love. He gave Himself up to the cross of shame because He held us in His heart. There

was no reason for His death, but only that "He loveth us." And with what a solemn power that thought invests His death! Even His love could not reach its end by any other means—not by mere good will, nor by any small sacrifice. Nothing short of the bitter Cross could accomplish His heart's desire for men. There was a need be for His death, but the necessity was, if we may so say, of His own making. He must die, for He loved the world so much that He must accept the mission of the Father, who so loved it that He sent the Son to die. His love in His death embraced us each, as it does to-day. Each man of all the race may be quite sure that he had a place in that Divine-human love of Christ's as He hung upon the Cross. I may take it all to myself, as the whole rainbow is mirrored on each eye that looks.

We have no proof of Christ's love to us, and no reason for loving Him, except His death for our sins. But if we believe, as John believed, that He tasted death for every man, and that by that death every poor, sin-mastered soul that trusts in Him may shake off the demon that sits upon his shoulders and be free from the guilt, the punishment, and the tyranny of sin, then we need not despair, however obstinate may be the conflict, but go into it with good heart, happy in the love and confident in the power of the Eternal Lover and Purifier of our souls, whose blood looses us from our sins, whose grace makes us kings and priests to God.

III.—One final word as to the praise which should be our answer to this great love.

Irrepressible gratitude bursts into a doxology from John's lips, even here at the beginning of the book, as the seer thinks of the love of Christ, and all through the Apocalypse we hear the shout of praise from earth or Heaven. The book which closes the New Testament "shuts up all with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs

and harping symphonies," as Milton says, in his stately diction, and may well represent for us in that perpetual cloud of incense rising up fragrant to the throne of God and of the Lamb, the unceasing love and thanksgiving which should be man's answer to Christ's love and sacrifice.

Our praise of Christ is but the expression of our recognition of Him for what He is, and our delight in and love towards Him. Such love, which is but our love speaking, is all which He asks. Love can only be paid by love. Any other recompense offered to it is coinage of another currency, that is not current in its kingdom. The only recompense that satisfies love is its own image reflected in another heart. That is what Jesus Christ wants of you. He does not want your admiration, your outward reverence, your lip homage, your grudging obedience. His heart hungers for more and other gifts from you. He wants your love, and is unsatisfied without it. He desired it so much that he was willing to die to procure it, as if a mother might think "My children have been cold to me while I lived; perhaps, if I were to give my life to help them, their hearts might melt." All the awful expenditure of love stronger than death is meant to draw forth our love. He comes to each of us, and pleads with us for our hearts, wooing us to love Him by showing us all which He has done for us, and all which He will do. Surely the Cross borne for us should move us. Surely the throne prepared for us should touch us into gratitude.

That Lord Who died and lives dwells now in the Heavens, the centre of a mighty chorus and tempest of praise which surges round His throne, loud as the voice of many waters, and sweet as harpers harping on their harps. The main question for us is, Does He hear our voice in it? Are our lips shut? Are our hearts cold?

Do we meet His fire of love with icy indifference? Do we repay His sacrifice with unmoved self-regard, and meet His pleadings with closed ears? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?"

Take this question home to your heart, How much owest thou unto thy Lord? He has loved thee, has given Himself for thee, and His sacrifice will unlock thy fetters and set thee free. Will you be silent in the presence of such transcendent mercy? Shall we not rather, moved by His dying love, and joyful in the possession of deliverance through His Cross, lift up our voices and hearts in a perpetual song of praise, to which our lives of glad obedience shall be as perfect music accompanying noble words, "Unto Him that loveth us, and looseth us from our sins by His own blood"?

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SERMON XXIV.

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THE CROSS, THE GLORY OF
CHRIST AND GOD.

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SERMON XXIV.

THE CROSS, THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND GOD.

"Therefore, when He was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.

"If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." John xiii. 31-32.

THERE is something very weird and awful in the brief note of time with which the Evangelist sends Judas on his dark errand. "He . . . went immediately out, and it was night." Into the darkness that dark soul went. That hour was "the power of darkness," the very key-stone of the black arch of man's sin, and some shadow of it fell upon the soul of Christ Himself.

In immediate connection with the departure of the traitor comes this singular burst of triumph in our text. The Evangelist emphasises the connection by that: "*Therefore*, when he was gone out, Jesus said." There is a wonderful touch of truth and naturalness in that connection. The traitor was gone. His presence had been a restraint; and now that that "spot in their feast of charity" had disappeared, the Master felt at ease; and like some stream, out of the bed of which a black rock has been taken, His words flow more freely. How intensely real and human the narrative becomes when we

see that Christ, too, felt the oppression of an uncongenial presence, and was relieved and glad at its removal! The departure of the traitor evoked these words of triumph in another way, too. At his going away, we may say, the match was lit that was to be applied to the train. He had gone out on his dark errand, and that brought the Cross within measurable distance of our Lord. Out of a new sense of its nearness He speaks here. So the note of time not only explains to us why our Lord spoke, but puts us on the right track for understanding His words, and makes any other interpretation of them than one impossible. What Judas went to do was the beginning of Christ's glorifying. We have here, then, a triple glorification—the Son of Man glorified in His Cross; God glorified in the Son of Man; and the Son of Man glorified in God. Let us look at these three things for a few moments now.

I.—First, we have here the Son of Man glorified in His Cross.

The words are a paradox. Strange, that at such a moment, when there rose up before Christ all the vision of the shame and the suffering, the pain and the death, and the mysterious sense of abandonment, which was worse than them all, He should seem to stretch out His hands to bring the Cross nearer to Himself, and that His soul should fill with triumph!

There is a double aspect under which our Lord regarded His sufferings. On the one hand we mark in Him an unmistakable shrinking from the Cross, the innocent shrinking of His manhood expressed in such words as "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished"; and in such incidents as the agony in Gethsemane. And yet, side by side with that, not overcome by it, but not overcoming it, there is the opposite feeling, the reaching out almost with eagerness to bring the Cross nearer to Himself. These two lie

close by each other in His heart. Like the pellucid waters of the Rhine and the turbid stream of the Moselle, that flow side by side over a long space, neither of them blending discernibly with the other, so the shrinking and the desire were contemporaneous in Christ's mind. Here we have the triumphant anticipation rising to the surface, and conquering for a time the shrinking.

Why did Christ think of His Cross as a glorifying? The New Testament generally represents it as the very lowest point of His degradation; John's Gospel always represents it as the very highest point of His glory. And the two things are both true; just as the zenith of our sky is the nadir of the sky for those on the other side of the world. The same fact which in one aspect sounds the very lowest depth of Christ's humiliation, in another aspect is the very highest culminating point of His glory.

How did the Cross glorify Christ? In two ways. It was the revelation of His heart; it was the throne of His sovereign power.

It was the revelation of His heart. All His life long He had been trying to tell the world how much He loved it. His love had been, as it were, filtered by drops through His words, through His deeds, through His whole demeanour and bearing; but in His death it comes in a flood, and pours itself upon the world. All His life long He had been revealing His heart, through the narrow rifts of His deeds, like some slender lancet windows; but in His death all the barriers are thrown down, and the brightness blazes out upon men. All through His life He had been trying to communicate His love to the world, and the fragrance came from the box of ointment exceeding precious, but when the box was broken the house was filled with the odour.

For Him to be known was to be glorified. So pure and perfect was He that revelation of His character and glori-

fication of Himself were one and the same thing. Because His Cross reveals to the world for all time, and for eternity, too, a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, a love which is capable of the most entire abandonment, a love which is diffused over the whole surface of humanity and through all the ages, a love which comes laden with the richest and the highest gifts, even the turning of selfish and sinful hearts into its own pure and perfect likeness, therefore does He say, in contemplation of that Cross which was to reveal Him for what He was to the world, and to bring His love to every one of us, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

We can fancy a mother, for instance, in the anticipation of shame, and ignominy, and suffering, and sorrow, and death which she encounters for the sake of some prodigal child, forgetting all the ignominy, and the shame, and the suffering, and the sorrow, and the death, because all these are absorbed in the one thought: "If I bear them, my poor, wandering, rebellious child will know at last how much I loved him." So Christ yearns to impart the knowledge of Himself to us, because by that knowledge we may be won to His love and service: and hence when He looks forward to the agony, and contumely, and sorrow of the close, every other thought is swallowed up in this one: "They shall be the means by which the whole world will find out how deep My heart of love to it was." Therefore does He triumph and say, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

Still further, He regards His Cross as the means of His glorifying, because it is His throne of saving power. The paradoxical words of our text rest upon His profound conviction that in His death He was about to put forth a mightier and Diviner power than ever he had manifested in His life. They are the same in effect and in tone as the great words: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men

unto Me." Now I want you to ask yourselves one question : In what sense is Christ's Cross Christ's glorifying, unless His Cross bears an altogether different relation to His life from what the death of a great teacher or benefactor ordinarily bears to His ? It is impossible that Christ could have spoken such words as these of my text if He had simply thought of His death as a Plato or a John Howard might have thought of his, as being the close of his activity for the welfare of his fellows. Unless Christ's death has in it some substantive value, unless it is something more than the mere termination of His work for the world, I see not how the words before us can be interpreted. If His death is His glorifying, it must be because in that death something is done which was not completed by the life, however fair ; by the words, however wise and tender ; by the works of power, however restorative and healing. Here is something more than these present. What more ? This more, that His Cross is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. He is glorified therein, not as a Socrates might be glorified by his calm and noble death ; not because nothing in His life became Him better than the leaving of it ; not because the page that tells the story of His passion is turned to by us as the tenderest and most sacred in the world's records ; but because in that death He wrestled with and overcame our foes, and because, like the Jewish hero of old, dying, He pulled down the house which our tyrants had built, and overwhelmed them in its ruins. "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

And so, brethren, there blend, in that last act of our Lord's—for His death was His act—in strange fashion, the two contradictory ideas of glory and shame : like some sky, all full of dark thunderclouds, and yet between them the brightest blue and the blazing sunshine. In the Cross Death crowns Him the Prince of Life, and His

Cross is His throne. All His life long He was the Light of the World, but the very noontide hour of His glory was that hour when the shadow of eclipse lay over all the land, and He hung on the Cross dying in the dark. At His eventide "it was light." "He endured the Cross, despising the shame;" and lo! the shame flashed up into the very brightness of glory, and the ignominy and the suffering became the jewels of His crown. "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

II.—Now let us turn for a moment to the second of the three-fold glorifications that are set forth here: God glorified in the Son of Man.

The mystery deepens as we advance. That God shall be glorified in a man is not strange, but that He shall be so glorified in the eminent and especial fashion in which it is spoken of here, is strange; and stranger still when we think that the act in which He was glorified was the death of an innocent Man. If God, in any special and eminent manner, is glorified in the Cross of Jesus Christ, that implies, as it seems to me, two things at all events—many more which I have no time to touch upon, but two things very plainly. One is that God was in Christ, in some singular and eminent manner. If all His life was a continual manifestation of the Divine character, if Christ's words were the Divine wisdom, if Christ's compassion was the Divine pity, if Christ's lowliness was the Divine gentleness, if His whole human life and nature were the brightest and clearest manifestation to the world of what God is, we can understand that the Cross was the highest point of the revelation of the Divine nature to the world, and so was the glorifying of God in Him. But if we take any lower view of the relation between God and Christ, I know not how we can acquit these words of our Master of the charge of being a world too wide for the facts of the case.

The words involve, as it seems to me, not only that idea of a close, unique union and indwelling of God in Christ, but they involve also this other: that these sufferings bore no relation to the deserts of the person who endured them. If Christ, with His pure and perfect character,—the innocency and nobleness of which all that read the Gospels admit—if Christ suffered so; if the highest virtue that was ever seen in this world brought no better wages than shame and spitting and the Cross; if Christ's life and Christ's death are simply a typical example of the world's treatment of its greatest benefactors; then, if they have any bearing at all on the character of God, they cast a shadow rather than a light upon the Divine government, and become not the least formidable of the difficulties and knots that will have to be untied hereafter before it shall be clear that God did everything well. But if we can say, "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;" if we can say "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself;" if we can say that His death was the death of Him Whom God had appointed to live and die for us, and to bear our sins in His own body on the tree, then, though deep mysteries come with the thought, still we can see that, in a very unique manner, God is glorified and exalted in His death.

For, if the dying Christ be the Son of God dying for us, then the Cross glorifies God, because it teaches us that the glory of the Divine character is the Divine love. Of wisdom, or of power, or of any of the more "majestic" attributes of the Divine nature, that weak Man, hanging dying on the Cross, was a strange embodiment; but if the very heart of the Divine brightness be the pure white fire of love; if there be nothing Diviner in God than His giving of Himself to His creatures; if the highest glory of the Divine nature be to pity and to bestow, then

the Cross upon which Christ died towers above all other revelations as the most awful, the most sacred, the most tender, the most complete, the most heart-touching, the most soul-subduing manifestation of the Divine nature; and stars and worlds, and angels and mighty creatures, and things in the heights and things in the depths, to each of which have been entrusted some broken syllables of the Divine character to make known to the world, dwindle and fade before the brightness, the lambent, gentle brightness that beams out from the Cross of Christ which proclaims—God is love, is pity, is pardon.

And is it not so—is it not so? Is not the thought that has flowed from Christ's Cross through Christendom about what our Father in Heaven is, the highest and the most blessed that the world has ever had? Has it not scattered doubts that lay like mountains of ice upon man's heart? Has it not swept the heavens clear of clouds that wrapped it in darkness? Has it not delivered men from the dreams of gods angry, gods capricious, gods vengeful, gods indifferent, gods simply mighty, and vast and awful, and unspeakable? Has it not taught us that love is God, and God is love; and so brought to the whole world the true Gospel, the Gospel of the grace of God? In that Cross the Father is glorified.

III.—Now, lastly, we have here the Son of Man glorified in the Father.

The mysteries and the paradoxes seem to deepen as we advance. "If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." Do these words sound to you as if they expressed no more than the confidence of a good man, who, when he was dying, believed that he would be accepted of a loving Father, and would be at rest from his sufferings? To me they seem to say infinitely more than that. "He shall also glorify Him in Himself." Mark that—"in

Himself." That is the obvious antithesis to what has been spoken about in the previous clause, a glorifying which consisted in a manifestation to the external universe, whereas this is a glorifying within the depths of the Divine nature. And the best commentary upon it is our Lord's own words: "Father! glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." We get a glimpse, as it were, into the very centre of the brightness of God; and there, walking in that beneficent furnace, we see "One like unto the Son of Man." Christ anticipates that, in some profound and unspeakable sense, He shall, as it were, be caught up into Divinity, and shall dwell, as indeed He did dwell from the beginning, "in the bosom of the Father." "He shall glorify Him in Himself."

But then mark, still further, that this reception into the bosom of the Father is given to the Son of Man. That is to say, the Man Christ Jesus, the Son of Mary, the Brother of us all, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," the very Person that walked upon earth and dwelt amongst us—He is taken up into the heart of God, and in His manhood enters into that same glory, which, from the beginning, the Eternal Word had with God.

And still further, not only have we here set forth, in most wondrous language, the reception and incorporation, if we may use such words, into the very centre of Divinity, as granted to the Son of Man, but we have that glorifying set forth as commencing immediately upon the completion of God's glorifying by Christ upon the Cross. "He shall straightway glorify Him." At the instant, then, that He said, "It is finished," and all that the Cross could do to glorify God was done, at that instant there began, with not a pin point of interval between them, God's glorifying of the Son in Himself. It began in that Paradise into which we know that upon that day He entered. It was

manifested to the world when He raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. It reached a still higher point when they brought Him near unto the Ancient of Days, and ascending up on high, a dominion and a throne and a glory were given to Him which last now, whilst the Son of Man sits in the Heaven on the Throne of His glory, wielding the attributes of Divinity, and administering the laws of the universe and the mysteries of providence. It shall rise to its highest manifestation before an assembled world, when He shall come in His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.

This, then, was the vision that lay before the Christ in that upper room, the vision of Himself glorified in His extreme shame because His Cross manifested His love and His saving power; of God glorified in Him above all other of His acts of manifestation when He died on the Cross, and revealed the very heart of God; and of Himself glorified in the Father when, exalted high above all creatures, He sitteth upon the Father's throne and rules the Father's realm.

And yet from that high, and, to us, inaccessible and all but inconceivable summit of His elevation, He looks down ready to bless each poor creature here, toiling and moiling amidst sufferings, and meannesses, and commonplaces, and monotony, if we will only put our trust in Him, and love Him, and see the brightness of the Father's face in Him. He cares for us all; and if we will but take Him as our Saviour, His all-prevalent prayer, presented within the veil for us, will certainly be fulfilled at last: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory."

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SERMON XXV.

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM,
AND THEIR REWARD.

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SERMON XXV.

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM, AND THEIR REWARD.

"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward." — Matt. x. 41-42.

THERE is nothing in these words to show whether they refer to the present or to the future. We shall probably not go wrong if we regard them as having reference to both. For all godliness has "promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come," and "*in* keeping God's commandments," as well as *for* keeping them, "there is great reward," a reward realised in the present, even although death holds the keys of the treasure house in which the richest rewards are stored. No act of holy obedience here is left without foretastes of joy, which, though they be but "brooks by the way," contain the same water of life which hereafter swells to an ocean.

Some people tell us that it is defective morality in Christianity to bribe men to be good by promising them Heaven, and that he who is actuated by such a motive is

selfish. Now that fantastic and over-strained objection may be very simply answered by two considerations; self-regard is not selfishness, and Christianity does not propose the future reward as the motive for goodness. The motive for goodness is love to Jesus Christ; and if ever there was a man who did acts of Christian goodness only for the sake of what he would get by them, the acts were not Christian goodness, because the motive was wrong. But it is a piece of fastidiousness to forbid us to reinforce the great Christian motive, which is love to Jesus Christ, by the thought of the recompense of reward. It is a stimulus and an encouragement, not the motive for goodness. This text shows us that it is a subordinate motive, for it says that the reception of a prophet, or of a righteous man, or of "one of these little ones," which is rewardable, is the reception "in the name of" a prophet, a disciple, and so on, or, in other words, recognising the prophet, or the righteous man, or the disciple for what he is, and because he is that, and not because of the reward, receiving him with sympathy and solace and help.

So, with that explanation, let us look for a moment or two at these very remarkable words of our text.

I.—The first thing which I wish to observe in them is the three classes of character which are dealt with—"prophet," "righteous man," "these little ones."

Now the question that I would suggest is this: Is there any meaning in the order in which these are arranged? If so, what is it? Do we begin at the bottom, or at the top? Have we to do with an ascending or with a descending scale? Is the prophet thought to be greater than the righteous man, or less? Is the righteous man thought to be higher than the little one, or to be lower? The question is an important one, and worth considering.

Now, at first sight, it certainly does look as if we had here to do with a descending scale, as if we began at the

top and went downwards. A prophet, a man honoured with a distinct commission from God to declare His will, is, in certain very obvious respects, loftier than a man who is not so honoured, however pure and righteous he may be. The dim and venerable figures, for instance, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, tower high above all their contemporaries ; and the godly men who hung upon their lips, like Baruch on Jeremiah's, and others, felt themselves to be, and were, inferior to them. And, in like manner, the little child who believes in Christ may seem to be insignificant in comparison with the prophet with his God-touched lips, or the righteous man of the old dispensation with his austere purity : as a humble violet may seem by the side of a rose with its heart of fire, or a white lily regal and tall. But one remembers that Jesus Christ Himself declared that "the least of the little ones" was greater than the greatest who had gone before ; and it is not at all likely that He who has just been saying that whosoever received His followers received Himself, should classify these followers beneath the righteous men of old. The Christian type of character is distinctly higher than the Old Testament type ; and the humblest believer is blessed above prophets and righteous men because his eyes behold and his heart welcomes the Christ.

Therefore I am inclined to believe that we have here an ascending series—that we begin at the bottom and not at the top : that the prophet is less than the righteous man, and the righteous man less than the little one who believes in Christ. For, suppose there were a prophet who was not righteous, and a righteous man who was not a prophet. Suppose the separation between the two characters were complete, which of them is the greater ? Balaam was a prophet ; Balaam was not a righteous man ; Balaam was immeasurably inferior to the righteous whose lives he did not emulate, though he could not but envy their deaths. In

like manner the humblest believer in Jesus Christ has something that a prophet, if he be not a disciple, does not possess ; and that which he has, and the prophet has not, is higher than the endowment that is peculiar to the prophet alone.

May we say the same thing about the difference between the righteous man and the disciple ? Can there be a righteous man that is not a disciple ? Can there be a disciple that is not a righteous man ? Can the separation between these two classes be perfect and complete ? No ! in the profoundest sense, certainly not. But then at the time when Christ spoke there were some men standing round Him, who, "as touching the righteousness which is of the law," were "blameless." And there are many men to-day, with much that is noble and admirable in their characters, who stand apart from the faith that is in Jesus Christ ; and if the separation be so complete as that, then it is to be emphatically and decisively pronounced that if we have regard to all that a man ought to be ; and if we estimate men in the measure in which they approximate to that ideal in their lives and conduct, "the Christian is the highest style of man." The disciple is above the righteous men adorned with many graces of character, who, if they be not Christians, have a worm at the root of all their goodness because it lacks the supreme refinement and consecration of faith ; and above the fiery-tongued prophet, if he be not a disciple.

Now, brethren, this thought is full of very important practical inferences. Faith is better than genius. Faith is better than brilliant gifts. Faith is better than large requirements. The poet's imagination, the philosopher's calm reasoning, the orator's tongue of fire, even the inspiration of men that may have their lips touched to proclaim God to their brethren, are all less than the bond of living

trust that knits a soul to Jesus Christ, and makes it thereby partaker of that indwelling Saviour.

And, in like manner, if there be men, as there are, and no doubt some of them in this congregation, adorned with virtues and graces of character, but who have not rested their souls on Jesus Christ, then high above these, too, stands the lowliest person who has set his faith and love on that Saviour. Neither intellectual endowments nor moral character is the highest, but faith in Jesus Christ. A man may be endowed with all brilliancy of intellect and fair with many beauties of character, and he may be lost; and on the other hand simple faith, rudimentary and germlike as it often is, carries in itself the prophecy of all goodness, and knits a man to the source of all blessedness. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, charity." "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven."

Ah! brethren, if we believed in Christ's classification of men, and in the order of importance and dignity in which He arranges them, it would make a wonderful practical difference to the lives, to the desires, and to the efforts of a great many of us. Some of you students before me this morning, young men and young women that are working at college or your classes, if you believed that it were better to trust in Jesus Christ than to be wise, and gave one-tenth, ay! one hundredth part of the attention and the effort to secure the one which you do to secure the other, would be different people. "Not many wise men after the flesh," but humble trusters in Jesus Christ, are the victors in the world. Believe you that, and order your lives accordingly.

Oh! what a reversal of this world's estimates is coming one day, when the names that stand high in the roll of

fame shall pale, like photographs that have been shut up in a portfolio, and when you take them out have faded off the paper. "The world knows nothing of its greatest men," but there is a time coming when the spurious mushroom aristocracy that the world has worshipped, will be forgotten ; like the nobility of some conquered land, who are brushed aside and relegated to private life by the new nobility of the conquerors, and when the true nobles, God's greatest, the righteous, who are righteous because they have trusted in Christ, shall shine forth like the sun "in the Kingdom of My Father."

Here is the climax : gifts and endowments at the bottom, character and morality in the middle, and at the top faith in Jesus Christ.

II.—Now notice briefly in the second place the variety of the reward according to the character.

The prophet has his, the righteous man has his, the little one has his. That is to say, each level of spiritual or moral stature receives its own prize. There is no difficulty in seeing that this is so in regard to the rewards of this life. Every faithful message delivered by a prophet increases that prophet's own blessedness, and has joys in the receiving of it from God, in the speaking of it to men, in the marking of its effects as it spreads through the world, which belong to him alone. In all these, and in many other ways, the "prophet" has rewards that no stranger can intermeddle with. All courses of obedient conduct have their own appropriate consequences and satisfaction. Every character is adapted to receive, and does receive, in the measure of its goodness, certain blessings and joys, here and now. "Surely the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth."

And the same principle, of course, applies if we think of the reward as altogether future. It must be remembered, however, that Christianity does not teach, as 1

believe, that if there be a prophet or a righteous man who is not a disciple, that prophet or righteous man will get rewards in the future life. It must be remembered, too, that every disciple is righteous in the measure of his faith. Discipleship being presupposed, then the disciple-prophet will have one reward, and the disciple-righteous man shall have another ; and where all three characteristics coincide, there shall be a triple crown of glory upon his head.

That is all plain and obvious enough if only we get rid of the prejudice that the rewards of a future life are merely bestowed upon men by God's arbitrary good pleasure. What is the reward of Heaven ? "Eternal life," people say. Yes ! "Blessedness." Yes ! But where does the life come from, and where does the blessedness come from ? They are both derived, they come from God in Christ ; and in the deepest sense, and in the only true sense, God is Heaven, and God is the reward of Heaven. "I am thy shield," so long as dangers need to be guarded against, and then, thereafter, "I am thine exceeding great Reward." It is the possession of God that makes all the Heaven of Heaven, the immortal life which His children receive, and the blessedness with which they are enraptured. We are heirs of immortality, we are heirs of life, we are heirs of blessedness, because, and in the measure in which, we become heirs of God.

And if that be so, then there is no difficulty in seeing that in Heaven, as on earth, men will get just as much of God as they can hold ; and that in Heaven, as on earth, capacity for receiving God is determined by character. The gift is one, the reward is one, and yet the reward is infinitely various. It is the same light which glows in all the stars, but "star differeth from star in glory." It is the same wine, the new wine of the Kingdom, that is poured into all the vessels, but the vessels are of divers magnitudes, though each be full to the brim.

And so in those two sister parables of our Master's, which are so remarkably discriminated and so remarkably alike, we have both these aspects of the Heavenly reward set forth—both that which declares its identity in all cases, and the other which declares its variety according to the recipient's character. All the servants receive the same welcome, the same prize, the same entrance into the same joy; although one of them had ten talents, and another five, and another two. But the servants who were each sent out to trade with one poor pound in their hands, and by their varying diligence reaped varying profits, were rewarded according to the returns that they had brought; and one received ten, and the other five, and the other two cities, over which to have authority and rule. So the reward is one, and yet infinitely diverse. It is not the same thing whether a man or a woman, being a Christian, is an earnest, and devoted, and growing Christian here on earth, or a selfish, and an idle, and a stagnant one. It is not the same thing whether you content yourselves with simply laying hold on Christ, and keeping a tremulous and feeble hold of Him for the rest of your lives, or whether you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. There is such a fate as being saved, yet so as by fire, and going into the brightness with the smell of the fire on your garments. There is such a fate as having just, as it were, squeezed into Heaven, and got there by the skin of your teeth. And there is such a thing as having an abundant entrance ministered, when its portals are thrown wide open. Some imperfect Christians die with but little capacity for possessing God, and therefore their Heaven will not be as bright, nor studded with as majestic constellations, as that of others. The starry vault that bends above us so far away, is the same in the number of its stars when gazed on by the savage with his unaided eye, and by the

astronomer with the strongest telescope ; and the Infinite God, who arches above us, but comes near to us, discloses galaxies of beauty and oceans of abysmal light in Himself according to the strength and clearness of the eye that looks upon Him. So, brethren, remember the one glory has infinite degrees ; and faith, and conduct, and character here determine the capacity for God which we shall have when we go to receive our reward.

III.—The last point that is here is the substantial identity of the reward to all that stand on the same level, however different may be the form of their lives.

“He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.” And so in the case of the others. The active prophet, righteous man, or disciple, and the passive recogniser of each in that character, who receives each as a prophet, or righteous man, or disciple, stand practically and substantially on the same level, though the one of them may have his lips glowing with the Divine inspiration and the other may never have opened his mouth for God.

That is beautiful and deep. The power of sympathising with any character is the partial possession of that character for ourselves. A man who is capable of having his soul bowed by the stormy thunder of Beethoven, or lifted to Heaven by the ethereal melody of Mendelssohn, is a musician, though he never composed a bar. The man who recognises and feels the grandeur of the organ music of “Paradise Lost” has some fibre of a poet in him, though he be but “a mute, inglorious Milton.”

All sympathy and recognition of character involves some likeness to that character. The poor woman who brought the sticks and prepared food for the prophet entered into the prophet’s mission and shared in the prophet’s work and reward, though his task was to beard Ahab, and hers was only to bake his bread. The old

knight that clapped Luther on the back when he went into the Diet of Worms, and said to him: "Well done, little monk!" shared in Luther's victory and in Luther's crown. He that helps a prophet because he is a prophet, has got the making of a prophet in himself.

As all work done from the same motive is the same in God's eyes, whatever be the outward shape of it, so the work that involves the same type of spiritual character will involve the same reward. You find the Egyptian medal on the breasts of the soldiers that kept the base of communication as well as on the breasts of the men that stormed the works at Tel-el-Kebir. It was a law in Israel, and it is a law in Heaven: "As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff, they shall part alike."

"I am going down into the pit, you hold the ropes," said Carey, the pioneer missionary. They that hold the ropes, and the daring miner that swings away down in the blackness, are one in the work, may be one in the motive, and, if they are, shall be one in the reward. So, brethren, though no coal of fire may be laid upon your lips, if you sympathise with the workers that are trying to serve God, and do what you can to help them, and identify yourself with them, and so hold the ropes, my text will be true about you. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." They who by reason of circumstances, by deficiency of power, or by the weight of other tasks and duties, can only give silent sympathy, and prayer, and help, are one with the men whom they help.

Dear brethren! remember that this awful, mystical life of ours is full everywhere of consequences that cannot be escaped. What we sow we reap, and we grind it, and we bake it, and we live upon it. We have to drink as we have brewed; we have to lie on the beds that we have

made. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked." The doctrine of reward has two sides to it. "Nothing human ever dies." All our deeds drag after them inevitable consequences; but if you will put your trust in Jesus Christ He will not deal with you according to your sins, nor reward you according to your iniquities; and the darkest features of the recompense of your evil will all be taken away by the forgiveness which we have in His blood. If you will trust yourselves to Him you will have that eternal life, which is not wages, but a gift; which is not reward, but a free bestowment of God's love. And then, built upon that foundation on which alone men can build their hopes, their thoughts, their characters, their lives, however feeble may be our efforts, however narrow may be our sphere,—though we be neither prophets nor sons of prophets, and though our righteousness may be all stained and imperfect, yet, to our own amazement and to God's glory, we shall find when the fire is kindled which reveals and tests our works, that, by the might of humble faith in Christ, we have built upon that foundation, gold and silver and precious stones; and shall receive the reward given to every man whose work abides that trial by fire.

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SERMON XXVI.

ONE SAYING WITH TWO MEANINGS.

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SERMON XXVI.

ONE SAYING WITH TWO MEANINGS.

"Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me. Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me, and where I am thither ye cannot come." John vii. 33-34.

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me; and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say to you."—John xiii. 33.

No greater contrast can be conceived than that between these two groups to whom such singularly similar words were addressed. The one consists of the officers, tools of the Pharisees and of the priests, who had been sent to seize Christ, and would fain have carried out their masters' commission, but were restrained by a strange awe, inexplicable even to themselves. The other consists of the little company of His faithful, though slow, scholars, who made a great many mistakes, and sometimes all but tired out even His patience, and yet were forgiven much because they loved much. Hatred animated one group, loving sorrow the other.

Christ speaks to them both in nearly the same words, but with what a different tone, meaning, and application! To the officers the saying is an exhibition of His triumphant confidence that their malice is impotent and

their arms paralysed : that when He wills He will *go*, not be dragged by them or any man, but go to a safe asylum, where foes can neither find nor follow. The officers do not understand what He means. They think that, bad Jew as they have always believed Him to be, He may very possibly consummate His apostacy by going over to the Gentiles altogether ; but, at any rate, they feel that He is to escape their hands.

The disciples understand little more as to whither He goes, as they themselves confess a moment after ; but they gather from His words His loving pity, and though the upper side of the saying seems to be menacing and full of separation, there is an under side that suggests the possibility of a reunion for them.

The words are nearly the same in both cases, but they are not absolutely identical. There are significant omissions and additions in the second form of them. "Little children," the tenderest of all the names that ever came from Christ's lips to His disciples, and never was heard on His lips except on this one occasion, for parting words ought to be very loving words. "A little time I am with you," but He does not say, "And then I go to Him that sent me." "Ye shall seek Me," but He does not say "And shall not find Me." "As I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come, so now say I to you." That little word "now" makes the announcement a truth for the present only. His disciples shall not seek Him in vain, but when they seek they shall find. And though for a moment they be parted from Him, it is with the prospect and the confidence of reunion. Let us, then, look at the two main thoughts here. First, the two "seekings," the seeking which is vain, and the seeking which is never vain ; and the two "cannots," the inability of His enemies for evermore to come where He is, and the inability of His friends, for a little season, to come where He is.

I.—The two seekings. As I have observed, there is a very significant omission in one of the forms of the words. The enemies are told they will never find Him, but no such dark words are spoken to the friends. So, then, hostile seeking of the Christ is in vain, and loving seeking of Him by His friends, though they understand Him but very poorly, and therefore seek Him that they may know Him better, is always answered and over-answered.

Let me deal just for a moment or two with each of these. In their simplest use the words of my first text merely mean this :—"You cannot touch Me, I am passing into a safe asylum where your hands can never reach Me."

We may generalise that for a moment, though it does not lie directly in my path, and preach the old blessed truth that no man with hostile intent seeking for Christ in His person, in His Gospel, or in His followers and friends, can ever find Him. All the antagonism that has stormed against Him and His cause and words, and His followers and lovers, has been impotent and vain. The pursuers are like dogs chasing a bird, sniffing along the ground after their prey, which all the while sits out of their reach on a bough, and carols to the sky. As in the days of His flesh, His foes could not touch His person till He chose, and vainly sought Him when it pleased Him to hide from them, so ever *since*, in regard of His cause, and in regard of all hearts that love Him, no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. They shall be wrapped, when need be, in a cloud of protecting darkness, and stand safe within its shelter. Take good cheer all you that are trying to do anything, however little, however secular it may appear to be, for the good and well-being of your fellows ! All such service is a prolongation of Christ's work, and an effluence from His, if there be any good in it at all ; and it is immortal and safe, as is His. "Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me."

But then, besides that, there is another thought. It is not merely hostile seeking of Him that is hopeless and vain. When the dark days came over Israel, under the growing pressure of the Roman yoke, and amidst the agonies of that last siege, and the unutterable sufferings which all but annihilated the nation, do you not think that there were many of these people who said to themselves :—" Ah ! If we had only that Jesus of Nazareth back with us for a day or two ; if we had only listened to Him !" Do you not think that before Israel dissolved in blood there were many of those who had stood hostile or alienated, who desired to see " one of the days of the Son of Man," and did not see it ? They sought Him, not in anger any more ; they sought Him, not in penitence, or else they would have found Him ; but they sought Him simply in distress, and wishing that they could have back again what they had cared so little for when they had it.

And are there no people listening to me now ? to whom these words apply—

" He that will not, when he may,
When he will it shall be—Nay ! "

Although it is (blessed be His name) always true that a seeking heart finds Him, and whensoever there is the faintest trace of penitent desire to get hold of Christ's hand we do get the hand, it is also true that things neglected once cannot be brought back ; that the sowing time allowed to pass can never return ; and that they who have turned, as some of you have turned, dear friends, all your lives, a deaf ear to the Christ that asks you to love Him and trust Him, may one day wish that it had been otherwise, and go to look for Him and not find Him.

There is another kind of seeking that is vain, an intellectual seeking without the preparation of the heart. There are no doubt some people here to-day that would say, " We have been seeking the truth about religion all

our lives, and we have not got to it yet." Well, I do not want to judge either your motives or your methods, but I know this, that there is many a man who goes on the quest for religious certainty, and looks *at*, if not *for* Jesus Christ, and is not really capable of discerning Him when he sees Him, because his eye is not single, or because his heart is full of worldliness or indifference ; or because he begins with a foregone conclusion, and looks for facts to that ; or because he will not lay down and put away evil things that rise *up* between him and his Master.

My brother ! If you go to look for Jesus Christ with a heart full of the world, if you go to look for Him, while you wish to hold on by all the habitudes and earthlinesses of your past, you will never find Him. The sensualist seeks for Him, the covetous man seeks for Him, the passionate, ill-tempered man seeks for Him ; the woman plunged in frivolities, or steeped to the eyebrows in domestic cares,—these may in some feeble fashion go to look for Him and they do not find Him, because they have sought for Him with hearts overcharged with other things and filled with the affairs of this life, its trifles and its sins.

I turn for a moment to the seeking that is not vain. "Ye shall seek Me," is not on Christ's lips to any heart that loves Him, however imperfectly, a sentence of separation or an appointment of a sorrowful lot, but it is a blessed law, the law of the Christian life.

That life is all one great seeking after Christ. Love seeks the absent when removed from our sight. If we care anything about Him at all, our hearts will turn to Him as naturally as, when the winter begins to pinch, the migrating birds seek the sunny South, impelled by an instinct that they do not themselves understand.

The same law which sends loving thoughts out across the globe to seek for husband, child, or friend when

absent, sets the really Christian heart seeking for the Christ, whom, having not seen, it loves, as surely as the ivy tendril feels out for a support. As surely as the roots of a mountain-ash growing on the top of a boulder feel down the side of the rock till they reach the soil ; as sure as the stork follows the warmth to the sunny Mediterranean, so surely, if your heart loves Christ, will the very heart and motive of your action be the search for Him.

And if you do *not* seek Him, brother, as surely as He is parted from our sense you will lose Him, and He will be parted from you wholly, for there is no way by which a person who is not before our eyes may be kept near us except only by diligent effort on our part to keep thought and love and will all in contact with Him : thought meditating, love going out towards Him, will submitting. Unless there be this effort you will lose your Master as surely as a little child in a crowd will lose his nurse and his guide, if his hand slips from out the protecting hand. The dark shadow of the earth on which you stand will slowly steal over His silvery brightness, as when the moon is eclipsed, and you will not know how you have lost Him, but only be sadly aware that your Heaven is darkened. "Ye shall seek Me," is the condition of all happy communion between Christ and us.

And that seeking, dear brother, in the three-fold form in which I have spoken of it, effort to keep Him in our thoughts, in our love, and over our will, is neither a seeking which starts from a sense that we do not possess Him, nor one which ends in disappointment. But we seek for Him because we already have Him in a measure, and we seek Him that we may possess Him more abundantly, and anything is possible rather than that such a search shall be vain. Men may go to created wells, and find no water, and return ashamed, and with their vessels

empty, but every one who seeks for that Fountain of salvation shall draw from it with joy. It is as impossible that a heart which wants Jesus Christ shall not have Him, as it is that lungs dilated shall not fill with air, or as it is that an empty vessel put out in a rainfall shall not be replenished. He does not hide Himself, but He desires to be found. May I say that as a mother will sometimes pretend to her child to hide, that the child's delight may be the greater in searching and in finding, so Christ has gone away from our sight in order, for one reason, that He may stimulate our desires to feel after Him! If we seek Him hid in God we shall find Him for the joy of our hearts.

A great thinker once said that he would rather have the search after truth than the possession of truth. It was a rash word, but it pointed to the fact that there is a search which is only one shade less blessed than the possession. And if that be so in regard to any pure and high truth, it is still more so about Christ Himself. To seek for Him is joy; to find Him is joy. What can be a happier life than the life of constant pursuit after an infinitely precious object, which is ever being sought and ever being found; sought with a profound consciousness of its preciousness, found with a widening appreciation and capacity for its enjoyment? "Ye shall seek Me" is a word not of evil but of good cheer; for buried in the depth of the commandment to search is the promise that we shall find.

II.—Secondly, let us look for a moment at these two "cannots." "Whither I go, ye cannot come," says He to the enemies, with no limitation, with no condition. The "cannot" is absolute and permanent, so long as they retain their enmity. To His friends, on the other hand, He says, "So *now* I say to you," the law for to-day, the law for this side the flood, but not the law for the beyond, as He explains more fully in the subsequent words:—

“Thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards.”

So, then, Christ is *somewhere*. When He passed from life it was not into a state only, but into a place; and He took with Him a material body, howsoever changed. He is somewhere, and there friend and enemy alike cannot enter, so long as they are compassed with “the earthly house of this tabernacle.” But the incapacity is deeper than that. No sinful man can pass thither. Where has He gone? The preceding words give us the answer. “God shall glorify Him in Himself.” The prospect of that assumption into the inmost glory of the Divine nature directly led our Lord to think of the change it would bring about in the relation of His humble friends to Him. While for Himself He triumphs in the prospect, He cannot but turn a thought to their lonesomeness, and hence come the words of our text. He has passed into the bosom and blaze of Divinity. Can I walk there, can I pass into that tremendous fiery furnace? “Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?” “Ye cannot follow Me now.” No man can go thither except Christ goes thither.

There are deep mysteries lying in that word of our Lord’s,—“I go to prepare a place for you.” We know not what manner of activity on His part that definitely means. It seems as if somehow or other the presence in Heaven of our Brother in His glorified humanity was necessary in order that the golden pavement should be trodden by our feet, and that our poor, feeble manhood should live and not be shrivelled up in the blaze of that central brightness.

We know not how He prepares the place, but Heaven, whatever it be, is no place for a man unless the Man, Christ Jesus, be there. He is the revealer of God, not only for earth, but for Heaven; not only for time, but for eternity.

"No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," is true everywhere and always, here as there. So I suppose that, but for His presence, Heaven itself would be dark, and its King invisible, and if a man could enter there he would either be blasted with unbearable flashes of brightness or grope at its noon-day as the blind, because his eye is not adapted to such beams. Be that as it may, "the Forerunner is for us entered." He has gone before, because He knows the great City, "His own calm home, His habitation from eternity." He has gone before to make ready a lodging for us, in whose land He has dwelt so long, and He will meet us, who would else be bewildered like some dweller in a desert if brought to the capital, when we reach the gates, and guide our unaccustomed steps to the mansion prepared for us.

But the power to enter there, even when He is there, depends on our union with Christ by faith. When we are joined to Him, the absolute "cannot," based upon flesh, and still more upon sin, which is a radical and permanent impossibility, is changed into a relative and temporary incapacity. If we have faith in Christ, and are thereby drawing a kindred life from Him, our nature will be in process of being changed into that which is capable of bearing the brilliance of the felicities of Heaven. But just as these friends of Christ, though they loved Him very truly, and understood Him a little, were a long way from being ready to follow Him, and needed the schooling of the Cross, and Olivet, and Pentecost, as well as the discipline of life and toil, before they were fully ripe for the harvest, so we, for the most part, have to pass through analogous training before we are prepared for the place which Christ has prepared for us. Certainly, so soon as a heart has trusted Christ, it is capable of entering where He is, and the real reason why the disciples could not come where He went was that they did not yet clearly

know Him as the Divine Sacrifice for theirs and the world's sins, and, however much they believed in Him as Messiah, had not yet, nor could have, the knowledge on which they could found their trust in Him as their Saviour.

But, while that is true, it is also true that each advance in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour will bring with it capacity to advance further into the heart of the far-off land, and to see more of the King in His beauty. So, as long as His friends were wrapped in such dark clouds of misconception and error, as long as their Christian characters were so imperfect and incomplete as they were at the time of my text being spoken, they could not go thither and follow Him. But it was a diminishing impossibility, and day by day they approximated more and more to His likeness, because they understood Him more, and trusted Him more, and loved Him more, and grew towards Him, and, therefore, day by day became more and more able to enter into that Kingdom.

Are you growing in power so to do? Is the only thing which unfits you for Heaven the fact that you have a mortal body? In other respects are you fit to go into that Heaven, and walk in its brightness and not be consumed? The answer to the question is found in another one—Are you joined to Jesus Christ by simple faith? The incapacity is absolute and eternal if the enmity is eternal.

State and place are determined yonder by character, and character is determined by faith. Take a bottle of some solution in which heterogeneous matters have all been melted up together, and let it stand on a shelf and gradually settle down, and its contents will settle in regular layers, the heaviest at the bottom and the lightest at the top, and stratify themselves according to gravity. And that is how the other world is arranged—stratified.

When all the confusions of this present are at an end, and all the moisture is driven off, men and women will be left in layers, like drawing to like. As Peter said about Judas with equal wisdom and reticence, "he went to his own place." That is where we shall all go, to the place we are fit for.

God does not slam the door of Heaven in anybody's face ; it stands wide open. But there is a mystic barrier, unseen, but most real, more repellent than cherub and flaming sword, which makes it impossible for any foot to cross that threshold except the foot of the man whose heart and nature have been made Christ-like, and fitted for Heaven by simple faith in Him.

Love Him and trust Him, and then your life on earth will be a blessed seeking and a blessed finding of Him whom to seek is joyous effort, whom to find is an Elysium of rest. You will walk here not parted from Him, but with your thoughts and your love, which are your truest self, going up where He is, until you drop "the muddy vesture of decay" which unfits you whilst you wear it for the presence-chamber of the King, and so you will enter in and be for ever with the Lord.

