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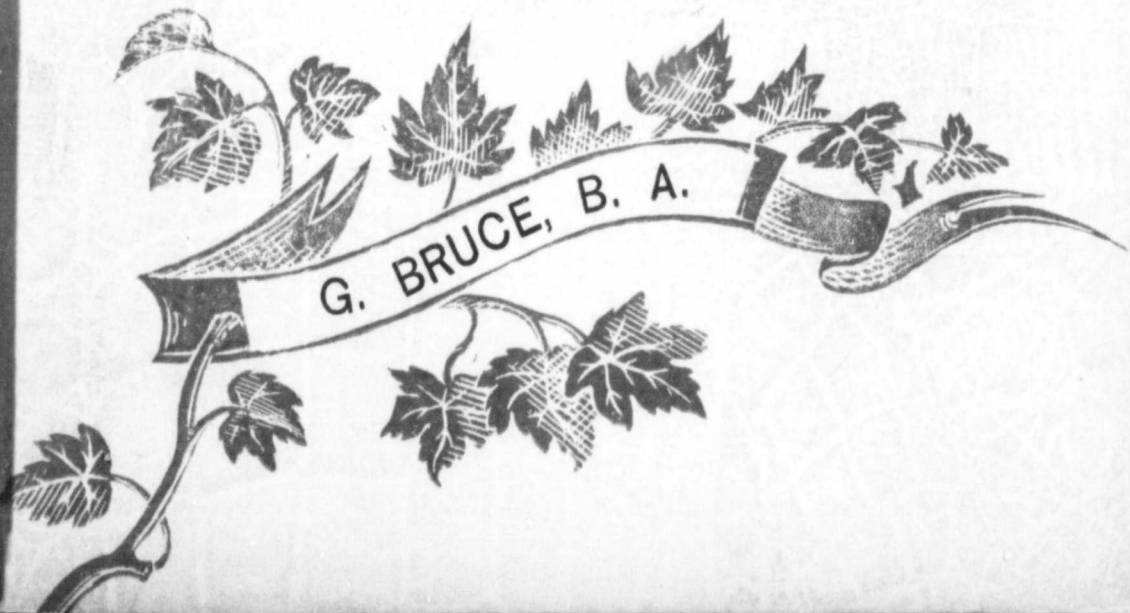
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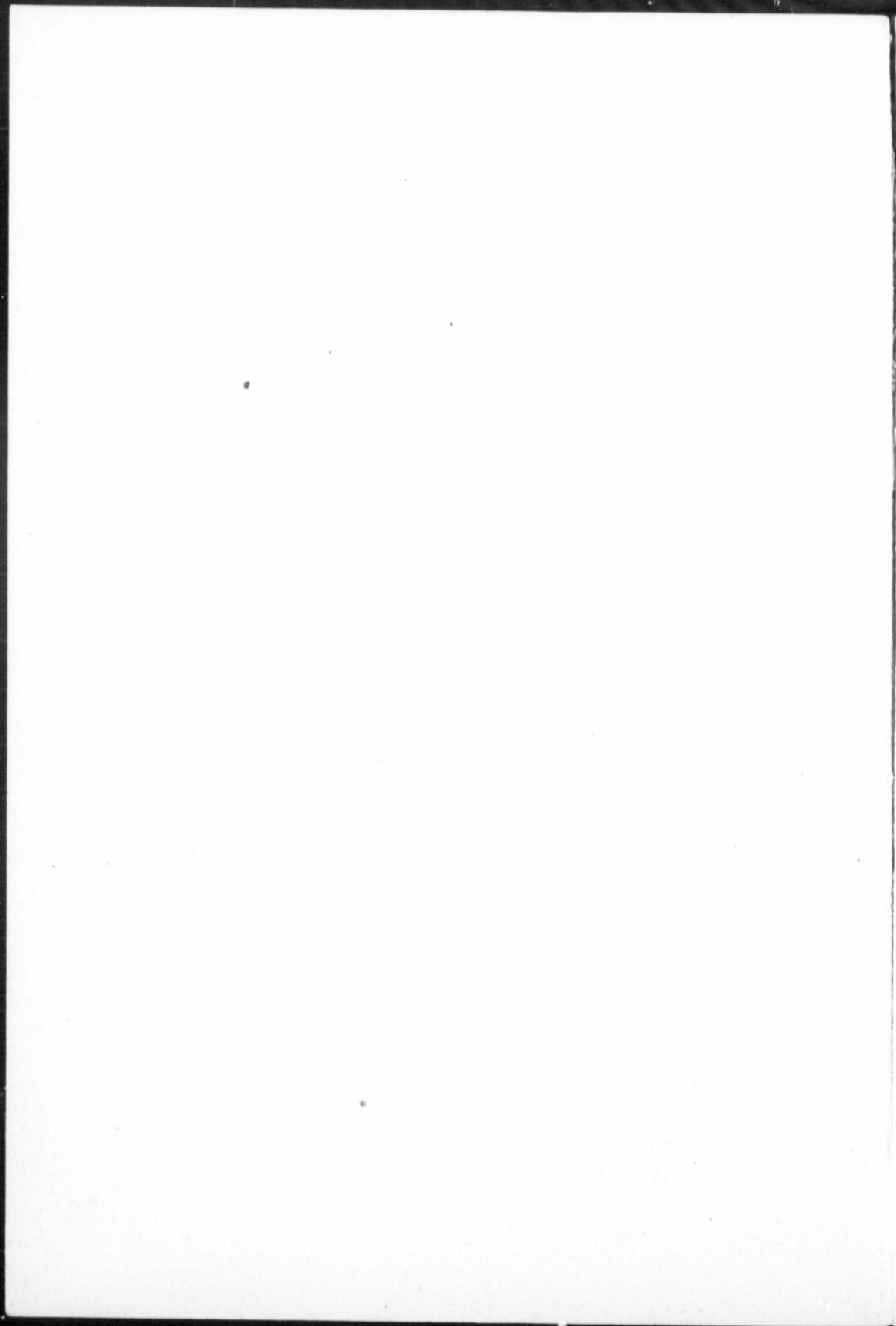
Morning

Thoughts

FOR

Busy Days.





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MORNING THOUGHTS

FOR

BUSY DAYS.

BY

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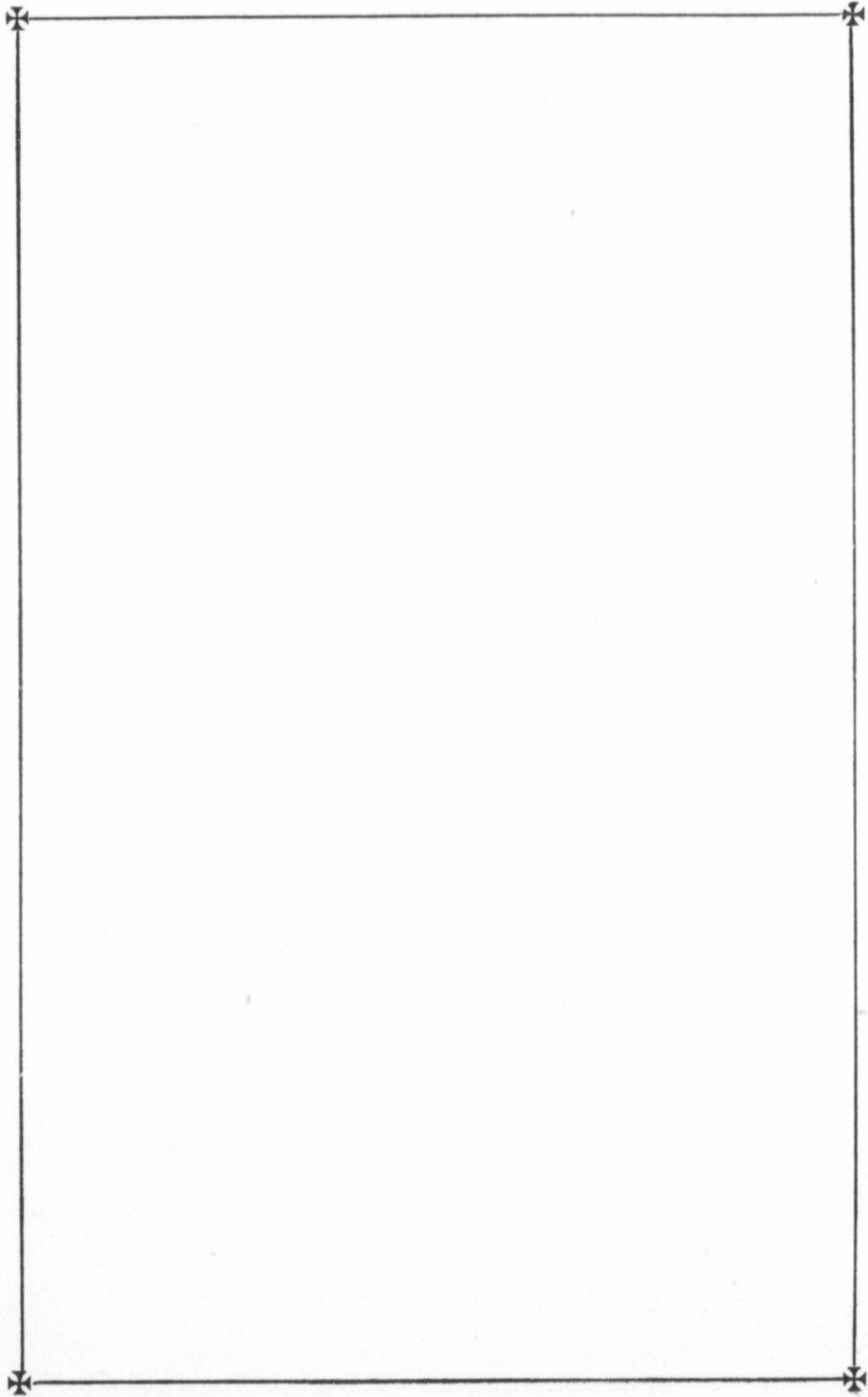
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by G. BRUCE, B. A.

In the Office of the Minister of Agriculture, at Ottawa.

INTRODUCTION.

THE mine from which these fragments have been brought is exhaustless, and the only thing really to be feared is that one may have mistaken bits of rubbish of his own imagining, glittering splinters of worthless spar, for gold. All the writer can say in answer to this is, that he has honestly tried to be sure that they have been found in the mine. They have been messages of help and guidance on the mornings of busy days to the one who has filled this little basket with them; and if they serve the same good turn to another the reason for gathering them will be understood.



THE HANDFUL OF MEAL.

1st. Kings, xvii. 12. "*And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse.*" When the man of God met the widow of Zarephath her heart was sad, and, instead of bringing her any comfort, his request only increased her sorrow. He asked for bread, and she had none to give. But although he asked, he really came to give in the name of the Lord. He had the key of an exhaustless storehouse, but it had to be oiled with faith before it would open the door, and it was for that faith, not the cake, but the faith that gave it in sore need, that he asked the widow. And she did not fail. The barrel was almost empty; the oil well nigh exhausted, but the fountain of faith was not yet dry, and it flowed all the more readily for a generous heart.

And now the prophet has eaten his simple meal, the widow and her sons, famine-stricken,

standing by. She had taken the last handful of meal to make that cake, the last few drops of oil had been drained to mix it, and all is gone. And now, at the prophet's word, she goes again on the well known way to the empty barrel. She peers hastily down into the shadowy depths, empty as she left it, but she stretches out her hand, and reaches down through the emptiness, deeper still through the vacant space. She touches the bottom — not quite — there is a handful of meal which she must have left. She will take it out. Fine meal it is, fresh and rich, with the flavour of the harvest field and the mill about it. Again she reaches down, and more confidently, and lo! another handful. Again and yet again with eager haste, touching the bottom every time, but always bringing up a handful, or rather a *full hand*. What a feast they had, the widow and her sons. And, never through the famine did they want for bread. The bottom of that barrel was the lid of God's mealbin.

Ps. xlii. 1. "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*" The Psalmist uses an illustration which he had seen, and which had made a deep impression on his mind, to express his own spiritual longings. It is not to be supposed that he had ever witnessed anything of the nature of a deer-hunt, such as is known to-day, where men equipped for the noble sport, with hounds in leash await the bugle call to chase a trembling creature to its death. Such a development of sport was to be the fruit of our nineteenth century civilization, but he had seen the "chase" as it comes in the stern play of nature, which, as Tennyson says, is "red in tooth and claw." He had marked the form of the hart as it passed, almost like a shadow of a cloud across the distant hillside. He had heard the cry of the enemy as it rose and fell on the pulses of the morning breeze. He had noted their relentless pursuit as, urged by their thirst for blood, they pressed forward, those messengers of death, so dim, so dusky in the distance, so relentless, so terrible.

And as they disappeared round the shoul-

der of the hill, sympathy with the panting deer, hope of his escape, and knowledge of the dark shades and deep glades where he would find the murmuring brooks which would at once carry off in their rippling flow the secret of his flight, which would betray him to the keen scent of the enemy; and refresh and cool his quivering nostrils and burning fever while they soothed him to rest on their mossy banks by their gentle murmurs. All these were blended in the vision of the Psalmist as he lifted his longing heart to the Lord.

And so it was with Himself. Enemies were pressing him sore. Their cries were in his ears. He could almost feel their hot breath as they followed him. He could discern the change in their cry as they began to exult in confidence of success.

And he was parched with a burning thirst. He knew these blessed streams. He knew well the quiet shade and the restful peace. He remembered how he had found that water of life so hateful to his enemies; how they had been confused, and confounded, and bewildered in the chase, and how he had always

found deliverance, and refreshment, and rest, and blessedness, when he came to them. And his soul panted as the hart with heaving sides and quivering nostrils, and he cried to the Lord once more.

And we know he was not disappointed. And now, is this a dream of something that *has been* only, or is it to be realized to-day? Was it the experience of one peculiar man, or is it the heritage of every one who will come? Let me take the words as *mine to-day*.

Ps. xlii. 1. "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*" How does this language suit the tenor of our thoughts this morning? Very familiar the words, and very beautiful to tongue and ear. And very pathetic the thoughts to the mind, but how far can the heart respond to them? How do they suit the rythm of desire and life? Surely if we were able to baptize the words in the warm life blood of our own hearts and make them our own, as if we had uttered them rather than heard them, we should not go away, as we have often done, so limited, and common-place, and dull, and monotonous, in our spiritual state. We should drink deep, full drafts, getting down upon our knees upon the bank, and drawing in with eager lips the water of the clear, cool stream. Why is it often so different? Why are we drowsy, and languid, and heavy laden? Not as they are who come for rest, but as they are who would rather have rested from coming. Ah, methinks I know the cause of this! We have but small desire, and we can take

but little benefit. We come as men, each one with a pint pot. All have been fashioned upon the same block, and are warranted to hold the same—measures not boundless desires, pannikins not burning thirst. Just enough to keep alive the feeble life for another day or another week. O, that we were driven out of our propriety and complacency, and a great quenchless thirst awakened within us.

2nd Kings iv. 7. *“Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.”* When the widow closed the door upon herself and her two sons and began to pour the oil in obedience to the word of the man of God, she did something, as another widow did long afterwards, who dropped her mites into the treasury, which was to exert an influence far beyond anything she could have thought of. When she took that cruse in her hands it became a fountain from which there flowed a stream of gracious influence which did not cease when the oil was staid. It became one of the streams which have formed the river revealed to the prophet, which grew broader and deeper and vaster till it became a river to swim in, that could not be crossed over. And empty hearts have been filled here through all these years, not failing, though the empty vessels run out in the widow’s room; nor shall this fountain fail so long as there are empty hearts to be filled or homes to be gladdened by the grace of God. None shall ever come to be sent empty away. The proclamation is ever to the messengers, “Bring me yet a vessel,” and while a life is in need of grace the oil will flow, till it be said, “there is not a vessel more.”

Ps. xciv. 19. "*In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.*" What trust is here! What sweet restfulness of confidence! Thy comforts delight my soul. What comforts are these? Not the pillows on which the world tries to rest, for they reverse Jacob's experience, who found a stone his sweetest rest. They find their downy cushions turn to stones under their feverish heads. Aye, and some have sharp corners too. Not these; not even God's kindest providences, for these do not rest the spirit. Nor have I ever seen the upholstery of chair or sofas luxurious, as it may have been, in the most comfortable and happy home that could rest the soul. But the Psalmist says, "Thy comforts delight my soul." God cares indeed to provide for His weary ones in their bodily comforts, but there must needs be a refreshment also for their souls. And what but His *promises* can do this? And God's promises are his thoughts in words. And when the tried soul learns God's words and

trusts them it thinks His thoughts, and it finds them delightful—sweeter than the honey comb—and the saying becomes like this: “*My* thoughts trouble me and weary me and perplex me, but *Thy* thoughts lift me up and delight me. They refresh me and strengthen me and heal me, for when we think God’s thoughts the spirit is present in them, the Divine energy fills each channel, and creek, and crevice, and cranny, with His blessed fulness.”

Ps. xciv. 19. "*In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.*" Why then are there so many who are, even among God's people, un comforted? Does the Lord deny his comforts to some? Does he refuse them to some while he gives them to others? So it would seem if we went no farther than the record of men's outward lives. But when we examine more carefully we discover that the Upas tree of *doubt* grows in many a heart and so thrives in its enclosure, that its evil shade is cast over the life. Now God's comforts are very tender in their nature; gentle withal, to soothe the weary wounded spirit, though infinitely powerful to hold up and cheer and invigorate — and they cannot grow in the baleful gloom of Doubting Castle, where this evil tree doth most abound. And so Christian himself must needs pine and languish so long as he remains a captive there. And how it must grieve the heart of our Father to have us actually cherish this destroyer of our peace and his love, and water it with our tears. We doubt the Lord. We cannot believe him because we cannot see. As if He had been so unkind to us in the past

that the chances were that ill and not good was in store for us.

You have a friend whose coming to your home is the signal for the gladsome glee of the children. See him as he stands before the fire at Christmas tide with his hands behind his back, the merry little group before him. "Guess," he says, "Guess what I have in my hands for you." And busy brains coin their answers from the confidence of their little hearts in his affection and generous nature; but see one unfortunate spirit full of evil foreboding—no light on the face, no gladness in the heart. The *mystery is darkness* to her. "Your hands are empty," she says; or, "you have a *stone*, or a whip, or a cup of bitter medicine." Can you imagine a *child* like that? No, but many a child of our Heavenly Father repeats this a thousand times when God holds his hands behind his back and asks what he has in store for us. What grief we give His loving spirit. Has he brought us stones, and emptiness, and bitterness, and evil in the past? Cheer up. Be one of the children; say, "It is something good, I know." "Thy comforts delight my soul."

1st Peter i. 7. "Though it be tried with fire." "Your faith," the Apostle says, "must be tried with fire" to purify it. Yes, of course, that its dross may be taken away; but it is to be tried by fire that it "might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." For *service*, also, then it needs to be tried by fire. Still imperfect, it is the vessel which God is using to convey the blessing of His grace to others. Copper vessels must be kept on the fire while they are being used. Let them get cold and their poison will mingle with the fruit. How well they serve the purpose while they are hot; how ill when they get cooled and there is death in the pot! And so it is with human nature. A fine vessel redeemed to service. So long as it is on the fire God can use it to hold and carry his gracious message, but if it be left over night in the vessel, the bitter poison of *self* will spoil all. Do not wonder when you feel the fire around you, God is preparing you for some service, to convey some message. If

you are to be used, you must endure the fire. Some day there will remain nothing for fire to burn or acid to corrode; but, till then, "Think it not strange, as though some strange thing happened unto you," when you find yourselves in some fiery trial, but "Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Remember this, Sabbath School Teacher, Christian Worker, all trembling as you bear the message! Remember this, Christian Mother in thy weakness; Minister of the Gospel in thy discouragements and failures. God has put you on the fire for his own purpose, which will be revealed to you some day, when you shall be as gold tried in the fire."

2nd Sam. xi. 27. "*But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.*" Men do not seem to think much of displeasing the Lord. But this is the plain way of the Bible. How simply this is spoken! Worse sin could scarcely be conceived than David's here — adultery and consequent murder — murder, not through the conduct of the victim provoking to rage, but to screen the vile sin of the murderer, to hide his guilt in the grave. The whole transaction was woven in a lie, warp and woof. And the disgraceful and awful crime was revealed to others, who were made accomplices with him, and they became thoroughly acquainted with his vileness and his sin. O, how he was lowered in their sight! How they would despise him! How his power over Joab was broken! What a farce it would seem to him to read the psalms of the King, or to hear his songs. Only upon the ground of a real convincing, abiding penitence and humiliation could he regain his place, with men even, and then he could not blot out the revelation of his heart, or undo

the tragedy of Rabbah, or the sin of his lust. And yet, of all this the Bible simply says: "The thing displeased the Lord." And because God so speaks men think sin is a light thing. But contemplate the three judgments, how dreadful to displease the Lord. And yet there is a greater power than judgment. "There is *forgiveness* with Thee that Thou mightest be feared." Forgiveness! Blessed word, unlocking the barred and bolted door: Mercy, tenderness, pity, love—these melt the heart and fill it with a holy fear. Bring your sin to God. It is against him you have transgressed, and he only can forgive.

Ps. li. 7. "*Whiter than snow.*" Whiter than the driven snow. Whiter than the snow as it falls from the heavens. Is it possible? Is this not a figure to illustrate the truth rather than a literal truth? We can remember how, in our childhood, we hailed the first snow. What joyful glee to see the feathery flakes falling so softly, and covering the ground, hard, and bare, and black, and cold, with the spotless robe. We forgot cold as we revelled in it. Perhaps we disregarded warning and wise injunction, and braved the remonstrance and reproof which were sure to follow, as we trooped in all aglow from the wild turmoil. And what impressed these eager, fun-loving spirits with a sense of something like awe was the spotless purity of the snow. Its wondrous crystals we could not see, but its wonderful, dazzling whiteness called up feelings which we scarcely understood. How we plunged our little hands into the soft heap and filled them, alas, only to find what we grasped stained and defiled. Even the whitest results of the laundry grew dingy

and yellow beside it, and snow—new fallen snow—became the emblem of purity, of spotless perfection. How often has it come back to us since then in contrast with the stains of passion, and foolishness, and sin, and worldliness? God's blessed emblem written on the child heart—symbol of purity and truth.

Ps. li. 7. "*Whiter than snow.*" What does this mean? The psalmist says, Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. What a washing this must be! Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Ah! yes, the hyssop means the blood. The sprinkling of the atoning blood, that is what slacks the bond and breaks the power of guilt upon the soul. Thus, where the foulness is condemned and the soul is free the washing comes, and it is no ordinary washing; but as the garments were trodden by the feet, as one may in some places see blankets yet tramped in the tub, amid the froth white foam, so, literally, the blood sprinkled, blood bought, blood redeemed soul is washed. Wash *Thou* me and I shall be whiter than snow. Ah! that will be a wonderful washing when we shall be made whiter than snow. No wonder a Mary Magdalene and a thief upon the cross could rejoice and love and adore. They were to

be washed from all their sins and made whiter than snow. Even the snow must gather the dust in the crystal air as it comes down. The sunbeam through the window tells us it is there, but the redeemed spirit shall exult in the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Even that light shall reveal no stain Whiter than snow!

Deut. vii. 22. “*And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little : thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee.*”

If anything were needed to show more clearly than the plain facts of the forty years and the entrance into the land of promise, that that land is not heaven *only*, or even first or proximately, this statement would settle the matter, one would think. Are there *enemies* in heaven? Is it our conception of that place of rest or glory that it has to be taken possession of by conflict with the enemy? Who are these enemies who are now in the home above? How are they employed, these original inhabitants of the celestial regions? We read of their idols, of their abominations, of those belongings which the people of God are forbidden to touch, and we are told that this house is to be *reclaimed*. It is to be purified so that it shall be a fit abode for the people of God? And in the verse we have before us it is said that even these bad things

must not be driven out all at once, or a worse thing will come in their place — the wild beasts, the beasts of the field. Where are they from? Surely all this is strange if it means heaven. But how all is cleared up when we think of the life of *faith* which takes possession on the land of *promise here and now*, counting heaven the complete fulfilment, the glorious and undisputed possession of the soul.

Mark ii. 21. “ *No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment : else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.*” No doubt this statement has an allegorical meaning, and refers to old and new doctrines or dispensations. Our purpose at this time shall be to note the literal meaning, and to learn the truth concerning the life and character of our Saviour, which the use of such an illustration by Him makes known to us. In His teaching human wisdom became divinely unerring, but it did not cease to be human. It was still gathered from life as it is, and by observation and reason which were exercised in the human life of Christ, and we lose much when we pass by the lessons so beautifully taught in the illustrations which He used as no other teacher ever did. Lessons, not of the deeper spiritual meaning only, which they were intended to convey, but revelations of the life and experience, where they were gathered incidental to the main purpose, but none the less to be valued.

Even more striking are they as being unintentional. The mending of an old garment is the fact to which our attention is called—that being used as an illustration of something else, indeed, but one does not use an illustration of something he has never seen. He instinctively recalls the familiar and well-known fact from his experience. And this fact of human life did not fail Him who was tried in all points. He had seen the old garments mended. He was familiar with the sight of careful fingers patching well worn clothes with pieces taken from other and more completely worn ones—wisely planning, carefully mending.

How else could the illustration have sprung up in his mind, that the thin and threadbare cloak must not be mended with a piece from the stout new web? Ah, yes! And before you get to the lesson of the old doctrine, and the new of the Gospel, and Judaism, you should learn the human experience, the human observation, the human sympathy of Jesus. And where did he learn this? Not by a divine and superhuman knowledge, but perchance, in the home in Nazareth. Is it

wrong to believe that in that lowly home, the abode of Joseph the carpenter, in the household where the offering in his infancy was the offering of the poor, "two turtle doves or two young pigeons." He had been familiar with the conditions of life where such illustrations were part of the daily experience? Would it be strange to think that she whom God honoured beyond all women, knew how to meet the wear of life's activity in the garments of her son by her loving skill. Or would it be strange to think that it was there, as He sat by her side, hearing the story of their people from her lips, that He also learned the lesson which He used so powerfully in answering the Pharisees in their sophistical subtleties. Wisely did John Wesley speak of "The Lord's poor." For the poor who trust the Lord have a sweet assurance of His love.

Prov. xxvii. 9. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." Much is made of *friendship* in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, and perhaps most of all in this book is reference made to the value of friendship in its various forms and relations. And no wonder. What is life without it? What may not life successfully encounter or endure upheld by true friendship! It is an original element of human nature, and it displays itself quite apart from any reasoning on the *results*. Indeed, *calculation* is the base alloy which degrades the true hunger of the soul for fellowship and sympathy. Like all fine things in the garden of life, it is best left to the *sun*. It may be pruned and trained by conscience, and it is made enduring and truly excellent when it is born again into the great friendship which comprehends all friendships, but it must flow and flow freely. How touching to see the infant jumping in his glee at the sight of another infant! How eagerly the boy longs to be with his companions! How sweet the attachment of the maiden for the friend who shares her confidence!

What value the man of business places upon the friendship of the man who has stood by him, and on whose advice he can lean, or with whom he can talk on matters in which they have a mutual interest. How mothers, in the endless cares of home and duty, in self-sacrificing devotion, find comfort in an interchange of sympathetic thought and experience. True, these are all in our strong years of conscious self-seeking, mingled and imperfect; but what sweet juices they yield, flowing rich and vital beneath the rough bark of uncongenial life, in hearts covered by silk, or broadcloth, or serge and calico, and homespun! What parched deserts do these waters not refresh as they mingle. And when the sun is sinking, how the *few* will meet apart and talk over the *past*. The very memory-ground is still full of the sap of ever-green love which waits for the eternal reunion.

2nd Kings vi. 16. " *And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" It was a terrible thing that the prophet's servant beheld when he went out in the morning. The host of Syria was gathered there. The strange din of the chariots, and the horses, as they pawed the ground, disturbed the morning air about remote Dothan, where Joseph's brethren had once fed their flocks. The cries of the men of war, the heralds and the officers, called many a drowsy villager from his slumbers, who, like the servant of the man of God, knew nothing of the reason of this demonstration.

Pale and breathless the servant came with unaccustomed haste into the presence of his master. Alas, he cried, alas, we are undone! Our enemies are here! Even here we meet the oppressor of our people! What shall we do? "Fear not" is the reply. There is no mistake in what you see. The Syrians are there, and we have more to do with their coming than you know, but you have not

seen all. Any one can see the hindrance and the danger. Only Faith can discover the deliverance. "Lord, open his eyes!" is the brief prayer. As they spoke, perchance, they had gone out, the servant leading the way to the gate from which he had seen the host. And as the prophet lifted his eyes from the glittering array to heaven, lo! there appeared to the servant a mighty host crowding the surrounding hills, so numerous, so august, so splendid the host of God, that the host of Syria—all unconscious of the presence of the heavenly battalions—seemed poor and contemptible in their strutting pride. And so it is! We only need our eyes to be opened. Not a new salvation, but a Faith to see the deliverance we have. Lord, open thou our eyes to see Thy glory!

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2 Kings vi. 18. “*And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.*” It is a great matter to have seen the horses and chariots of the Lord, but it is a greater thing to know the Lord Himself to be near for our deliverance. No doubt the fears of the servant were overcome and put away by the revelation of the chariots and horses of fire. He felt that these flashing messengers could descend upon the plain and destroy the host of Syria before they could come into Dothan or harm any of its people; but the wonder of the deliverance was not revealed to him. These chariots never moved till they were lost to sight in the golden light of the rising sun. Not one step did these horses take; not one quivering ray flashed from a moving spoke; still, motionless, silent, they waited the bidding of the Lord; but the word came not; they were not required. The Lord Himself was with the prophet in Dothan. And so the second prayer of the man of God

is to the Lord to turn the power of the enemy to helplessness by smiting them with blindness. No need for the host of God, of seraphim and cherubim, with flashing swords, to descend upon a crowd of blind men groping to find their way. Poor, helpless things, running against one another, tripped up by sword, and pike, and shield! No! *men* would never attack such helpless beings. Surely, never the angels of God, in all their panoply of glory. Elijah led them where he would. Ah, the Lord was within the circle of the enemy!—ever nearer than the enemy. It is well to know that “The hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just,” but better it is than that even the angels have charge to know “the Lord is a very present help in trouble.”

1 Cor. ii. 5. "*That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men.*" We see a great deal of this — faith standing in the wisdom of men, in religion as well as in other forms of hero worship; and it has its most disastrous failures here, being most misplaced. How the experience is repeated, till it becomes a weary thing; of the crowd rushing after some phenomenon, who is declared to preach wonderful things; some "Bible Reader," who has a *new* way, as if Bible reading or any other reading were not open to the earnest heart. It is quite true that the instrument is of vast importance, and that all are not alike in gifts or power, but when the eye can get no farther than the iridescence of the lens it is a sad failure for a telescope. The perfection of a glass is its *invisibility* and unobtrusive power to reveal some other object. The eye must not be delayed on it. The mind must bestow but a passing thought of gratitude upon the glass in the glow awakened by the revelation of the true object. Faith which rests in man has a poor home.

Zech. i. 20. "*And the Lord showed me four carpenters.*" Four carpenters come to fray the horns! It is always so in the Lord's work. In this sense also it is true that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Where the power of evil has been lifting up its horns in pride against the truth, there God has caused his own instruments to come, prepared to destroy the evil. What glorious carpenters we have in London Midnight Missions, in New York Water Street, Cremorne, and Florence Missions. What skilful and able workmen in Miller, and Bernardo, and Quarrier and others to fray the horns of vice and cruelty which have tossed the poor little waifs of the alley and the curbstone! Truly, God's carpenters are a mighty host, and their tools from the armoury of the Lord are bright Damascus blades, shining and keen. And God reveals his carpenters just as they are needed, and when they are wanted. And He trains them in the work. Sometimes, it is true, He takes some special workman away

alone, that He may teach him a lesson which cannot be learned among men. Some grand creative mind as Moses; some majestic messenger like Elijah; some "voice" to proclaim the new evangel as John. The Lord takes them to be with himself through the years of strengthening faith of tempered judgment of profound humility, that he may reveal them, as messengers from heaven, leaders of men. Sometimes, on the other hand, generally, indeed, He reveals them slowly, gradually to themselves, and others *in the work*. Only when we look back do we see the training which was to produce the strong, skilled workman. Conflict with evil has developed the man, making him wise and strong and courageous. Are we trying to benefit by our training?

Zech. vii. 6. "*Did ye not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves..*" A reference to the seventy years. A little window through which we look out over the dreary plain of three score and ten years. The sight is not cheering. They fasted, but not to the Lord. Their fast came to an end, and again the full table; yea, the feast, the indulgence, but no thanksgiving, no mention of the Lord. They eat and drink, but not to the glory of God but to their own comfort and in self gratification. We note (1) that they who hope so much from affliction in changing impenitent spirits have not much help here; and (2), and specially, we are warned that we may be very religious, and be far from God. We may be full of sermons, and prayers, and hymns, and meetings, and yet God may not be in them at all. Let us take the ritual of a fine church and put it to the test. Many could not say why they are there, have not thought why they came. The organ swells in the anthem, but their hearts are not ascending to God.

The sense says, "Ah! Beautiful," the prayer comes. Are the petitions cast as grappling hooks upon the rock, or do they fall in drowsy indolence from the lips? The sermon must please, little matter that it should profit. And, when we have done all, and God's balance sheet is made out, is it very different from what we read here? All for self! Our church is comfortable! It is beautiful! It is successful! We feel pleased to have our friends come with us to see and to hear, and to admire, as we are sure they will. And after all, how far is God's glory, our aim, and object, and desire? Is sin rebuked in the community? Are our lives at home and in our affairs more christlike for those fine services? Are we more forgiving, earnest, gentle, compassionate for Christ's sake. Or is all as our text says, for ourselves? And would one of the "sinners" who came to Jesus, coming to the door have to turn away saying, "no welcome for me?"

Joshua xiv. 11. *“As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.”* Caleb was one of the knights of old—one who could have on his shield in truth “without fear and without reproach.” Mark the old hero of eighty-five how he stands before Joshua. Note how the light flashes from beneath the shaggy eyebrow as he recalls the mission of the spies. He is as ready now as he was then to have at these uncircumcised sons of Anak. He asks no easy billet, no soft sinecure. He has not been accustomed to a life of ease and self-indulgence, and he will not begin now. Years have only strengthened the stalwart form. Experience has but tightened his grip upon his sword. His eye is not dim; more keen than ever is the sharp glance which penetrates the snares and unveils the shams of the coward and the unbeliever. His heart has the old time vigour; for five and eighty years it has been beating an onward march; the feet were forced to turn back from the inheritance

by reason of the unbelief of others, but the heart has kept right on its way. The eye which is not dim has been forced to look backward and see a wilderness of forty weary years, but the heart has looked through all to Canaan, and now is his hour of triumph. Grand old evergreen.

Nor is Caleb the only one. He is not the solitary tree in the forest whose green boughs are cast out in resolute freshness against the wintry sky. He is not alone in having vital vigour showing grandly among the snows of age. Years do not measure life. Some men are never young, they seem almost to be born old and peevish and complaining; and others never grow old. True, it is not given to everyone like Moses, to have the spirit like the newly strung bow, the eye like the eagle and the word of command like the arrow, but by the grace of God the heart may throb responsive to life and love though the body become weary. Filled from the eternal fountain it cannot fail.

Joshua xiv. 11-12. *"As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in."* (12) *"Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said."* Caleb knew the secret of the Lord, and it was his life. God had given him a promise of an inheritance when he passed through the vineyards of Anak's progeny, Jehovah said, "I will give this to thee and thy children." And Caleb held this covenant fast through all these years of discouragement and wandering. If this deed had been written on parchment it would have grown yellow with age, and faded through the years. It would have been cut, too, in the folds, and chafed, so that Caleb would have had trouble in keeping it together. He would have had

to unfold it carefully when he looked at it for fear the signature or the seal should be detached. So long delayed, so seemingly worthless, why keep it any longer? Ah, but Caleb's deed was written on no dead parchment, but on the tablets of a loving heart, and the lines and the name and the seal of ownership only grew more clear and deep through the operation of faith in the years. Anything else will wear out. A steel engraving even will grow faint. As the thousands of impressions are struck off you can buy them more cheaply, but the deed in the *heart* is God's deed. It is God's doing. It is done forever. And Caleb claims Hebron as his own.

2 Chron. x. 4. "*Thy father made our yoke grievous,*" etc. And so we find that an oppressed and discontented people had been bearing the yoke which Solomon had put upon them. Beneath all this splendour of the reign of Solomon there lay distress and murmuring. When the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon she declared his servants happy, and it may have been that those near to the person of the King were partakers of his favour — some specially chosen ones — but the people as a whole were weary and heavy laden. How different things sometimes are from what they seem to be. How true that in the houses of wealth and splendour there is often no peace. How true that the display is often paid for with a price which is too great. How often the outward glory is taken from the inner peace which should be illuminated with the love and contentment and mutual help and burden-bearing which makes a blessed home and happy lives. Outwardly there is splendour, to the gaze of the wondering,

envious world. Within there is cheerless discontent, hearts are despoiled of their inheritance, their birthright of love. How Solomon failed after all when contrasted with Christ. He, lonely, sorrowful, had not where to lay his head. Yet He said, "come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Matt. xi. 3. “*And he said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*” John even was perplexed. John, than whom a greater had not lived. We need not wonder. He had been enabled to accept humbly the place of decrease, but he had expected to rejoice greatly at the sound of the bridegroom’s voice, and here he was in a prison dark and lonesome. Shadows come to the lives of all. The strongest are not free from the trial of faith, and no man is proof against the moment of doubt. When Israel crossed Jordan, the grim walls of Jericho rose before them and there fell shadows from these over the hearts of the bravest. Still they marched round obedient, hopeful. After Jericho they were commanded to march forward to *conquest*, but this meant the meeting of *new enemies* at every step. Each victory dispelled a doubt, but as each new host arose of varied strength, and unknown resources and courage a new trial of faith came. Shall we overcome this enemy, or be overcome by them? Doubt is the chill which creeps over the heart as each new enemy appears, the response is still — believe. Remember Doubting Castle, and the key — A promise.

Ps. cxix. 25. "*My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me.*" It is not to be wondered at that the body should have some concern with the dust. It came from it and to dust it must return. But that the soul should cleave to the dust is sad. But there are different kinds of dust; and the dust to which the soul cleaves will be a noble dust, a clean dust. Yes, there is the dust of earth, real estate dust, and gold dust, and paper dust, bonds and mortgages, and there is diamond dust, so sparkling and splendid, different kinds of dust, you see. Yes, but after all, dust is dust, and nothing else. All the forms spring from one old original dust, and return to it again. We make graves out of dust, It is true flowers spring from it, and golden fruit, and yet they all return. Shall our spirits cleave to the dust of the grave? Dead things belong to the dust, and souls which belong to it which cleave to it are dead. Quicken them, O Lord!

Acts xiii. 45. “*When the Jews saw the multitudes they were filled with envy.*” Why? Generally, people like to see their churches crowded. Large congregations are mostly received with favour by the managers. They do strange things to attract them. It pays. The minister is sought for who can *draw*. This was not what was taking place here, however. Even if the matter of money had come up and entered into the question, there was a stronger passion, which surged up till its black waves boiled over the banks and filled their souls. What was the matter? These Gentiles were admitted to the same privileges. The Gentiles remained. Verse 43: After the Jews went away, and the Apostles spoke to them. And in verse 26, Paul took all in. Human nature cannot stand this. Every one wants to be special—peculiar. Hear people talk, and you soon find this. Even in their sicknesses they are different. “The doctor never saw such a case.” If I must admit that I am a sinner, I must, at least, be a *peculiar* sinner. “God, I thank thee that *I* am not as *other* men are!”

Jer. xiii. 20. “*Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?*” It may be that this is a question for some of us—for some ministers, Sunday school teachers, parents, and shepherds of the flock. Where are they, the congregation? The gathering together of the flock is thin and sparse. Empty pews, little vacant folds tell a story of the wolf and the thief. Why did they come? Perhaps we taught them to be captains over us. (v. 21). We say infidelity has come and burned the pasture. Worldliness has wiled the sheep to strange fields; the glitter of gold has taken the place of the green soft verdure and the living waters. Ah, these enemies were *invited* to come and enter the fold. He who was the shepherd betrayed God’s truth; he feared to meet these enemies openly. He grew a craven, and, to be popular, he made agreement with popular sin, which came in rich dress, and now he weeps that mammon has become captain of the congregation. So, Sunday School teachers, yielding, where is

your beautiful flock which God gave you? Father, mother, where your beautiful flock? The world came, who welcomed him first? Fashion, Business, Hurry. You brought them home and now they control you, and you can no longer reach the hearts of your flock, or lead them. You have almost *led* them into the strange pastures, and now you cannot get them to listen when you call them away.

How many Christian fathers and mothers have sent daughters and sons, for fashion's sake, to places of amusement and pleasure, where Godless men were to be met, wearing jewels and smiles and promises, and they are allured and destroyed. Where are they, these loved ones?

John iv. 13. “*Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.*” How true of all the wells in this world! Note those people you see in the room. It is after midnight. They are gaily attired. They are excited, eager. They have come from a scene of pleasure—of gayety and mirth. It was to be the *event* of the season. It was. No expense was spared. The *elite* were there. Music and wine were superb. The rooms were gorgeous, and—well. It is over. How eagerly they looked forward to it. How deeply they drank of its spiced enjoyment with tingling nerves. And now, one brief hour is not gone by, and yet the disappointment is coming clearly into the foreground—the slight, the failure to get at the realization of some cherished anticipation. The blight of some hope as a bud withered in the frost. The *emptiness* of it all. Oh, how they thirst *again*, as so often they have done before. So the man of bargain and sale, of money-making ilk. He has been in a glow to get his bargain. He has got it, and—he thirsts for another. And so more and more. Deeper draughts—more feverish thirst—more quenchless desire. Is this the beginning of the fire that is not quenched?

Acts xxiv. 25. “*When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*” So Felix said, as he rose from his seat, trembling and alarmed, and dismissed the Apostle. Not now. “Not *this* time” is the prescription which Satan thrusts into the hand of a convicted soul. This is the card of dismissal to the messenger of the cross, and a new life. Not *now*. And with this simple device he leads men past every awakening into the eternity of lost souls. It seems so simple. It is so easy and so harmless withal, and in this lies its power and its affinity with eternity. It simply puts off indefinitely until indefiniteness becomes infinity. A friend of mine, who held chief control of a system of railroads, once sent me a “pass” over the road. When I opened the envelope, and read the accompanying note, I looked at the little card, which had so much meaning, and I found upon it, in the blank space left for the name of the destination, these words instead: “From station to station.” That was all. “Conductors will please pass

the bearer from station to station." Very simple it seemed, but it meant more than if it had been filled up with ten thousand or a hundred thousand miles. Simply to the *next station*: that was all. An insignificant thing it seemed—a mere matter of five or ten miles or so. But it meant *indefinite postponement of action*, and secured my continuance on the road. "From station to station" is the inscription on the card which Satan uses in answer to the voice of conscience. "Merely to the next station." "You will make a change presently." "By-and-by you will get off this track of folly and sin." It is only to the *next station*. "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Luke xvii. 21. "*The kingdom of God is within you.*" No system except the Gospel of Christ puts the *individual man* in this relation to the kingdom. All other kingdoms or conquerors are *over* the man. These conquerors cry "Down!" "Let my chariot roll over your body and your soul." "Down! my kingdom must come!" A thousand men! Ten thousand! A hundred thousand lives! No matter, "my kingdom must come!" The man, the individual is nothing. Let him be consumed to give glory to the kingdom of the Great One! But the kingdom of Christ reverses all this as it does so many human rules. He says the kingdom begins in the heart and grows by *making*, not *destroying*, men; by taking poor wretched, ruined, lost creatures and raising them by that hidden power from within into citizenship, honour and participation. But the outward kingdom does not fail of being established for this. Not so. It is attained only by this means: Let each soul be healed and all are

whole. Leave each diseased, and the mass is unsound. True nations can be formed only of true citizens, not otherwise. But the work is too great, the labour too arduous for human plans or human power. Aye, and the time too long to wait, and the searching too keen. The lamp of God is no *dark lantern*, hiding the man who holds it. It falls full upon him and shines through and through him, and only One can endure to carry it so as to reveal the sin which must be removed. Thank God, He who spoke these words can hold it. He can wait, He can cleanse, He can heal, *one by one*, the weakest, the lowliest, one by one, and when His work is done we shall be in the kingdom of heaven.

1 Samuel x. 22. "*Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.*" Over-modesty is often a sign of the presence of the opposite. It seems beautiful in the young man to shrink from observation and hide himself. We are attracted to him as he is set before us, blushing as a young girl—confused by his very excellence. And the thought comes upon us, How could this fine, unselfish humility be so lost and changed as to leave only its very opposite? After all, it is not so strange. Nay, here once more we find the Bible true to life, holding up the mirror, and faithfully telling the truth. No doubt there was much that was lovable in Saul in his early days, and this feature was, as ever, attractive; but it is also true that an undue sensitiveness is a sign of self-consciousness, which is the soil out of which pride comes but too readily. Nay, it is the very fruit of too much self in the mind already. Forgetfulness of self, grateful joy at kindness and success, are the marks of a truly obedient, humble, unselfish spirit.

Eph. vi. 14. "*Having on the breastplate of righteousness.*" The kind of armour reveals the nature and place of the defence, and this, the character of the attack. The breastplate shows an attack on the *heart* anticipated, a thrust, an attempt to pierce. But how is this to be? And by whom? By the enemy of souls, no other. As to his method. Is it by inflicting bodily wounds, or by working bereavement of the heart? No! By inciting the heart, through its own weakness, to work its own fall and bitterness. The enemy can work no damage to God's children except he can incite them to *injure themselves*, and his thrust, his wound is *alluring*, not painful. It is the temptation to escape from pain, or to gain added joy. Such a wound is sweet at the time; the pain comes afterwards. When the devil tempted Our Saviour, hunger was first of human desires there, and the sudden thrust of the proposal is along that line. How the sense would respond to it. But no! It was against the word of God. "I cannot do this

thing." "It is written." Sometimes, however, men can deal very summarily with the writing as the king who thrust a penknife through the roll. And one wonders how much of the writing would be left if those penknives had but finished their self-appointed task. Who shall venture to say what the breastplate of Revealed Righteousness would be like after it had undergone the cutting and carving of some of the "higher criticism" we hear so much about. A poor affair, truly, for a conflict with Apollyon in the valley of the shadow of death. Nay, we shall even put it to the test, as it is, once more. It has turned aside too many thrusts to be discarded on such evidence. Too many broken, grisly spears attest its power to let us pay much attention to the penknife valour of some of the critics who seem to have no other occupation in life than to say with one of old, "Yea, hath God said?"

2 Cor. x. 12. *“ Measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves.”* A very common occupation, and very profitless. It is the ministry of indolence and spiritual pride. It is so easy to look for a smaller man and congratulate myself and say, “ Well done.” It is, perhaps, not hard, to my mind, to discover a meaner man than I am, and therefore I clap myself upon the shoulder as I go about some of my untruthful ways and exclaim, “ What a fine fellow !” It would not be quite so bad if I would only look up some of the best men, or if I would keep my eye upon the strong features of the characters of those with whom I measure and compare myself, but I am sure to select the weak things, the blemishes and imperfections. I am blind to the excellencies of my neighbour when I am comparing myself with him, and quick to see his defects. And even at the best this process is a poor affair — a number of men taking hold on one another to raise themselves higher by each getting on

the shoulders of the other while all are in the miry clay. It is, of course, open for one to get up higher, but he wants a mountain to climb on. A number of people cast from a sinking ship on the water cannot be helped by trying to struggle with one another. They need the life boat.

Joshua vii. 10. “*Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*” Achan’s trespass had brought trouble and defeat, and Joshua had gone to tell God. God says, “There is sin.” “Do not lie there, be up and doing; put away the sin.” Sometimes a sore or wound will not heal. It is bathed, and poulticed, and rested, and cared for in every way, and just when the patient tries to stand upon his foot he is ready to fall. There is pain and helplessness in the limb which was so strong. Inflammation succeeds inflammation, and the sore is foul and renders offensively. There is need of some other dealing. A skilled surgeon comes. He is only a moment. He says: “There is something wrong; there is a *foreign substance* here.” It must come out or there will be blood poisoning and mortification. A splinter of bad bone remains at the bottom of the wound and causes this festering sore. It must be *removed*. Nothing of lotion or rest

or plaster will do. The offensive thing must be taken out. So is it with Achan's sin, with any sin. There was a foreign substance, a wedge of gold, a garment of Babylon. Oh, so many of them! The church is weak and falls before her enemies because of such a sin. It is no use to try to heal till the sin be taken away.

1st Samuel xv. 32. "Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past." Saul, gratified with the victory over the enemy, made his own terms in obeying God, perhaps quite as willing to have his enemy alive and captive as slain, and as the execution drew to a close, and Agag was left, some ray of hope came to him. He might be spared. And now he is sent for; it is not an executioner but a messenger who is sent to bring him to the king and the prophet. And his pride lifted up its head once more, and he came with well arrayed apparel, and easy self assurance. Surely the bitterness of death is past. But not so, *one* had been false to the command of God. There is, however, no failure of judgment, only delay. There are many of the seed of Agag. Warnings have come of impending judgment. Many have fallen, and straits have been felt; in their own lives, imprisonment, and delay. And men who are sent to tell the word of the Lord, to condemn sin to death with no mitigation, falter, gratified with their popularity, pleased with the grateful homage of the world. But it is not over. *Samuel will come.*

1 John iii. 14. " *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*" The best evidence of salvation is love to the brethren. It is clear and obvious that, if Christ be in my heart, I shall love Christ as I perceive him in another man. To love Christ is to love Him always, and everywhere; and when Christ is seen anywhere in men's lives, the magnet attracts the soul under the power of that same love. There is *another* side or enlargement to this. If we have passed from death unto life, we shall love those who are *not* brethren. And this is, it seems, even a stronger proof, if possible. To love the brethren is to love Christ, who is altogether lovely, and not to love Christ in a brother argues deadness; but to love the unattractive and the vile. This is to love that which is *not* lovable. This is to be *like Christ*, and no one can be like Christ, I fear, to whom this love which filled His life is a stranger.

My brother, you are a Christian. At least you are known as such among men, and you

hope you are. And what does that mean? A *Christ-one*, does it not? Never mind the etymology, just now. We want the truth. You are one in whom Christ's life should be manifest. Then you must be like Him. You wonder why you have no clear evidence, no proof of your being saved. You need not wonder. Rather would it be a wonder—a strange wonder—if you could have such a proof while your life contradicts it. You are only a *negation*. You are only keeping clear of doing bad things. You are satisfied with *not* doing. Well, you will have to rest satisfied with a negation. You are not sure you are lost. That is all you can expect. Be like Christ in love, and you will have the positive evidence of His love.

Ps. lx. 4. "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.*" When soldiers are going away on some very dangerous campaign, or when they return from a victory in which their valour has been signally displayed, it is a beautiful and significant practice frequently to present them with a banner. Some one held in esteem and of elevated position, usually a lady, presents the commanding officer, in the presence of the men, with a set of colours. This is in token of their bravery, or of assurance and encouragement to them. It would signify how grace and beauty, and purity — all that is dearest in life — places its trust in those to whom this emblem is presented; and the banner is to be displayed in the presence of the enemy because of the *sacred trust* committed to the keeping of these honored and march-stained men. So God, so Jesus, so the Spirit has given to us a banner

in the name of and in defence of the Truth. All that is holy and noble and pure and true is committed to our keeping. Shall we be true, or shall we fail? Shall weary march, or sudden assault, or wounds, or hunger, or *death* cause us to forsake or disgrace this sacred banner?

Acts x. 14. “*Not so Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*” Peter was very careful as to his religious life. He was consecrated, but it was the consecration of the Pharisee yet, not of Christ only. The strange thing is that he knew it was the Lord who called him to eat and yet he could say, “not so.” If he had believed that it was an angel who had spread the table and asked him to eat, he might have said “Not so good angel, you try your best to meet the wants of a man. You know nothing of hunger or eating as we do, and you have made a mistake. We do not eat everything ; no common food has ever entered my mouth.” But not so *Lord*, sounds strangely in our ears. Is it the old spirit asserting itself once more in an unguarded moment. “Not so Lord, this shall not be unto thee,” and now “Not so Lord, this shall not be unto *me*.” We see here indeed earnestness but not obedience ; not the *abandon* of love. My religion is too precious to be used

as an ordinary thing. How much of this there is. I am earnest but I cannot mix with these *common* people. I am devoted but cannot do this service.

Perhaps we may use an allegory here. An Eastern king of a very wise and sympathetic nature became deeply moved by the sorrow and wretchedness of a large number of his subjects, and he determined to do something in their behalf. He sought out a region of much beauty and fertility where he might prepare a home for these poor and sorrowful creatures. He built a wall about it. He planted it with the finest shade and fruit trees. He opened fountains in it, and filled its borders with the choicest flowers, so that the air was filled with the sweet perfume. He then gathered a large number of the people for whom he had prepared this beautiful home. He cleansed and healed and clothed them, and it was his great delight to be with them and to see their joy. In due time he sought out others who lived at a distance and whose sad condition was the same as that of those who were now in the city. And he caused them also to be brought, that they might

enter into this home and enjoy its beauty and blessedness. But what was his surprise and grief to find that the people of the city were filled with contempt and hatred towards the strangers who were brought to the gate for admission, refusing to bring them in or even to speak to them through the bars of the gate. The king remonstrated with them about this selfish and wicked conduct, but one of them, who had attained to a position of influence among the people, replied to the king that he had never associated with people of a common and degraded character.

The good king might have replied by reminding him of the past and of his own wretchedness when he had been brought in, but he spared him this humiliation. He merely said "When I have brought a man to the gate and have come with him to bring him in he is to be counted worthy to enter here and to dwell in this place which I have prepared for him."

Ezek. xxxiii. 15. "*If the wicked restore the pledge, etc.*" The great truth here is that conversion must have results in the life. That repentance must mean the redressing of the wrong done to another in the old condition. It is most true that we cannot undo the evil we have done toward God and in our relation to our fellow men; but the best evidence we can give that we are sorry for having gone over a road is to go back again. Zacchæus showed his repentance in a very practical way, and it was on this confession, this repentance, this action of restoration that the Lord pronounced forgiveness to the sinner. In the lxxx. Ps. three times we read, "Turn us," meaning that the joy which was sought for could not be expected except by the turning. This means for me, now, as I read it, that I am to examine my way and see what I ought to turn from, wherein I am not like Christ. And when men are converted there ought to be action of restitution and confession. Then the penitence is sincere; and it costs something.

2 Samuel i. 21. "*As though he had not been anointed with oil.*" The lamentation of David is threefold in its bitterness. A *threnody*, *first*, for the brave men who had fallen; *second*, for his friend; and *third*, because the *anointed* of the Lord had been slain. Of this we note that the most solemn thought is that the defeat and death of a man anointed of the Lord casts a dark shadow upon the promise of God, as we see it. It seems to discredit the source of our spiritual strength. If the Lord's anointed be thus fallen and cast away, what is the meaning or the value of being anointed of the Lord? And so men feel now as David did, and all the more that the anointing is of the Spirit of Christ. The Gospel stands on the promise of victory, and if defeat comes to the man who is so blessed, what is left? Has the anointing failed? Is it a dream? Every one may say with David, "He has fallen, as though he had not been anointed with oil." When the people of God fall before the Philistines, and the sons of Amalek, it is a cause for sadness indeed.

Luke xxii. 53. “*This is your hour and the power of darkness.*” It is a sad thing when our best chance is that of the power of darkness ; when destruction is found with us, and when our opportunity is that of evil. When an occupation is of a nature that makes success in it mean hindrance and failure to others, surely it must stand chargeable with the evil it produces, and must be condemned as an ally of the powers of darkness. It is possible, thank God ! to find employment in a thousand things where diligence and advancement are the assurance of increased comfort and happiness to others ; but when the warming and lighting of your home would mean the blight and desolation, the cold and darkness of other homes ; the clothing of your family, the rags and nakedness of others ; your success, their ruin, you may be sure the sowing of selfishness, and passion, and impurity, of infidelity and blasphemy, will have a harvesting. And there will be harvesters, but what a harvest ! What sheaves

of darkness! Sheaves of blight and cruel
mildew and death! Sheaves of the crying,
and bitterness, and pain of ruined men and
women! Sheaves of lost souls, condemned
through your life. You took part with the
powers of darkness. The turbid stream, filled
with tears and blood, turned your mill-wheel,
and you ground your grist. Is it any wonder
your loaf is a bitter one.

1st Thess. iii. 8. “*For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord,*” the Apostle wrote to the Church at Thessalonica. As an Apostle, he had brought the word to them with a body still sore from the stripes which the jailer at Philippi had washed at midnight, with trembling hands. He had planted the Tree of Life at Thessalonica in sadness and heaviness of spirit. He had watered it with tears and he had remembered it in anxious prayer, knowing the bitterness of those Jews who, not content with driving him away from Thessalonica, had followed him to Berea. He knew that the young life there would have to endure the bitterest persecution, and for these at Thessalonica as for Christians wherever his ministry had planted the seed of truth, he felt the yearnings of one who had invested all in them. His *life* had been laid down for them and, like a mother with her child, he could say he received it again when they lived. “Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” So it was with the Apostle, but the

Gospel of Christ, even when it comes in the form of the experiences of His most devoted, is none the less true, of and to the weakest of his followers, and so we also can say of our loved ones, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." What joy is comparable to that of knowing the salvation of a dear friend? To know him safe in Christ is an endless refreshment—a joy unspeakable. According to your love to Christ, and your love to him, so is your joy, your life in this knowledge. What depth of comprehension is opened up between you? Before this, well as you agreed on other things, in taste and business and literature and pleasure, in the spirit of your minds there was a great lack, and that place into which he could not come was your life. But now everything leads out into its blessed fulness.

John iv. 14. “*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*” Friendship out of Christ may be beautiful and real, but it is like a richly carved fountain of marvellous design, Divinely wrought, but the water from which it is supplied is only a *reservoir*. It may be pure, cool, sweet, refreshing, but it is limited. It can be measured; so many gallons, and then the sad end of all. It may have continued without interruption almost for three score years and ten, through the morning with its dewy freshness. The early strength of the day, the glorious noon, the steady laborious afternoon, and the shady evening. The grass may have been fresh and green on the terraces, the flowers beautiful and fragrant as the Garden of God. The trees may have cast out their branches strongly as they grew by that stream, and the birds have sung their

carols of gladness. Is not that a good estimate to put upon your *chance* of life and friendship and love? We have not invited any shadow. We have not conjured up any spectre with its ghastly finger plucking your flowers. We have not conceived any hindrance in the flow nor any poisoning of the waters. We suppose all that we can suppose of worldly love, and then——the last cupful goes gurgling down the conduit pipes and the beautiful font is dry. It did not produce the water, it only stood there that the water might flow through it. Now it is a monument and all its cunning fashioning tells of failure. Each opening from which the water gushed is now a symbol of decay, the emblem of an unanswered prayer, and the lovely scene is a dry desert; and what is needed to avert this? Open the channel to the everlasting spring; pierce through the rocky wall of that strong heart and let the water flow which flows forever. “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.”

Acts xxvi. 13. *"I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun."*

It must be a strong light that could cast a shadow sunwards, but that is what the light which shone upon the road to Damascus would have done but that it shone from heaven, which made a shadow impossible. But what is true, what really took place was, that the light of the sun turned pale and feeble in the glory of that light; that the light at whose approach the lamps of the street are forgotten, at whose coming the shadows flee away, and the stars disappear, hiding their distant and ineffectual glory; that this light of lights flared like a smoky torch in the flood which burst forth from the opened heavens and deluged the prostrate man and his companions. Such is the light of Christ when it shines upon the soul. It gathers up all other heavenly lights as some mighty stream, the rills from the hillside springs. It enlarges and expands and glorifies them. It makes them to become rays of the glory that excelleth. They are lost and found again in its

blessedness. But it has another relation to the lights of worldly pleasure, and sin, and vice. It reveals their pallor and sickliness and darkness. It throws shadows over them. It robs them of their brilliance and attractiveness. This is the deliverance of those whom Christ sets free. I am sorry for the Christians who keep away from the sinful pleasures of the world because they are afraid they will be punished if they enjoy them, Christians to whom the pleasures of sin seem so full of attractiveness and beauty. When Will-o'-the-Wisp's lantern has such a splendour one must fear that the sun has not risen; and when the poor foot-lights of the stage cast such dark shadows on the road away from them the light from heaven must indeed be feeble. There is hardly a more pitiable spectacle than a Christian who is afraid to go in at the gate with the world, but who tries to see the play through the cracks of the fence. He knows little of the joy of Christ who could see anything in the poor spectacle of sin. Your light should quench them. It is above the brightness of the sun.

Judges vii. 19. “*And they blew the trumpets and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.*” Why did they break the pitchers? Because they had only two hands, and when the time came that the onset was to be made upon the Midianites three hundred trumpets were to peal out with one blast upon the midnight air, and three hundred lamps were to flash through the darkness. Now, it took the right hand to hold the trumpet, and the left hand to hold the lamp, and the pitchers, no longer needed, must be broken or thrown away. Better that they should be broken, that the sudden simultaneous crash, as they were shivered by one blow against the trumpets, should intensify the effect of the demonstration, and increase the bewilderment and consternation of the half-awake Midianites.

Many men try to save their pitchers. They do not like the waste of the breaking; they have lamps and they seem to be willing to let them shine. They have come out against the enemy but they have not got to the point of breaking the pitchers. “Why should my Christian profession entail such a loss?” And then it is an *irretrievable* loss if the

pitcher be broken." "If I throw it away carefully I might find it again." "Cannot I manage to bestow my pitcher somewhere in the folds of my girdle." "I may need it again." "I may want—who knows—to hide in the darkness." "I may require to hide my light and then I should want my pitcher again." No such cowardly caution was found among the three hundred chosen men. No such paltering parsimony in Gideon's band. Yet such thoughts are not unknown in the church, but the requirements, the urgent imperative impetuosity of a living christianity is against them. It becomes unendurable to them. The loins must be girded. No loose, convenient folds in the garment or the girdle. No chance left for a retreat in the darkness! What fine use some men could make of a third hand to carry a pitcher with. Indeed, they manage to do it with one of the two they have, and throw dark shadows on their actions whenever they are likely to lose or to suffer inconvenience in the conflict. Poor craven, temporising creatures! Midian would have no cause to fear from a million such as they are. It is the men who break the pitchers who strike them with terror.

2 Kings v. 3. *“And she said unto her mistress, ‘Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.’”* A little Jewish maiden, carried off by a Syrian band, torn from home and love, is suddenly brought before us, among kings, and generals, and soldiers. A little captive maid, sad and lonely. Surely there is not much that she can do. Her lot was to be in the home of Naaman, and she stood before his wife. She became her waiting maid. A lowly lot and a lonely place were hers. Was her duty to do the humblest service of the house? To clean vessels and kindle fires, and keep the dust from settling upon the vessels of gold and silver which fell to the lot of Naaman in his successful wars, or was she the toy and amusement of her mistress? Asked to smile sweetly though her heart might be sad. To sing one of the Hebrew melodies in a foreign home; to enliven the life of those about her. We know not, only this, it was a sad and lonesome lot,

with plenty of the sorrow of a broken heart. But, upheld and guided by her faith in God, she enters upon her duties with a will, and a heart that could feel for the strangers, rich and proud though they were — enemies to her people, authors of her own captivity. Duty does not change with our abode, and Godliness is ever the same, and shines most clearly in the deepest gloom. And she sees, as all can see who come into the secret of the life, that there is a *hidden sorrow* in the splendour of that gorgeous home, a sorrow so deep, a sadness so incurable that she forgot her own in its presence. Naaman was a leper. How much servants see of the hidden things about the house. How much more are the highest in need of sympathy sometimes than the lowliest. Perchance she saw the dressing of the sore, or knew the feverish, restless nights which must tell sometime upon the manly form and the splendid courage that endured it so heroically now, hiding it from the world. Or the settled grief of her mistress may have formed a strange bond of sympathy between the mistress and the maid. “Every heart knoweth his own bitterness,”

and sorrow is not dispensed so unequally as we might suppose if we only looked upon appearances. The wife of the mighty soldier and the little captive maid have more in common than the world could see.

But what can she accomplish? This friendless one? She can do what the lowliest can do. She can feel pity and sympathy, and this led to more. "She hath done what she could." And, no doubt, her sympathy led to prayer that God—the God of Israel—the God of the prophet—would send help and healing. As she knelt by her little bedside, she could "pray to the Father which seeth in secret," and He could "reward her openly." Was it kindness on their part that won the intercession of the little heart? Surely it must have been so, and God answered. And the little maid, whose name is not given, became the actor in one of the splendid events in the history of the people of God.

Luke xv. 8. “ *Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it,*” This parable takes us at once into a lowly Judæan home. It is an ill-lighted, unpretentious dwelling—a home in which ends were made to meet only by continual effort; where the table was spread with careful frugality; where the *mites* of a self-denying economy slowly accumulated and transformed themselves into “pieces of silver,” which were laid up for the creditor, or the rent day, or as love’s tribute of a blessed parsimony. “An offering unto the Lord.” “Ten pieces of silver.” One of them was lost, and she to whom they belonged was startled, when she came to look them over, to find them only nine. Again she counted them. One, two, three, each shining piece, with circumspection, is laid down, one upon another, but the inexorable truth comes out the same. Only nine! One of her pieces is lost. So well she knows them. So much they

have cost her she could almost distinguish the absent one from all the rest. With a throbbing heart, a flushed face, and an eager hand, she goes hastily to the little shelf where her iron lamp stands during the day, and lighting it she proceeds with bent form and close scrutiny to examine every hidden place. Here and there the little light twinkles and blinks, appearing and disappearing, but ever revealing an earnest, anxious face bending over it. All in vain! Shall she give up the search? Something says, "You had better, you will never see it again; who can tell where it may have gone?" But no! Like the woman with the issue of blood who pressed through the crowd, or blind Bartimaeus, who refused to be silenced, and who only cried the more: necessity was upon her, the compulsion of preciousness and she begins again, going over the ground anew, with greater care. "It is in the house," she says, "and I shall find it." And now the besom of twigs is brought, to be used with the right hand, while the lamp is held out in the left. Once more there is failure. No flashing responsive ray reveals the hiding place of the truant coin. Now, surely she will give up

the search! Better earn another. Better think of the nine. No! Another more thorough search. "Till I find it" is the motto, and inspiration. And now table and chair, and bed and box and mat, all are moved to discover the lost coin. Strength, main force is brought to bear. The flush deepens on the face, revealed by the flaring lamp; and the eyes flash with a more searching intensity. She "seeks *diligently*." Escape is now impossible. Discovery and restoration are engraven upon every movement of that intense, absorbing activity. And, at last, lo! Hidden in a dark corner, whither it had run as it fell from among its companions, she discovers it, by its brightness, among the dust. With trembling gladness she stoops down and grasps it, and, forgetful for once of the disorder and dust, the disarranged condition of her house through the search, she goes with eager joy to her neighbour, calling to them as she came, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost."

We have tried to fix our thoughts for a moment upon this second parable of the

marvellous trilogy in which our Saviour here taught the great doctrine of love to perishing and ruined sinners. We are told again how the light shines with its most excellent glory, the light of forgiving love. We realize once more how the canker of Phariseeism is smitten and shrivelled before it; and how the lost ones are encouraged to come and be saved by that wondrous love. But we would not, in this greater light, forget the revelation of the tender sympathy with life, in its lowly, common place, toil and care, in its sweepings, and its dustings, and its searchings, of Him who was familiar with such scenes as He has used here to be the illustration of Divine love.

2 Cor. v. 15. "*That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*"

The change which is involved in this statement is very great. Nothing indeed could well be more radical or universal to human nature. Naturally, self is the centre of the human heart. All the affections and desires, by nature, go out from it as radii. Like the spokes of a revolving wheel, they stretch from the motionless centre point through all the widening expanse to the extreme circumference, and whether the motion be rapid or retarded, it is ever and changelessly about the centre. This does not mean, of course, that a man, even a selfish man in his nature, has no thought of anything but himself. If it were possible to find a man who could limit his care and interest to his own bodily personality, who could envelop his *world* in his cloak; you might put him in a museum of monstrosities and carry him about as a show, even in this selfish world. No man can so wall himself about. No man can so isolate

himself from the interests of others. Selfishness is too shrewd, too cunning for that, although, in the end it ever proves to have been but a poor guide, a blind leader of the blind. It is ever cutting the roots of the tree upon which it has built its nest. Albeit, no such thought is in its mind. It is wise and calculating and thoughtful. It is decent and respectable; affectionate withal, and full of sympathy. It may love wife and children and home and friends. It can be patriotic and public spirited and grandly enthusiastic. What then? This is the danger. Leprosy can hide in a velvet robe as well as under a ragged coat. The test is easily applied. How does all this appear when personal profit and interest cease? At once, the tendrils which went forth so lovingly, which embraced their object so affectionately, become smitten with a paralysis and relax their hold. Like rubber bands which have been stretched, suddenly released, they fly back to the heart with a pang of revulsion, and self-centred personality asserts its dominance once more. A selfish man may expand himself astonishingly. He may have *interests* in China and

India and Japan, and in a thousand places. He may become cosmopolitan and be a man of broad and diverse sympathies. The life blood of his greed may flow in its own channels in a perfect network of arteries and veins over the globe. But let the message flash to the central lair that the hope of booty is gone, at any point of these vast and varied interests, and the fibrous grasp is relaxed, the tension of self-interest at once asserts itself. The rubber bands fly back over mountain and ocean bed, and—the man liveth to himself openly once more.

2 Cor. v. 15. "That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." The battle with *self* is one of the hardest. One of the grandest also in results when victory has been won. The first difficulty is to *recognize* the enemy. Self must perceive self—truly a difficult task. And not only must self be perceived and understood *as it is*, but in order to the commencement of this momentous duel of self against self, of a man striving to get the mastery over himself, he must see himself *as he ought to be*. In short, there must be *two* selves, the old and the new; essentially distinct, and antagonistic to one another. And it must be clearly understood that both cannot live together, *that one must die*. And when this is attained, how the old man pleads his cause! Is it not his house, his world? Has he not right of possession? How shall he give up to another? Be sure he will fight to the last ditch, that he will cling to the last tower and bastion and

vault. He will die in the desperate defence. It will be Jerusalem and Titus over again. The city will be destroyed before the struggle come to an end, except the mighty conqueror can save it. How graphically the Apostle tells the story in the seventh chapter of Romans, where he speaks of his experiences, of the battle of the old and the new. He gives vividness and intensity to the description by speaking of the old nature as a dead body, and he cries "who shall deliver me?" And many a man has uttered the same cry, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And how is this deliverance to come? The Apostle gives the answer almost in the same sentence in which he asks the question, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." This conflict for the mastery over self can only be begun, continued or brought to its victorious and glorious consummation through Christ. But, "Cannot I think of and realize the beauty of this new nature myself?" There *is* no new self until Christ is formed in the heart the hope of glory. It is His coming, His being born in the heart and laid in the manger of worldly desire that

forms the new man who is to overcome the old. Not otherwise can the nature be renewed. It is true that the old nature, the self of original possession and control, is a scene of division and discord and passion, but there is still but one master whom all obey--self! and none of the passions of the heart can ever become the leader of a new life. Else, like the closing years of Israel, the accession of each new king would but accelerate the ruin of the kingdom. Jeroboam would be worse than Rehoboam, and Ahab and Jezebel worse than either. But when the new power is born by the spirit, the Child Jesus, how sweet, how graceous the blessed influence! Before love, the grim walls begin to shake like the walls of old Jerico as the host of God encircled them. The new life gathers strength and power. Slowly and amidst adverse elements, drawing its nourishment from the transformed soul. Divine love becoming flesh. A new self which prevails against the old. And the death and rising again of the Son of God become the inspiration and eternal energy of the regenerated spirit.