

STUDIES
IN THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

By the same Author,

“STUDIES IN ST. MATTHEW.”

In preparation,

“STUDIES IN ST. JOHN.”

STUDIES

IN THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY THE

REV. J. CYNDDYLAN JONES,

AUTHOR OF "STUDIES IN ST. MATTHEW."



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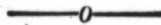
IT has long occurred to the author that volumes of sermons, discussing the principal passages in certain special books of Scripture, might be of considerable advantage to readers, and especially to young ministers. Under that impression, he ventures with much diffidence to put the present volume in the hands of the publishers.

CARDIFF, 1882.

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I.

Power from on High.

(Inaugural.)

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."—ACTS i. 8.

It is generally agreed among critics that the Acts of the Apostles was written by "Luke, the beloved physician." There are certain graces of style which point to him as the author. Evidently, he was a more polished writer, a more accomplished scholar, than the other evangelists. He is somewhat fond of long words, of compound words, of words admitting many prepositions before them. It is altogether a more classical style. In the Acts, as well as in the third Gospel, we discover these characteristics, and the diction alone would go a long way to prove that the two treatises were the products of the same mind. It was customary some years back in England, and, indeed, the custom has not quite died out yet, for the author to dedicate his book to a gentleman of influence and standing. And in early ages the same custom seems to have prevailed, and we find that St. Luke dedicated his two books

to "the most excellent Theophilus"—a Christian gentleman of title and position in the old world. Luke hints in the preface to the Acts that there is a connection between the two books, that they are related to each other. The word which points out the connection is "*began*." From its position in the original, this word is emphatic. "The former treatise"—namely, the Gospel—"have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach." In the Gospel you have the account of His first works and first words, of what He did and said in His state of humiliation; in this second treatise, says Luke, I propose to carry on the history commenced there; this will form the second volume: it will relate what Jesus continues to do and teach among men. His work did not cease with His death—He still works on in the world. The title of this book, as you are aware, is not inspired; and it would be a better index to the purpose which the writer had in his eye, if it were styled, not the Acts of the Apostles, but the Acts of Jesus Christ through His Apostles. In the Gospel you have the history of what He did in His state of humiliation; in the Acts of what He was still doing in His state of exaltation. And this is the right view to take of church history: it is the record of the works of Jesus—of the manifestation of the working of a supernatural power in the world.

Then he proceeds to give a short summary of His appearances during the forty days that elapsed between His resurrection and ascension. He touched

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I.
II.

upon this point in the last chapter of his Gospel, but he now looks at it from a different standpoint. There it is recorded as the climax of His life here upon earth, the last act of His career among men; here it is recorded as the introduction to His life in a glorified state. This is stated in the third verse: "To whom He also showed Himself by many infallible proofs." The word rendered "showed" does not mean continuous showing; it means showing as in a vision; He came, He went, and that is all they knew about it: His appearances were revelations from the invisible world; from that world He came, to that world He vanished. It was the beginning of a new and higher life. During these seasons in which He came out of the invisible world, He held high and sacred fellowship with His disciples; He spoke to them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. The words I have read as a text were spoken in His last interview with them; they are His parting words: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The subject which solicits our attention is the nature of the power which Christ promises to His disciples; in other words, we shall endeavour to answer the question, *What is the nature of the power necessary to regenerate and save the human race?*

I. Let us show what it is not.

II. Let us show what it is.

I. Let us look upon the subject on its NEGATIVE SIDE.

1. We should sadly misunderstand the words of the Saviour did we attach to them the idea of *physical power*. The current literature of the day sometimes speaks of "muscular Christianity;" but it is superfluous for me to add that that is not the Christianity of the New Testament. This has nothing at all to do with the muscle; it is radically different from physical force. But men oftentimes forget this. They once thought they could resist the spread of Christianity by physical means. But could they? No. They could no more prevent the success of Christianity by throwing the Gospel into prison than our Government could stop the lightning on its path by calling out the volunteers. Subsequently, men thought they could materially assist the Gospel by bringing it into alliance with the political organizations of the world. But could they? No. Persecutions never made saints yet. The axe can never infuse new life into the tree. But is there anything that can? Yes, the Spring can. In like manner, the axe of the executioner, or the rack of the inquisitor, or the stake of the persecutor, can never quicken a soul dead in trespasses and sins. The power Christ promised is not physical. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God."

2. It is not *miraculous power*. They were already endowed with this, though no doubt a great increase was subsequently made to it. This was not the

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power the world stood principally in need of. Miraculous power cannot save men. Men saw Jesus performing miracles—opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and raising the dead to life—and still remained in their unbelief. “Send Lazarus to my brethren,” said Dives, in torment, to Abraham, “and they will listen to him.” But what was the patriarch’s reply? “If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead.” A miracle would not engender faith in their hearts. We read that, after the resurrection of Jesus, “Many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of their graves, and went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many.” Imagine a company of ghosts walking to town together and appearing to many! Well, many believed? No; not one. Miracles will not save men. We would rush to perdition through a battalion of ghosts.

3. Neither is it the *power of eloquence*. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech; or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” I admit there is tremendous power in words; they breathe, they burn, they move the soul. But there is one thing they cannot do—regenerate the soul. They are not adequate to do that. You all know that there is an invention to electrify dead bodies; by bringing the dead into contact with the electric battery, they can be made to imitate the living; they look, they stare, they move, they gesticulate: there is the semblance of life, but

not the reality. And I have seen, under powerful and eloquent sermons, stout-hearted sinners start from their seats. I have seen them weep; I have seen them pray. Well, they are alive? Not they—they are only the dead acting the living. Let the electric current which flows from the preacher subside, and they will fall back to their former torpor and indifference. What are many of the so-called revivals? Electric shocks disturbing the dead, but leaving them dead notwithstanding. Eloquence can move men, but it cannot save them. Eloquence, like the wind, moves the sea from without, but that which saves must move it from its own depths. Eloquence works *upon* the soul; that which saves must work *in* the soul. I do not disparage elegance of language and eloquence of style; but this I know, that Paul's preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom. It is generally acknowledged that the New Testament diction is not in the best classic style. The fact is—there is danger in polishing too much. One can easily compose a sermon that the most critical hearer cannot detect a flaw in it. Ask him an hour afterwards what he remembers of it, and he finds it difficult to tell you. The sermon was so refined that it shot right *through* the soul instead of entering *into* it and remaining there. Polish is commendable up to a certain point—to the point of showing, instead of concealing, the material underneath. I never like to see an article of furniture so highly polished that I cannot say of what timber it is made—whether it is pine or oak, ash or mahogany.

Let every article be polished so as to show and not to hide its native worth. And so in regard to compositions. Let king-thoughts ride in royal chariots; let them be surrounded by servants in liveries; but beggarly thoughts ought to carry about them a proof of their own poverty. I do not disparage eloquence; we want more of it in the pulpit. At the same time, we must not forget that eloquence will not regenerate men. The power Christ promised His disciples was not word power.

4. Neither is it the *power of logic*. It is trite and commonplace to say that argument cannot convert a soul. Conquer a man in argument, and, as a rule, you only confirm him in his error. Last Monday I was looking at a picture which bore the title, "Conquered, but not Subdued." The young lad was evidently conquered by his mother. There he stood, with his face half turned towards the wall: but there was determination in the mouth, defiance in the eye, anger in the nostrils; he was conquered but not subdued. Drive a sinner in argument to a corner, so that he cannot move, yet he can sink, and sink he will to his own hell. You have all seen sheet-lightnings; they flash, they dazzle, but they never kill. And arguments after all are only sheet-lightnings—flashing, dazzling, enlightening, but not killing in the sense in which Paul says that he was slain. I say nothing against logic: have as much of it in the pulpit as you can; but, after all, logic will not save the world. God can never save you by argument; the world will defy the Almighty in a debate. There

is argument in the Bible ; and argument is indispensable : but it is not by argument that men are made new creatures. The power that Christ promised the disciples is not that of logic.

5. It is not the *power of thought*. All of us know by experience and observation that ideas wield immense power in the world ; that brilliant thoughts exercise a kind of magic influence on those that hear them : yet we must admit that the power of ideas is not that which saves. The Bible does not claim superiority on account of its ideas. I believe, of course, that it contains the sublimest ideas, the profoundest thoughts ever clothed in human language : but it is not upon its literary or intellectual character that it rests its claim to the homage of mankind. Indeed, you may study the Scriptures for sixty years, you may be the best Biblical scholar in the land, and be at last a castaway. It is not the ideas of the Bible that save. The history of preaching abundantly proves this. Read the sermon which was preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost, and it will not strike you as sparkling with ideas ; it will not astonish you with the profundity of its thoughts. Sermons that display as great mental calibre had been preached before, and have often been preached since. The sermon on the Mount, and the sermon that Paul preached on Mars' Hill stand higher on the intellectual and philosophic side ; and yet they made but few converts. Why ? Because the power of thought is not the power that saves. Look again from the pulpit to books. It is not the most intellectual

books that have been mainly blessed to the salvation of souls. Take the "Analogy" by Butler; no book in the language perhaps displays more solid intellectual power; yet I question very much if there are twenty people now living that would point to the "Analogy" as the means of bringing them to Jesus. I may be mistaken, but that is my impression. I have heard a great many people praising it, referring to it, saying they are indebted to it, but not one ascribing his salvation to it. But read the "Dairyman's Daughter," by Legh Richmond; or the "Anxious Inquirer," by John Angell James; and you do not find the millionth part of the mental power in them that you find in the "Analogy;" but there are thousands in England to-day who trace their conversion to these books. It is another power than that of thought which saves. I do not say that thought is not necessary; but it is not of itself adequate to bring about the desired change.

No one will think that I wish to cast discredit on any of the excellences I have enumerated. I know the fox is ready enough to say the grapes he cannot reach are sour; and that man is too ready to say "it is nought, it is nought," of every accomplishment which he has the misfortune to be without. What I say is,—they are not of themselves adequate to save the world. They are very valuable in their own places. If a man is possessed of much bodily vigour, he can do nothing better than consecrate it on the altar of Christianity. We have, perhaps, too many delicate students and too few robust fishermen

occupying the pulpits of our land. If a man is endowed with the gift of eloquence, if he is able to speak with enticing words, let him by all means enlist his talent in the service of Christ. The more eloquent he is, the better for him and for the churches. Only let him not calculate upon it as the chief element in the salvation of sinners. If a man is able to produce beautiful roses and delight his congregation with them Sunday after Sunday, by all means let him produce them; only let him take care to make his roses as God makes His—never a rose without a thorn, to prick the conscience of the hearer, and to spur him onward in the Divine life. Let the sermon please, if possible; but, like Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, it ought to prick the consciences of men. Let it be beautiful, if possible; but let it first be useful. In making rocks God's principal object was solidity; but, as most of you know, He has etched the hard stones with lines of beauty and mystic figures of every description. Usefulness first, beauty afterwards. If a man is blessed with a powerful intellect and a vivid imagination, let him by all means preach sermons which radiate with light and sparkle with ideas. Only a week or two ago, many of us were reading in a popular serial an address delivered by a great trans-Atlantic preacher to students, in which he warned them against preaching great sermons. I could not help whispering to myself in reading it—"Better warn them against preaching small sermons. We are not in danger of greatness overmuch in England. It is not the great, but

the small sermons, that empty our churches ; it is not the great, but the small sermons, that allow men to sink deeper and deeper in worldliness and sin." Have as many human excellences as you can ; after all, they will not change the heart of man. All the powers I have enumerated had been tried before Jesus Christ came to the world, and found wanting. Demosthenes, the prince of orators, had lived and died, and the world was unredeemed. Plato, the prince of thinkers, had lived and died, and the world was unredeemed. Aristotle, the prince of logicians, had lived and died, and the world was unredeemed. Homer, the prince of poets, had lived and died, and the world was unredeemed. If man is to be saved, a new power must come to the field.

II. We now move on to consider the subject on its POSITIVE SIDE.

I. What, then, is the power which Christ promises to His disciples? In the Gospel it is called "*power from on high*," a power which has its source in worlds above us. The great want of the world was a power to uplift it out of its state of degradation and sin—a power to upraise it. There was power from beneath working in this world, dragging it down to the abode of woe. The history of the world previous to the day of Pentecost shows that it was sinking lower and lower in the scale of morals. But history shows that since that time humanity has been gradually ascending and progressing. What brought about the change? What

gave this heavenward impulse to the world? A new power has been brought to bear upon its destinies—a power from on high is attracting it upward to itself. The power from beneath is mighty to drag us down; the power from on high is mightier to draw us up. This is a great idea of Christianity—the power of other worlds is making itself felt in this. Physically we know that this earth is subject to the attraction of other planets; the orbit of the world in space is determined by the power of other worlds acting upon it. The same fact holds true spiritually; this world is subject to the power of other worlds, its course through time is determined by powers extraneous to itself. There is a power working mightily in the children of disobedience, and the source of it is in darker regions than our own. But at last another power has come to the field, a power from on high; the contest must be long and terrible; but the higher power is gradually winning, and will, by degrees, deliver the world from the grasp of evil. On the day of Pentecost, according to the prediction of the text, there came a rush of power from eternity, and it is still working in our midst, upheaving society, revolutionising the world. It fills me with hope, and even with inspiration, to think that the power of the higher world has come to rescue this; that forces other than human are remoulding society.

2. Here it is called "*the power of the Holy Ghost.*" I want you to try and realise that. The disciples were to receive into their souls Divine power—not the power that comes from learning or culture, but the

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veritable power of God. We often picture God as looking down pitifully upon us from His heaven, and we do right in so picturing Him; but it does not exhaust the New Testament doctrine. We are taught that the great God has descended upon men, and thrown into their hearts the infinite impulse of His own eternal nature. The disciples, as we see them in the pages of the Gospel, are weak, timid, hesitant creatures; but at last the Holy Ghost came down upon them, overshadowed them, pervaded them, threw into their souls His own profound impulse, and thenceforth they walked the earth as Divine men, as inspired heroes. The power of God was working in their hearts; the power of God was making them able ministers of the New Testament: and we must have the same power in the present day, and, thank God, it has been neither withdrawn nor withheld. The Christian life is a Divine life. The life we lead here in the flesh is supernatural. When we speak of the supernatural in the pulpit, we look back across the vista of eighteen centuries, and fix on a point far away in the distant horizon of history. But that is only a portion of the New Testament idea, and not the whole. Christianity is from first to last a supernatural religion—not a remembrance of the supernatural in the past, but its perpetuation throughout all ages, even to the end of the world. Supernatural forces are lodged in the Christianity of to-day; they make themselves felt by the men of to-day.

Every sincere Christian leads a supernatural life;

every true ministry is heavy with supernatural influences. We do not perform miracles in the present day, in the limited technical sense in which that word is now used. For what is a miracle? The supernatural in the domain of matter. That we do not claim; that we do not need. But if our ministry is not a continuation of the supernatural in the realm of matter, I rejoice to say that it is a continuation of the supernatural in the realm of mind; and of the two, the latter is the higher kind. Luke tells us that in his Gospel he narrated what Jesus began both to do and to teach; only what He began. In this book, he goes on to narrate what Jesus continued to do and to teach among men; and Church history generally is only a continuation of the same history, of what Jesus did in the days of our fathers, of what Jesus is still doing in our own days. But has the supernatural died out of the history? No. As in the Gospel, and in the Acts, so in Church history ever since, the supernatural predominates, with this difference: that at the beginning the supernatural shows itself in the realm of matter, and in the continuance it shows itself in the realm of spirits. But it is supernatural all through; and may I suggest, in a nobler, diviner form? "The works that I do ye also shall do, and greater works than these shall ye do." Greater—how greater? "What I do are only miracles in the world of matter, but he that believeth in Me will perform miracles in the world of spirits." To change the nature of a soul is a higher display of the supernatural than to change

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the nature of water. To open the eyes of the understanding is a diviner act than to open the eyes of the body. To quicken a soul dead in trespasses and sins is a nobler work than to raise Lazarus from the grave. There was more of the supernatural among men during the ministry of the Apostles than during Jesus' personal ministry: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." "You will do supernatural works in the world of spirits; God will pour of His own energy into your souls; He will pour of that energy into the souls of My servants to the end of time; preachers of the Gospel are to be the constant repositories of the supernatural in an evil and godless world." That, I believe, is the idea of the text, and I believe that there are Divine forces still working in the world. Eternity continues to pour in fresh supplies, and it will continue to pour in till humanity is flooded with the Divine. The triumphs of Christianity are the victories of the supernatural. "He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost;" the Divine life will come down in torrents, and submerge the natural; or, better still, the human will be steeped in the supernatural, that, in the words of Paul, "ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." Now, this is the power promised to the disciples—this is the only power that can save men. The maker of the instrument only can repair it.

3. What was the effect of this Divine baptism on the disciples? The effect upon them was to make them pre-eminently *spiritual*. It deepened the Divine

life within them. Spirituality should be the distinctive badge of every Christian, and especially of the ambassadors of Christ. Holiness is indispensable. "A bishop must be blameless." All well and good if he is learned, but he *must* be blameless. All well and good if he is eloquent, but he *must* be blameless. In the Revelation John saw "a star fall from heaven." What next? "And smoke came out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace." And ministers apostatising are stars falling. Smoke comes out of the pit and darkens the heavens in that neighbourhood for many a long year. Pray, my friends, that Christ may preserve His stars in His right hand.

The effect upon them as ministers was to fill them with Divine enthusiasm; or, in the more expressive language of the New Testament, with "fire." The Bible speaks much about this fire. Jeremiah had a message to deliver to the children of Israel; but having been insulted, persecuted, incarcerated, he made up his mind not to open his mouth to them again. "I said I will not make mention of Him, or speak any more in His name." Well, how did he fare? "His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay." It was hard to speak—it was harder to be silent. It is difficult enough to stand up here and preach; it would be more difficult to sit down there and be mute. The Apostles, under the inspiring influence of the Holy Ghost shed upon them on the day of Pentecost,

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evinced such fervour and earnestness, that many supposed they were under the illegitimate power of strong drink. No, says Peter, it is the Holy Ghost working in us. They felt their souls growing, expanding; there was a certain something seething, boiling within them which they could not resist; they were carried away by it. They were, to make use of a continental phrase, "God-intoxicated men." "The love of Christ constraineth us," says St. Paul. Some dared to brand him as a fanatic. "Whether we be beside ourselves," said he, "it is to God, or whether we be sober it is for your cause." We want more enthusiasts of Paul's stamp. No man in his age accomplished more good than Richard Baxter; no man wrote more, and preached more with greater success. What was the secret of his power? His unbounded enthusiasm. His biographer says that Baxter would have set the world on fire while another was lighting a match.

" He preached as though he ne'er should preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men."

I spoke to you just now about eloquence: it is the fire of the Holy Ghost that will make men eloquent. Many of us think it consists in a power to rattle vowels and consonants together, and make language ring like a tinkling cymbal. No; that is not eloquence, it is counterfeit; that man has not command over language—language has command over him. What is eloquence? According to Gillfillan, "Eloquence is logic set on fire." But where

is the fire to come from? From the great heart of God. A preacher in his study ought to gather his thoughts, to collect his materials; and ascending the pulpit, he ought to set them all ablaze, with fire from off the altar. Having made all the necessary preparations, having built the altar, digged the trenches, slain the sacrifice, he should join Elijah, and cry, "O God, send the fire, send the fire!"

4. What is the effect upon the congregation? Many *are turned to God*, and are brought out of nature's darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. When the power of the Holy Ghost comes upon the minister, the congregation feel it. They yield to the Divine impulse. On the consecration of the Temple of Solomon, when the glory of the Lord descended and filled the house, the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; much less could the people stand to criticise the work of art, or to admire the amount and richness of the gold. In the same manner a ministry accompanied by Divine power makes men forget all other qualities; the beauty of holiness makes them blind to every inferior quality; the divinity of the sermon makes them overlook its literature. The power from on high hides everything but itself. Many a critic went to hear Whitfield with hostile intentions and a fault-finding disposition; but in less than five minutes they had totally forgotten their sinister art, and their right hand its cunning. They could no more think of the literary merits of the

sermon than you can examine the loveliness of the daisy when the lightnings flash and the thunders roar. Wait, then, in expectation, and devoutly pray for the great gift promised in the text, or my preaching and your hearing will alike be in vain.

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II.

The Day of Pentecost.

(Delivered to the Students of a Theological College.)

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine."—ACTS ii.

1-13.

I AM called upon to deliver the usual address at the close of your academical year. I experience a difficulty in determining the path I should take. On the one hand, I do not wish to give you an ordination charge: that will come at the proper time and

in the right place. On the other hand, I am forbidden by custom to enter into an abstruse discussion of any subject philosophical or theological. I shall therefore endeavour to avoid both the one and the other, hoping, however, that a middle way may be discovered.

It would be well for us, perhaps, to throw our thoughts back to the commencement of ecclesiastical history, and deduce a few lessons from the important transactions of the day of Pentecost, when the foundations of the Christian Church were laid—lessons which will guide us in the management of our own as well as the Church's affairs. The words I have read as a text appear to me to suggest a very appropriate subject, viz., *The Gift of Tongues*, or *The Action of the Spirit on the minds of the preachers of the Word as shown on the Day of Pentecost*.

I. You will please observe that it is said in the text that the disciples **BEGAN TO SPEAK**.

The first effect of the outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples was to prompt them to speak. Hitherto they had kept silence. Throughout the Gospels not a single speech of theirs is recorded. They were learners and asked questions, but did not venture upon the delivery of set sermons. They were sent two and two through Judæa and Galilee in the lifetime of the Saviour to try their "'prentice hands," it is true; but, in writing the Gospels, four of their own number thought well to omit all mention of their discourses on that occasion—they were not much to boast of—they were the first buddings of

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their intellectual life. But no sooner was the Spirit poured abundantly upon them on the day of Pentecost than they began to speak. "They were filled with the Holy Ghost," says the narrative, "and began to speak." A man may have a little of the Spirit and be able to observe silence; but if he is filled with the Spirit he cannot hold his peace. "Necessity is laid upon me to preach." From their irrepressible desire to speak, many of the onlookers concluded they were labouring under the effects of "new wine." One of the first symptoms of intoxication is a strong tendency to speak. And herein there is a superficial likeness between "being filled with wine" and "being filled with the Spirit:" in either case there is a powerful desire to speak. A few chapters further on, the magistrates "straitly threaten the disciples that they speak henceforth to no man." What say they? "We cannot but speak"—a power too mighty was working within them for them to be able to keep it in check. The Holy Spirit was fermenting within them and bursting through all restraints.

In the Book of Job this spiritual impulse is aptly compared to new wine working, seething, expanding in the bottle till it either sends the cork off flying or breaks in pieces the bottle. "Elihu said, I will answer also my part; I also will show mine opinion. For I am full of matter." We are often devoid enough of matter; but Elihu, true to the nature of all enthusiastic young men, says, "I am full of matter, the Spirit within me constraineth me. Be-

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hold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak that I may be refreshed"—on the margin, "that I may breathe." There was a spirit within him, he says, constraining him; he felt ready to burst; he therefore spake that he might escape the sad catastrophe. In like manner a new power, here called the Holy Ghost, entered the hearts of the apostles and demanded full vent, and forthwith they began to speak. They could not but speak. This spiritual intoxication could not be restrained within the old barriers. No; they at once began to speak as if they laboured under the exhilarating influence of "new wine." They are drunk, exclaimed the spectators. They are drunk, intimates the historian of the Acts, but not with the new wine of earthly vineyards; rather are they excited with the mighty influences of the Holy Spirit. And need there is, my friends, that you experience this Spirit within you constraining you, this Spirit which whilst you speak makes you excited and enthusiastic, this Spirit which necessitates you either to speak to the people or else explode in your studies.

II. You will further observe that the disciples began to speak WITH OTHER TONGUES.

To speak with new tongues is a power inherent in all men; do not men speak with new tongues every year? Some of you can converse in two or three or more languages other than that in which you were born. What then did the Spirit do? He quickened

this power to an unusual degree, He infused into it fresh energy. The miracle consisted in the rapidity with which knowledge of other tongues was acquired. The first miracle recorded in the Gospels is the turning of water into wine. There is nothing unnatural in that miracle. Do we not see water turned into wine every year in the vintages of Europe? The supernatural in the act did not consist in turning water into wine, but in turning it instantaneously. The rapidity of the change it was that constituted the miracle. And the first miracle reported in the Acts is of a similar nature. The ability to speak with foreign tongues is natural enough; are not many of our friends living witnesses? The supernatural consists rather in the suddenness, the instantaneousness which characterises the whole proceeding.

But is it possible, asks the Rationalist, to acquire mastery over a new language thus? We answer that we cannot explain the phenomenon, we can only form an approximate opinion. We know that among our acquaintances some acquire knowledge with much greater rapidity than others. One will acquire an accurate mastery over a foreign tongue in one year, whilst another will require three years. Who can tell how quickly the human intellect may acquire it when filled, invigorated, inspired by the superabundant energies of the Holy Ghost? Sir William Hamilton tells us of a servant girl who, under the excitement of fever, repeated with ease and accuracy long and intricate passages from various

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authors in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Where learnt she them? She only occasionally overheard her old master read them to himself as he was walking up and down a passage in his house, and under the fiery excitement of fever she could repeat them with marvellous exactitude. He quotes several other instances to the same effect. This seems well nigh incredible to the student pondering for years over his classics and failing at last to make much progress in them. If that be the case under the excitement of fever, is it incredible to you that the disciples spoke with foreign tongues under the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit? Let God but touch one of the springs of the mind and it displays wondrous power. Man, as he now is, is only a degenerate specimen of man as he formerly was. "There were giants on the earth in those days." Adam in innocency could learn more in five minutes than we can in five years. He could instinctively, intuitively make language, a much more formidable task than to learn one already made. And man, as he now is, by no means furnishes us with a standard by which to measure the man of the future. Let sin be cast out, and the wound it has inflicted on the mind be healed up, and man will again learn a new language with as much facility as Adam made a new one at first. The Spirit descended on the disciples in the plenitude of His power, and forthwith they fluently discoursed in new tongues without undergoing the drudgery of learning them.

The Holy Spirit, it is admitted, ennobles other

faculties; then why not the faculty to speak with other tongues? He filled Bezaleel and Aholiab, and made them skilful in all things pertaining to the efficient workmanship of the Tabernacle. And I believe He still endows men with the knowledge necessary to the successful prosecution of Art. Anyhow, the chiefest works of art have been executed in connection with and under the patronage of Christianity. When the religion of the New Testament appeared, the arts and sciences were at a very low ebb. But before long the new religion poured a new spirit into society; it soon became evident that a divine power had been introduced into the world. It began to ennoble the intellect of the race. Just as you have seen a tree, after being dug around and well manured, budding out in early spring with fresh vitality, so Christianity enriched the human mind; a new spirit found ingress into it, and it began to sprout. Poetry revived under its genial, benign influences—the best poetry of the world is Christian. Painting grew under the shadow of its wing—the grand pictures are nearly all representations of scenes in the life of the Saviour. Music and Architecture also have chiefly flourished on Christian soil and in immediate connection with Christian worship.

It is noteworthy that Christianity exerts great influence on the sciences also—greater, perhaps, than many at first sight are ready to concede. When did the revival of Science and Literature take place in Europe? Not till the revival of Christianity came to pass in the days of Luther. The Reformation in

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the Church led to a reformation almost as great in philosophy. When did Science make the discovery that the sun is the centre of our system? Not till Luther discovered that Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, is the centre of religion. Luther and his coadjutors first discovered the true centre of spirits, and then was the discovery made of the true centre of the planets. Many, doubtless, will smile at this connection as fanciful and artificial; but I believe it to be vital and organic. The impetus the effusion of the Spirit gave the Church on the day of Pentecost ceased not till it moved and disturbed the whole ocean of knowledge. The same spirit continues to be the moving and refining power in modern civilisation. Stephenson was once asked, What was the power that pulled the train along the rails? He answered, The Sun. The sun was not the immediate power—that was the fire under the boiler; but he knew that science could trace back the fire of the coal to the fire of the sun. Yonder shining sun is the ultimate power which drags the heavy trains along the rails, and propels the stately steamers through the mighty main. And if you inquire what power it is that is now working in the heart of civilisation, that is pushing upward and forward all that is good and true and fair—I answer, The power of the Spirit of Christ. The sun shines not simply to promote growth and nourish life upon our earth, but also in all the worlds revolving around him as their centre. And Jesus Christ sheds His Spirit, not simply to fructify His own Church, but to

stimulate men to greater activity and to secure them better success in all branches of enterprise and knowledge.

As the sanctification of the race progresses, as sin, which lies like an incubus on the heart of humanity, hindering free movement, will be expunged, we may expect corresponding celerity in our acquisition of knowledge. I should not be at all surprised to find that the lofty mental state in which the apostles found themselves on the present occasion is the normal state of man; in other words, that what we in our present sinful condition call supernatural is the true natural. Daniel was thrown to the lions' den, and the lions hurt him not. That we call supernatural: yet I am not sure but it is the true natural—the state in which man was placed in Paradise, and in which he will find himself again by and by. Adam mingled freely with the beasts in Eden, and received no hurt. Jesus Christ, the "model man," was forty days in the wilderness with the "wild beasts," and not one of them made an attempt upon His life; and we read that in the remote future the lion and the lamb will lie down together, and a little child will lead them. The three young men in Babylon were cast into the fiery furnace, and the flame did not singe a hair of their heads. That we call supernatural: yet I am not sure but it is the true natural—the condition in which man found himself at first, and in which he will find himself again. Man was not subject to death either natural or accidental before the entrance of sin into

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the world—fire would not consume him; and man redeemed will be delivered from the law of death—he will go through the fire and not be burnt. Jesus Christ walked the sea, and Peter trod the waves to meet Him. That we call supernatural: yet I am not sure but it is the true natural—the state in which man found himself in the Paradise of old, and in which he will find himself again in the Paradise regained. The waters will not drown the redeemed man—he will walk through the rivers and they will not overflow him. Paul took hold of serpents, and they did not bite him. That we call supernatural: yet I am not sure but it is the true natural—serpents would not bite man in Eden, and they will not bite him in the future either. And the disciples on the day of Pentecost spoke with other tongues; they could converse with foreigners in their own dialect wherein they were born. That we call supernatural: I am not sure, however, but it is the true natural—the family of man once spoke the same language; and who knows but the partition walls erected between nations as the inevitable result of the confusion of languages will be totally removed, by a vast display of intellectual power on the part of the race baptized with the Holy Ghost? The Lord descended to Babel and confused the tongues—He there and then set a train of circumstances in motion which necessarily resulted in diversity of languages. The Lord descended to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and unified the tongues again—He there and then set a train of circumstances in motion

which inevitably led to a better understanding between the nations, and a more thorough knowledge of each other's languages. The miracle of the Pentecost will gradually neutralise the miracle of Babel.

Men travel now with greater speed than of old; they correspond with greater rapidity; and who can tell but that learning will move with greater ease, relieved to a certain extent from the present drudgery? There is no royal road to learning, observed the philosopher to his imperial pupil; and he was right, considering man in his present sinful condition. Nevertheless there is a royal road—let sin be purged out, and man will learn by intuition. "These signs shall follow them that believe in me: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

III. The history further shows that the disciples began to speak with other tongues the **WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD.**

They did not discourse of the ordinary but of the wonderful works of God. What are His ordinary works? The creation around us in its various ramifications. He makes the sun to rise and to set; He spreads the firmament every morning with brightness; and every spring He renovates the face of the earth. What are His wonderful works? Read Peter's sermon and you will find they are the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These

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formed the grand topics which the disciples construed into other tongues. Not nature but the Gospel; not creation but redemption. And here we may take a hint—that the only subjects worthy of the pulpit are not the arts and sciences, but the everlasting Gospel of the blessed God. One thing is specially lacking in the sermons of some of the leading preachers on this and the other side of the Atlantic—there is too little Gospel in them. Canon Liddon's are able, elaborate, philosophic disquisitions in defence of the Gospel—they would be none the worse if there was a little more Gospel in them. Henry Ward Beecher's are vivid, descriptive, poetic representations of the high morality of the Gospel; but alas! too often removed from its stable foundation in Christ to its ever-shifting basis in human nature. Be it your constant endeavour to bring as much Gospel into your preaching as you can. Bottom all your teaching concerning morality as well as doctrine upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

It is truly remarkable that the wonderful works of God are easily translatable into all languages. The Bible has long been considered the most translatable of all books. Science is not suitable for every language. Science, for instance, cannot speak Welsh. Almost all its technical terms have no equivalents in the language of the Principality. Suppose any one was to try to translate a book on Chemistry into intelligible Welsh! Why, the thing is impossible. But the Gospel can speak Welsh as

articulately as if it were a native growth of our mountains. A minister once dwelt in the hearing of an elderly lady on the importance of knowing Greek to properly understand the New Testament. "I do not mean to learn Greek," remarked the old lady afterwards, "I do not perceive the necessity of learning Greek, for my Saviour knows Welsh as well as I do. It is in Welsh that I always speak to Him, and that He always speaks to me. He knew Welsh when I was a little girl, and we have talked Welsh together ever since." The quaintness of her remark must not conceal from our view the precious truth imbedded in it—that all languages are equally known to God, that the Gospel can deliver its momentous message fully and freely in any and every dialect of man, "for there is no difference."

But the words contain a further intimation, that the disciples spoke the wonderful works of God in foreign languages with a thorough command of their peculiar idiom and accent. The Divine is always perfect, and admits of no additional polish. The disciples were taken under the immediate tuition of the Spirit of Truth, and consequently spoke with other tongues, commanding all the ease and grace and precision of natives. "There were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men out of every nation under heaven," and they declared the disciples spoke "in their own tongues wherein they were born, the wonderful works of God"—not only in their languages but in their tongues: that is, they had perfect com-

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mand of the dialect—they had the very twang of natives. This had a marvellous effect on the hearers. Native tongue has very great influence over man. The same truths, uttered in another language, though well understood, exercise not the same charm and power over the heart. Language is not a garment thrown over man which he may doff at pleasure—it has grown out of him, and belongs to him more truly than his skin. “Can an Ethiopian change his skin?” Yes, as soon as he can change his tongue. Hence in addressing people of other nations the Church should study their language, and if possible, their very dialect. When St. Paul addressed the enraged multitude in Jerusalem in Hebrew, they grew calm and attentive. Latin and Greek would only excite them; their native Hebrew at once appeased them. “And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue, they kept the more silence.”

Seeing that language is the only weapon the Gospel is allowed to wield in the propagation of itself in the world, it is of great importance that its ministers should know how to use it deftly and well. “There appeared unto them cloven tongues as it were of fire;” and the Church, to extend its sway, is allowed no other weapon than tongues set on fire by the Holy Ghost. The sword has been unsheathed in its favour before now; but its legitimate weapon is not the sword but the tongue. The sword of Oliver Cromwell was ponderous, mighty, and polished—all Europe feared the flash of that sword. But let me tell you—the tongue and pen of

John Milton did more to ensure liberty of conscience than the powerful sword of the Protector. Milton tells us that in writing his stirring, intellectual essays, he was conscious only of the use of his left hand. But if that were the case he did more with his left than Cromwell ever did with his right, to promote the cause of truth, justice, and liberty in this realm. The pen is stronger than the sword—the tongue can drown the roar of cannon. “Behold the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven with fierce winds, yet they are turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a very small member;” but it has often changed the course of the planet and turned it round about as if it were a small toy. “They who turn the world upside down have come hither also.” And this is the gift with which the Church has been entrusted—the gift of the Tongue and the Pen; and as preachers of the word you should know how to use them skilfully and successfully, and the Tongue even more than the Pen.

And I think I am right in saying that the Church leads the van in the study of languages; it is always the first to explore distant regions and to decipher unknown tongues. Commerce and love of learning have done a little in that direction, I admit; but they generally follow in the wake of the Gospel—they have not enterprise enough to precede. Who are the great discoverers of the century? Missionaries of the Gospel. Who are the first to learn the languages of distant nations, to write their

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Grammars, to compile their Dictionaries? Missionaries of the Gospel. What book is the first to speak in the barbarous tongues of the earth? The blessed book you see on this desk; but the moment the Bible speaks in those tongues they forthwith cease to be barbarous. "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common or unclean." Sin has left its deep, black marks upon language. Open your English Dictionary and you will find in the first page that three-fourths of the words owe their existence and significance to sin. But these words must gradually grow obsolete, and language be re-fashioned—the Gospel, too, will leave its mark upon the Dictionary. The Church of the present day is richly endued with the Gift of Tongues, more so than in any age since its foundation—every fresh effusion of the Spirit being followed by the certain acquisition of a new language on its part. Go to the Bible Society House in London, and you will there witness for yourselves the Church speaking in no fewer than 250 languages. That is not bad, is it? The disciples "began to speak with other tongues"—they only began; the Church continues and will continue till all nations shall have heard in their own tongues in which they were born the wonderful works of God. In studying languages we are entering into the spirit of the New Dispensation, and helping to advance the Divine purposes.

But we are not taught languages miraculously in the present day, you say. True: and so far as I can see there are valid reasons for the cessation of

the miracle. One reason is this—the Printing Press more than fills its place. Were I asked which I would rather have, the Gift of Tongues as bestowed by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost or the Gift of Tongues as bestowed by the Printing Press of modern times, I would answer, Lord, give me the printing press. Here all languages are accessible to us; here we can speak to the distant nations of the earth, and they can speak to us; here we have fixed in deep, indelible characters, the words and the thoughts of the towering geniuses of the race. What the gift of tongues did for the Church of the Pentecost, the printing press has done for the Church of the Reformation. In the library attached to this college you are more highly favoured than if you stood in the Upper Chamber and were numbered with the apostles when “cloven tongues like as of fire” appeared unto them and “sat upon each of them.”

Another reason for the cessation of the miracle is this—the labourers are more abundant. In the primitive Church there were only a few labourers, whereas there was a whole world to evangelise. There were only a few reapers, whilst the field was co-extensive with the habitable globe, and white already to the harvest. The Pentecost was the harvest feast; and now the disciples are commissioned to gather in the harvest of humanity. But how are they to set about their task? They are but a small company of illiterate people for the most part, and how are they to accomplish their work? God gives them their tools ready made—He hands them their

sickles sharpened for work. Had they to prepare their own instruments, to acquire knowledge of languages in the usual way, the night would have come on, and their ardour would have cooled before their work had been commenced. But now that exigency exists not. There are workmen enough, millions in the British Isles alone, to say nothing of Europe and America; we have ample time to provide our own tools and do our work too. There are Christians enough in England alone to learn all the languages of the earth, and to preach the Gospel to every creature in the tongue wherein he was born in less than ten years, without in the least disturbing the ordinary course of business at home. God supplied the ancient Church with the gift to speak with new tongues without undergoing the preliminary toil of learning them; for it had no time to go to Athens or Alexandria to study languages—it had only just time to make the circuit of the earth, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ. But when the Church became sufficiently numerous to afford time to master the different languages in the usual way, and yet perform its appointed task, God withdrew the miracle. To continue it would be to patronise indolence, and do for believers what they can easily do for themselves.

The present Church, therefore, is no whit behind the Church of the apostles. It has lost nothing; it has gained much. But it is objected that it has lost the gift to speak with tongues. I have been trying to show it has not lost it, that it speaks with

more tongues to-day than it ever did before. True, the manner of bestowing it is different; but the manner is nothing, the fact is everything. The miracle has ceased, but the blessing enveloped in the miracle remains. Indeed, the necessity for miracles arises out of the want and not of the wealth of the age in which they are performed. That miracles were performed in the age of the apostles but are not performed now, proves that they lacked something which we possess: the miracles were wrought to supply a conscious void which has since then been filled. If Jesus Christ miraculously turns water into wine in a certain wedding, it is a proof of deficiency in that wedding. Fortunate are the parties who can get married without the need of a miracle to cover their poverty. If Jesus Christ miraculously multiplies the loaves and fishes, it is a proof of deficiency in the neighbourhood where the miracle is performed. Happy the congregations and happy the neighbourhoods which do not require miracles to supply their material wants. If Jesus Christ miraculously heals the sick, it is a proof of a serious defect in the medical art of the age. Lucky the ages in which medical knowledge is sufficiently advanced to heal the sick without the aid of a miracle.

The miraculous ages are always the most impoverished spiritually in the history of the world. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is marked by miracles. But the necessity for them arose out of the moral dearth of the times. The consciousness of God had almost become extinct in the Hebrews

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as well as in their idolatrous oppressors. As this consciousness grew in depth and richness and vividness, the miraculous in their history continued to wax smaller and "beautifully less," till in the reigns of David and Solomon—the richest period materially, intellectually, and spiritually in the history of the nation—it ceased altogether. When the spiritual reached its height, the miraculous quite disappeared. But in subsequent reigns spiritual religion rapidly declined: in the days of Ahab the land was spiritually a desolation—the consciousness of God had again become dim. In those days therefore the gift of miracles was again revived in the persons of Elijah and Elisha; but mark—it was spiritually the most imbecile age since the redemption from the bondage of Egypt. Again spiritual religion revived and reached its climax in the times of the Maccabees; but henceforth decay set in, and when the Saviour appeared on the scene infidelity was rife among the Sadducees, and hypocrisy rampant among the Pharisees. Cant had taken the place of life. Everywhere in Judæa and out of it, the epoch was the most degraded in the annals of the race. The gift of miracles was therefore granted once more; but the necessity for it arose out of the hard-heartedness, the moral obtuseness, the total absence of the consciousness of God in the souls of men.

Miraculous is always in inverse proportion to spiritual power; where the latter grows the former declines. Will miracles be again revived in the Christian Church? Not unless spiritual religion be

threatened with speedy extinction. As long as the Divine life in the Church will continue deep and vigorous, miracles will be withheld. But should there happen a universal apostasy from spiritual Christianity, as St. Paul seems to dimly intimate, the power to work miracles may be again restored to the Church. "But let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first." And if there come a general falling away, what then? The analogies of history point to the probability of a renewal of the gift of miracles. As miracles were wrought at the dawn of history when the foundations of the Jewish Church were laid; and as they were wrought at the noon of history when the Jewish Church merged into the Christian; who knows but they will be performed again at the eventide of history, when the affairs of the present dispensation will be about to be wound up, and the Christian Church about to enter upon its glorified state? Be it yours, however, by cultivating spiritual religion in yourselves and others, to keep the evil day away, when miracles will be required to maintain the supremacy of Christianity and to keep alive the consciousness of God in the race.

IV. They began to speak with other tongues the wonderful works of God to MEN OF OTHER NATIONS. "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven; and they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another,

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Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?"

Increased life always demands increased scope for its exercise. A large addition was now made to the spiritual life of the Church—"they were all filled with the Holy Ghost;" and this increased life manifests itself, as it always does, in a strenuous effort to diffuse itself. Every life is diffusive according to its volume or internal vigour. There was no power to spread itself in religion under the Old Testament, not because there was any arbitrary decree forbidding it, but because it possessed not the internal force or momentum necessary to do so. The local, national character of the Old Testament Church arose out of the feebleness of its inward pulse, the great scarcity of its spiritual force. The Spirit was given in very scanty measures, just enough to preserve life but not to multiply life and replenish the earth. That Judaism should cover only a small portion of the globe was an absolute necessity, for it could maintain its life only by concentration.

If the fire on the hearth be small, there is but one way of keeping it burning and glowing—it must be heaped close together. Let the coals be scattered, and the fire will die out: concentration is necessary to keep it alive—the coals must keep each other warm. And under the Old Testament only a few sparks came down from heaven to earth; hence it was necessary to gather them together within the narrow confines of Palestine—scatter them and the

fire will die out. Just sufficient power resided in Judaism to preserve life but not to extend it. And in the days of the Saviour the life was well nigh gone, the fire was nearly extinguished. The zeal for sacred things evinced by the Pharisees and Sadducees was only painted fire, and painted fire will never burn. There was not enough genuine fire in the current religion to consume the least impurity. Fire—hot, hissing, glowing—was the great need of the age. “I indeed baptize you with water,” exclaims the Baptist; but water can only cleanse the surface, it can only wash away the impurities of the skin. They required another baptism, which would penetrate into the depths of their nature, cleansing them from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. “I indeed baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” And on the day of Pentecost the prediction is fulfilled. The fire first burns into the hearts of the disciples, then it begins to extend its area, and now it threatens to burn up all the stubble of the world.

This increased life reveals itself instinctively in a desire to enlarge its circumference. This desire is not so much the result of reflection as the spontaneous outcome of the new nature. Whenever the presence of the Spirit is powerfully felt in the Church, it is invariably followed by a renewed effort to evangelise the world. Let the spring impart new life to the roots of the trees, and the life will at once be transmitted to the branches, covering them with abundant foliage. Let the warm, genial months come round,

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reviving the drooping nature of the bird after the long dreary winter cold, and the bird shows it immediately in his song. He does not sing because he thinks he ought; he sings because he cannot help it; he sings because he must—the necessity arising out of the joyousness of his little heart. And it is a poor way of promoting the evangelistic zeal of the Church to demonstrate constantly what she ought to do. Ought, alas! in the history of man is only one step removed from nought. What then should we do? Why, assemble ourselves together in the Upper Chamber, and continue with one accord in prayer “till the promise of the Father” be fulfilled. Increased life will instinctively claim increased room; additional fire will naturally throw out its light and heat beyond the old boundaries. Herein consists the great desideratum in the evangelistic life of the Church of this century; and it would be well for our Presbyteries and General Assemblies to remember this—it is useless to spend days to lay down rules for the guidance of the Churches unless we also help to supply them with motive power. We trust too much to plans and organisations—there is too much reflection and self-consciousness. We want more spontaneity, more self-forgetfulness, more enthusiasm, more life.

I do not cry down organisations; they are very valuable in their proper place. But what are they after all? They are only cisterns; and cisterns, though of the most approved pattern and of the most finished make, are not of much use to quench

the burning thirst of humanity. I do not know that the Pentecostal Church had many organisations to win the world to Christ; but I do know that she had the water of life to give freely to all who were in need. The modern Church can boast of multitudinous organisations; and so far she can claim superiority to the early Church, for cisterns after all are serviceable. But I am afraid we are too well pleased with our organisations, admiring their outward shape and glitter, whilst oblivious of their emptiness and hollowness. What glorious cisterns are the Missionary Societies of this country! They have silver pipes connecting them with every country under heaven; the waterworks are laid to convey the water of life to every thirsty soul. But the results are seldom proportionate to the expenditure. The cisterns too often run dry. The coffers may be full of money or they may be empty; but in either case, Mammon claims the Report to himself, and says to the assembled multitudes in the annual meeting, "Without me ye can do nothing." I want these and kindred societies to believe, I want the Churches to believe, I want you and me to believe, that without him we can do a great many things, that without him we can do all the more important things. I want Christendom to believe less in money and more in the Holy Ghost—to believe less in splendid organisations and more in divine influences—to believe less in cisterns and more in water. How few the triumphs of Christianity at home and abroad! How tardy its onward march! Why?

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what is the cause? Lack of funds, answer our secretaries. Nay, sirs, lack of life, lack of piety, lack of the Holy Spirit of God. Had the apostles funds to back their efforts? Had St. Paul a large society canvassing the country on his behalf? And yet he preached the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and from Illyricum to the coasts of Spain. Rely on it—Gold will never cast out devils. Oh that God would breathe into our missionary and educational institutions the breath of life, and then they would become quickening spirits on the earth.

“'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
More life, and fuller, that we want.”

Reflection on the part of the Church is not to be discouraged. But stock-taking will not clothe the naked—you must have warm-hearted charity to do that. We spend too much time in surveying our property, and meanwhile our enthusiasm considerably abates. The Greek Church took stock of all the doctrines of Christianity, and reduced them into carefully-worded articles: she took the exact measurement of our spiritual life and formulated it into fine-spun definitions. But in reflection she lost her ardour, in speculation evaporated all her life. The most orthodox Church became practically a dead Church. I respect orthodoxy, but I prefer life. I respect fashion, I like men to conform to fashion, I like them to be orthodox in their mode of dressing; but if the fashion tends to kill men and women, if it presses unduly upon the free circulation of the blood,

then—away with orthodoxy, give me life and liberty and fair play. The Greek Church bound herself so tightly round the waist with definitions of truth that she could not breathe; she wound herself so ingeniously in the web of dogma that she could not move; she actually died of orthodoxy. She continues to hold all the vital truths of Christianity—she, indeed, first evolved them and explained them in her councils. She continues to wear all the habiliments of the living. But I have not heard of her sending out missionaries to evangelise the heathen; I have not heard of any special effort on her part to disseminate the truth and carry the torch of light to the dark places of the earth. She has the name to live but is dead. What then is required to awaken within her the old life and incite her to new adventures? A fresh effusion of the Holy Spirit. The new life would perforce snap the strangling cords of dogma; and the Greek Church would again become a mighty power on the earth. What is wanting to make Roman and Protestant Churches more powerful for good in the world? Another outpouring of the Holy Ghost. We have cisterns enough, pray for the living water: channels enough; pray the River of Life may flow therein: machinery enough, pray the Spirit of the living creature to enter the wheels, and then it will do more work and make less clatter—it will run with greater speed and keep less noise.

V. The disciples began to speak with other

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tongues the wonderful works of God to people of other nations, that **THEY ALSO MIGHT BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST.** "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Truth, though it be Christian truth, cannot fill man; it cannot satisfy our nature. God alone can do that. And we must endeavour to convey not only the truth of Christ, but the spirit of Christ to our hearers. "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This, of course, implies that human nature is capacious enough to take in the Spirit, which can be affirmed of no other nature in this world. Man is both finite and infinite—finite in his powers, but infinite in his wants. God is too great for our powers, He baffles our understanding, He puzzles our imagination.

"Imagination's utmost stretch
In wonder dies away."

But if He is too great for our powers, He is not too great for our wants. If He is too vast for our reason, He is not too vast for our hearts. He alone can fill us. Therefore, in order to conceive adequately the greatness of man, and to kindle within us the "enthusiasm of humanity," which was so characteristic of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, let us not think so much of our abilities as of our necessities. Our abilities are limited enough, but our necessities are verily boundless. "Let us make

man in our image, after our likeness;" and He made him in the similitude even of His infinitude. In our powers we are finite indeed, but in our wants we are infinite, and God alone can satisfy us. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

Thus we know God more by our wants than by our understanding. We apprehend Him better as a Being supplying our need than as a Being squaring with our reason. This is the God of the Gospel—a Being filling the emptiness of humanity. God in His Son fills the emptiness of human nature: God in His Spirit fills the emptiness of human persons. A question is discussed in philosophy—Can a finite mind know an infinite God? Some answer No, and others answer Yes. Sir William Hamilton and his school answer No; and from their standpoint they are right. In their philosophy man is only a logical machine, and it is impossible to bring God within the compass of a syllogism. In their system man is a compound of powers, and as such he can never "search out the Almighty to perfection." But man is something besides a bundle of powers,—he is a bundle of wants, if I may be allowed the expression; and through his wants he can know God. Do not say I cannot know the Infinite Being: I have infinite wants within me, and through the Infinite within I can know the Infinite without, and receive Him in the ample plenitude of His power and grace into my soul. We know God through the necessitous side of our nature. How does the infant six months old know his mother? He knows

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her by his wants. He knows not whether she is rich or poor, accomplished or unlearned, beautiful or plain. The child knows nothing about all that; but there is a side of his nature by which he thoroughly knows her—he knows her through his need. When he is hungry she feeds him; when he is cold she warms him; when he is in pain she soothes him. He knows her as a mother, and the mother is the quintessence of the woman. How do we know God? Just in the same way, as a God supplying our need and filling the void in our nature. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

We may be filled with Him also—so filled as to convince unbelievers, not only that we have been with God, but that He dwells in us of a truth. There is a curious invention to fill the human body with electricity. If you only approach the body so filled, it will shoot forth sparks of wild lightning. But all connection between the body and the earth must be severed; the man must stand on a non-conducting material, else the electric fluid will flow out as fast as it flows in. In like manner we may be recipients of the Divine fire—we may be filled with the Holy Ghost. And sometimes we feel as if we were getting full, we emit divine sparks at the approach of others. They are convinced that God is in us of a truth. But ere many days pass, the hallowed influences have all flowed out. We have been in too close contact with the world in its dissipating frivolities and gay pleasures; our enthusiasm has died, our zeal has been

quenched. Worldliness is the great sin of the Church in our century—it robs us of the Divine in Christian experience.

Oh, for another Pentecostal baptism! We need the Spirit now as much as ever to convert unbelievers, and to stir up the dormant energies of the Church. Why is it ministers and other Christian workers see so little fruit to their labours? Why is it the success is not commensurate with the organisations? Why is it we preach from month to month and have no souls for our hire? Some answer, The poverty of your sermons is the reason; preach better and you will have better success. That we can improve much in the matter and style of our preaching, I admit. But I do not think the true reason lies there; for I read in the Bible of another Preacher who had in glorious perfection all the qualities we lack,—spiritually-minded above the children of men, spending nights and days in earnest prayer and deep meditation on solitary mountain-tops—the best master of genuine eloquence the world ever witnessed. “Never man spake like this man.” And yet He did not succeed very well. After spending years in the ministry, He had not more than one hundred and twenty admirers at the day of His death. Every qualification met in the preacher, and yet He made but comparatively few converts. “He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” The coldness of the people of Capernaum palsied the arm of the blessed Saviour, and froze His loving words on His lips. A cold Church, an un-

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believing Church, robs itself of the choicest blessings of heaven. Let it not blame its ministers for its non-success—roses will not grow in Greenland, trees will not blossom at the North Pole. Many a minister has failed for a season, not so much because of his own incompetency as because of the unhealthiness of the climate in which He was labouring. "Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

III.

The Lame Man at the Gate of the Temple

(Hospital Sunday.)

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."—Acts iii. 6.

WHAT time had passed between the events recorded in the previous chapter and the events recorded in this we do not positively know. But one thing seems pretty evident—that the excitement of the Pentecost had subsided, that the Church had settled down in quiet and peace, and had partly ceased to draw public attention to itself. Several months, no doubt, intervened between the concluding history of the second chapter and the interesting story contained in the third.

The miracle of healing described in the context appears to have been the first performed by the apostles since the ascension to heaven of their Lord and Master. True, we read in the closing verses of the second chapter "that many wonders and signs were done by the apostles;" but the words are generally taken to be prospective rather than re-

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rospective. The first of those "works and signs" we take to be the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple.

Let me have your attention, if you please, to two points.

I. The lame man.

II. The cure of the lame man.

I. THE LAME MAN.

We are told that he was "lame from his mother's womb." Many become lame through accident or sickness; but this man was born a cripple. Luke, who was a physician, gives us to understand the cause of his decrepitude. His description of the healing process—or rather of the healing act, for there was no process—is very expressive: "Immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength." His lameness was owing to a weakness in, and perhaps, malformation of, the ankle-bones. The man had never walked—he was born a cripple.

But that hardly suffices to describe his helpless condition. The context shows that there was not the least strength in his feet, not enough even to allow of the use of crutches. We know many lame men, but most of them are able to move about with the help of artificial supports. But this man was so utterly helpless that he could not even avail himself of the aid of a crutch—he was obliged to be carried, like a new-born babe, from one place to another. Not that there was any weakness in his body, all

the weakness was in his ankles; he could not put an ounce of weight upon them—they bent under him like a bruised reed. Raphael, in his cartoon illustrating this portion of sacred story, seems to have seized this feature. He has drawn at a little distance from him another deformed man, who, however, is able to hobble along by the help of a crutch. But he has drawn this man without a crutch near him. But I think Raphael was mistaken in drawing his legs in a stiff, rigid form; it was not rigidity in the ankles he was suffering from, but extreme weakness. "Immediately his feet and ankles became firm." Before, there was no firmness in them; his feet were quite loose in their sockets, twisting about like whipcord. And not only was he lame—that of itself was a sore misfortune, and hard enough to bear; but in addition to utter impotence he was in downright poverty. He was a cripple and he was a beggar too. It is difficult to conceive a more pitiable condition. "A certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the Temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the Temple."

There were several reasons why the gate of the Temple had been selected as a propitious place for begging. For one thing, crowds of people were coming and going through it at least three times a day. Beggars generally select public thoroughfares. Besides, the people who were coming in and going out were the best men and the best women in Jeru-

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salem; the impious, unsympathetic rabble did not care to resort daily to the Temple at the appointed hours of prayer. It is the cream of society that frequent places of worship, and by cream I do not mean exactly the richest men, but the best men. Moreover, men in going to and coming from church are in a better mood for considering the poor and supplying their wants than in the tumultuous whirl of business. Those who go to the Temple to observe the first table of the Law, which commands loving and serving God, are better disposed to observe the second, which enjoins loving and serving our neighbours.

And it is a fact that almost all the alms of the world are administered at the gates of the Temple; almost all the charitable institutions of the world are dependent for their moral and pecuniary support, and almost all the benevolent movements of society are dependent for their success, on them that go up to the Temple at the hour of prayer. Just think of all the charitable institutions of London. Where does the revenue come from? Mainly from the pockets and the hearts of those who attend on the public worship of God. If money is needed for the better support and the greater efficiency of the hospitals and dispensaries of the metropolis, to whom is appeal made? Why, to the Temple-goers. I never was honoured with a letter from the Lord Mayor of London, till he thought money was required to carry out his humane object. Maybe that every man of science and every man of business also

received a letter from him, which, however, I doubt; but I am sure every clergyman of the Establishment, and every minister of Nonconformity, were honoured with a courteous epistle. Do I find fault? Certainly not,—I look upon it as a great compliment to Christianity. When money is needed to assuage the world's grief, to relieve the world's distress, men go straight to the gate of the Temple to beg. They are trying to found an Hospital Saturday, but they have founded an Hospital Sunday. It is an irrefutable testimony to the worth of Christianity.

A week or two ago I was reading a leading article in one of the daily papers. That paper and others had been warmly advocating private contributions towards the relief of the famine in India. So far, good. These papers which are going to supersede the pulpit, and do away with preaching (which means, of course, that the writers of the papers consider themselves much abler and cleverer than we poor ministers, so given are men to think of themselves otherwise than they should think), these papers had been loud and eloquent in their appeals for money. But the money did not come. Other appeals were made, louder and more eloquent. But the money did not come. As a last resort, what did the powerful paper with "its largest circulation in the world" propose to do? To have a collection in the churches, forsooth; the Mansion House Committee were to go to the gates of the Temple to beg! The churches could at once swell the Famine Fund,

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it was said, to the desired dimensions, and we were forcibly summoned to do our duty. Mind, I say not a word against a collection in the churches in aid of the Famine Fund; let the churches but understand that a million sterling is necessary to help to feed the suffering Hindoos, and the million sterling will be immediately forthcoming. But where were the readers of the paper, I should like to know? Where the "largest circulation in the world"? Could not the "Almighty Press" squeeze a little money out of its numerous readers? The appeal for money, forsooth, must be made to the churches! Do I find fault? Oh, no; it is a high compliment to Christianity, and a noble, though unintentional, compliment to the ministers thereof—they teach their hearers to be charitable at least, a virtue which the papers fail to teach their readers. The journalistic magicians struck the rock, and what did they elicit? Sparks of fire. Only the rod of Moses can make it flow a living stream to quench the thirst of the suffering millions. But Christianity is dying fast; the world can do without the churches? No, my friends, not as long as there are the lame to help, and the blind to lead, and the hungry to feed, and the poor to succour. Christianity is founded, not so much in the powers as in the needs of the race. All the beggars flock to the gates of the Temple. They sometimes sit at the gates of Trade, but they are sternly told by the voice of authority in buckram to "move on." They sometimes sit at the gates of Pleasure and of Fashion, but none save the dogs

deign to take notice of them. The beggars know that the Temple is the great almshouse of the world, and at its gates they sit in large companies, asking alms of them that pass by.

There were about ten gates to the Temple in Jerusalem, all of them very costly and very superb, mostly overlaid with silver and gold. The Jews did not as a rule grudge the most lavish expenditure upon the adornments of the Temple. But there was one gate far surpassing all others in costliness of material and magnificence of design, generally known as the Gate of Nicanor. The majority of commentators favour the view that this was the gate called Beautiful, at which was placed the impotent beggar. I, for one, should like to see to every temple in Christendom a gate called Beautiful; and I should like to see standing at the gate Lady Bountiful, to administer comfort to the blind, the halt, and the sick. I have been somewhat fortunate in my text to-day—it serves a double purpose; it serves the purpose of calling your attention to the state of the building in which we are assembled, and the desirableness of renovating it—a subject, as already announced, to be submitted to your kind consideration during the coming week; it also serves the purpose of kindling your love towards the poor and the afflicted, and of practically enlisting your sympathies in their favour. God's house should always be about the most beautiful house in the neighbourhood, and God's people must not complain if they are called upon to contribute of their earthly possessions towards its adorn-

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ment. If our congregations increase annually in wealth, God expects a part of it to flow to the sanctuary. Trade must do homage to religion, and "offer unto it gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh." When the Church was in a state of comparative poverty, a mound of earth hastily thrown up with a rude spade served it for an altar—and the mound of earth was acceptable in the sight of God. But when the Church increased in numbers and advanced in refinement and civilisation, the altar of earth was justly superseded by an altar of shittim wood overlaid with brass; instead of the rude mound, there was to be a little artistic work. Finally, when the Church had multiplied in numbers, and had increased in possessions, God was not satisfied with the mound of earth, nor with the altar of shittim wood overlaid with brass; thenceforward the altar was to be of wood overlaid with fine gold.

Do Christians increase in wealth? Let a portion of it flow to the sanctuary of the Highest; let there be built a gate called the Beautiful. And at the gate let there stand a sister of mercy to administer alms to the helpless and forlorn. "And now abideth Beauty and Charity, these two; but the greater of these is Charity." If we cannot get the two, Beauty and Charity, then let go Beauty and let us follow after Charity. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." However beautiful was the gate of the Temple, more beautiful in the sight of God and His holy angels were the hands which in tenderness and sympathy gave alms to the cripple that sat by. Beauty of

stone and of metal is not to be compared with beauty of disposition and of character. Young people, do you covet beauty? Let me tell you, you can all acquire it; and beauty acquired is incomparably better than beauty born. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Yes, and beautiful too. Once upon a time, says the legend, a dispute arose between three young ladies as to which had the most beautiful hand. One sat by a crystal stream and dipped her snowy hand into the water, and held it up. Another plucked strawberries till the ends of her tapering fingers were pink. Another gathered violets till her hands were fragrant. Thereupon an aged woman passed by, hungry, emaciated, decrepit. "Who will give me a gift," said she, "for I am poor?" All the three young ladies denied her her request; but a poor peasant girl, who stood near, unwashed in the stream, unstained by the pink of strawberries, unadorned with flowers, gave her a simple gift and cheered the aged pilgrim. Then, turning back, she asked the young ladies, with voice musical and sweet, what they disputed about, and they told her and lifted up their beautiful hands for her to decide. "Beautiful, indeed!" exclaimed she, with radiant countenance. "But which is the most beautiful?" asked they. "It is not the hand that is washed in the purling brook," said she; "it is not the hand that is tipped with delicate pink; it is not the hand that is garlanded with fragrant flowers; it is the hand which gave a gift to the destitute that is most beautiful." And as she spoke her body was slowly

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transfigured, her wrinkles gradually vanished, her staff suddenly dropped, and there flew up to heaven, in a blaze of glory, the radiant form of an angel of God. We know not the angels we pass by in contempt in the streets. They solicit alms, and we turn a deaf ear; they pray for help, and we give them a rebuff; but some day we will possibly discover that out of that wasted form of clay will emerge an angel of God. An "angel of God" did I say? I wish to correct myself and say, not an angel but a child of God. "And the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

II. THE CURE OF THE LAME MAN.

"Peter and John went up together into the Temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour," or three o'clock in the afternoon. The apostles did not abruptly sever themselves from the old dispensation; sudden ruptures never take place in the Kingdom of God. First, there is a division *in* the Church, then a division *from* the Church. That was the case at the establishment of Christianity; first, a division in Judaism, next a division from Judaism. That was the case at the time of the Protestant Reformation; first, a rent in Catholicism, then a rent from it. That was the case in the history of the Establishment in our own country; first, a schism in the body, then a schism from the body. In the present day we witness another division in the Mother Church; ere many years roll by we shall witness a division from it.

The heathen who adopted Christianity were called upon to break off at once their connection with idols; for between Christianity and idolatry there could be nothing but sheer antagonism. But the Jews who adopted Christianity were only gradually weaned from Judaism, because between Judaism and Christianity there was no radical opposition; they were both moving in the same line of religious development. One could not be an idolater and a Christian; but one could be a Jew and a Christian. "Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the hour of prayer."

As they were about to enter, their attention was called to the impotent man that sat by the gate, begging. "He asked an alms of them." He had long ago ceased hoping for anything else. However lofty his aspirations in early youth, they were now all dead and "buried, without hope of a better resurrection." He did not now expect to be anything other than a life-long cripple or anything better than an abject beggar. Forty years of helplessness and beggary will kill ambition in the most sanguine heart. We have known people who had been lying on a bed of suffering for ten years; at the close of the ten they had no ambition even to rise. If you spoke to them at the close of the first year, you would discover a shade of discontent—they had a strong desire to get up and walk. But at the end of ten years the most fiery spirit is quite tamed—ten years close confinement makes the lark forget the way to fly. "He asked an alms of them."

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“And Peter, fastening his eyes on him with John, said, Look on us.” They *fastened* their eyes on him. There was, perhaps, an unusual earnestness about his entreaty, or, which is more likely, the apostles must have felt an inward movement of soul, a sudden stirring of the Divine life, a powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, a vivid consciousness that they were richly endowed with supernatural powers. “They fastened their eyes on him”—there was terrible earnestness in their gaze, unspeakable compassion in their looks. “They fastened their eyes on him.” Is not this a characteristic feature of Christianity—that it fastens its eyes on the destitute and the sick? Science fastens its eyes on inanimate matter; Art fastens its eyes on beauty. Art going up to the Temple to pray—which, by the by, it seldom does in our day and generation—would fix its gaze on the “Gate called Beautiful,” and would turn away in disgust from the loathsome object that was craving alms of the passers-by. But Christianity going up to the Temple fastened its eyes on the poor cripple; and ever since her eyes have reverted in the direction of the helpless and forlorn. Science seeks out the secrets of the world; Art seeks out the beauties of the world; but Christianity seeks out the ills of the world, and strives hard to remove them. “They fastened their eyes on him.” There is a great deal in a look. The words of the Bible are brimful of meaning. There is often more philosophy in one of its sentences than in a score of large, pretentious octavo volumes.

“Draw out thy soul to the hungry.” Is it not enough to draw out the purse to him? No—“draw out thy soul.” Is it not enough to draw out food and raiment? No—“draw out thy soul to the hungry;” let thy spirit flow out in tenderest sympathy and deepest compassion. “They fastened their eyes on him, and said unto him, Look on us;” and thereupon the sympathising eyes of Peter caught the wondering eyes of the beggar, and the latter felt a strange sensation, like a stream of electricity, thrilling his entire system. “And Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankles received strength.”

The man sought alms; but the apostles gave him what was better—they gave him health. Health without money is infinitely better than money without health. Moreover, by endowing him with health they were conferring on him the ability to earn money; by imparting the greater they were also giving the lesser. In this the miracle was a “sign,” and typifies to us the Divine method of saving the world. The Gospel does not directly aim at improving men’s circumstances; it aims at improving men themselves. But no sooner does it bring about a moral improvement in the men than the men bring about a noticeable improvement in their surroundings. The Gospel converts the man; the man converts the house. The Gospel does not

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directly aim at increasing the material riches of a nation; it aims at increasing its funds of spiritual health; but no sooner does the nation feel new blood palpitating in every limb and member than it shakes off the lethargy of centuries, and marches fearlessly forward in the upward path of discovery and enterprise, and, as a natural consequence, riches flow in plentifully to its exchequer. The Gospel came to a world crippled in all its powers and fettered in all its faculties. It said unto it, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." "And immediately the world's feet and ankle-bones received strength." It forthwith began a career upward and forward, and Christianity has indirectly added enormously to its material riches. Which are the richest and most flourishing nations in our day? England, America, and Germany, the countries that have received most abundantly of the life and health that are lodged in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. There is a philosophy, and an admirable philosophy it is in many respects, whose direct object is the improvement of men's circumstances. Its language is, Give men better houses, higher wages, purer air, more wholesome water, and by improving their circumstances you will improve their constitutions. That is the philosophy which boasts of the name of Utilitarianism. But what says Christianity? I have in my possession the elixir of life, and I will endeavour first to improve the constitutions of men. I will give feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind, and health to the sick, and hope to the desponding; I

will strive to improve men, for I know that no sooner will men feel beating within them new and potent energies than they will set about to improve their external condition. Men need better houses, and purer air, and more wholesome water; but the great want of men is life—more life; and I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Utilitarianism *does* men good, Christianity *makes* them good.

The Apostolic Church had no silver and gold, it had only health to impart. But it is in the power of the modern Church to give both money and health. The apostles going up to the Temple had not a penny in their possession which they could give to the destitute and disabled; but assuredly the modern Church cannot plead poverty. Silver and gold the Church now-a-days has, and of its silver and gold it is occasionally called upon to give. There are in this huge city over eighty hospitals, and you will find on inquiry that every hospital is well-nigh full—full of people who have not the means to pay for professional attendance at home; and it is a duty incumbent on the Churches to maintain these institutions in a state of high efficiency. Hospitals in a special sense are the earliest and mellowest fruit of our holy religion. The idea of an hospital received shape, form, and life in the early Christian Church. I do not mean to deny that there were feeble attempts in that direction in days prior to the coming of Christ in the flesh; but among His followers the

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idea first became a principle, a duty, a power, and an inspiration. And where was the first hospital founded? I read that it was in that very city where the apostle of love laboured for a quarter of a century; where Sunday after Sunday the venerable man repeated the words, "Little children, love one another;" where first was proclaimed in distinct utterance the glorious truth, "God is love;" there—in Ephesus, the home of John—was first founded an hospital for invalids. And by what names were hospitals first known in modern civilisation? *Lazarettoes*; the very name bears on its forefront the stamp of the Gospel—*lazarettoes*, from the touching story of Lazarus sitting at the rich man's gate. And who founded the great hospitals of this metropolis? They were founded, the greater number of them, by Christians, and largely endowed by Christians, and dedicated for the most part to Christians. *Saint Bartholomew's*, *Saint Luke's*, *Saint George's*,—with a few exceptions the hospitals are all saints; they are the precious legacies of the Christianity of the past; they have a strong claim on the Christianity of the present. Silver and gold the apostles had not; silver and gold we have: and may we deem it our duty, not to say our privilege, to make ample provision for the poor sick among us!

But I also trust that in acquiring money, we have not lost what is of incomparably greater value, the faith and the courage to say to poor humanity, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." When Thomas Aquinas visited Rome,

and was shown the gorgeousness of the Papal palace, the Pope, it is said, remarked to him, "The Church in our reign cannot say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" "No," replied Aquinas, "neither can it say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'" The Church had gained in wealth since apostolic times, but it had lost in spiritual force; and the loss more than counterbalanced the gain. My friends, what think you is the state of the Church in our own age and country? She cannot say "Silver and gold have I none"—those words would be a lie on her lips. Silver and gold, I am glad to say, she has; in that there is a clear gain on apostolic times. But if we have gained in the beginning of the verse, can we say we have not lost in the conclusion thereof? Can we say without mockery to men around us, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk"? I hope we can. Hundreds who go into hospitals founded by Christian philanthropy, and supported by Christian charity, hundreds who go in as helpless as the poor cripple at the gate of the Temple, come out "able to stand and walk." But I trust that in a still deeper sense it is true. Have we not witnessed the power of the Gospel in our own midst, giving strength to the weak and life to the dead? Speak of miracles! Why, miracles have been performed in our very neighbourhood. Men dead in trespasses and sins have risen in newness of life; men crippled in the spiritual nature have received strength; men weak in their feet and ankle-bones have received fresh power—they now enter the Temple, they run in

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the way of the Divine commandments, they leap for joy-like harts on the mountains of spices. The Church is fast increasing in riches; let us pray that it may also increase in the power to impart health to men "lame from their mother's womb."

IV.

The First Persecution of the Church.

“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”—ACTS iv. 1, 2.

THE healing of the impotent man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple created intense excitement among the people, and drew a large multitude together into the porch or colonnade of Solomon. “When Peter saw it, he answered unto the people”—he dealt with the question naturally rising in their hearts. A portion of the sermon is reported in the third chapter; but before he brought it to a proper conclusion, he was rudely interrupted by the Temple police and “put in hold” till the following morning. “Rudely interrupted,” I say, for the historian evidently wishes to convey that idea. “As they spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees came upon them”—rushed suddenly upon them and carried them away with violence.

A careful reader will easily perceive that Peter does not follow out his train of thought to a proper conclusion. He breaks off suddenly in the middle.

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“Unto you first,” says he in the last verse of the preceding chapter, “God having raised His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” “Unto you first;” but the first always requires a second, which, however, is not forthcoming. He was abruptly stopped in the progress of his discourse and put, together with John, in custody for the night.

But why was Christianity then and afterwards persecuted in the persons of its ministers? Why did the priests and the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees come suddenly upon the apostles and put them in prison? The second verse answers: “They were grieved because they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” In this verse we find in simple words the true philosophy of all persecution.

I. The authorities were offended because the apostles taught.

II. They were offended because they taught the people.

III. They were offended because they taught the people through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

I. The authorities were offended because the apostles TAUGHT. They were “grieved.” The language means that they were vexed and annoyed; the sight filled them with pain and roused their indignation. This is emphatically true of the priests. Account for it as you like, but the priests looked

upon themselves as the only lawfully constituted teachers of the people, and viewed with jealous eye any agency that was likely to put their authority in jeopardy. They were vexed and annoyed that the apostles should take upon themselves to teach.

I. They considered that the apostles were not *personally qualified* to discharge the important duties of public teachers. A little further on it is said they perceived they were "unlearned and ignorant men." The translation is not so felicitous as might be wished. The word "unlearned" refers to their educational disqualifications: it means they had not been regularly trained in Rabbinical lore—they were not brought up to letters—they were "agrammatoi." Men in every age lay undue stress upon "Grammar." Not to have been trained in the public schools is of itself almost sufficient to secure the verdict against any man who aspires to the office of a teacher. And the apostles had not been to the accredited colleges of the nation, they had not "learned letters." That of itself was enough to seal their doom in the minds of the authorities. The "priests" and their unscrupulous confederates burnt with indignation that "unlearned men" should presume to teach. Human nature is ever the same. The priests are still grieved that men who are no scholars should undertake to decide what is truth and what is error.

But were not the priests right? Was not lack of scholarship a fatal drawback? It is necessary we should learn to distinguish between scholarship and learning. Scholarship is proficiency in words and

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forms and man's opinions about things. Learning, on the other hand, is a large sympathy with life and a deep insight into the eternal truth of things. In the priest, whether of that or other ages, we see scholarship; in the apostles we see learning; and the learning of the latter is infinitely preferable to the scholarship of the former. But in the case before us the men of scholarship looked down contemptuously upon the men of learning. Does that surprise you? It has been repeated over and over again in the history of our own country. Did not the clergy sneer at the ministers of Dissent—Bunyan and his contemporaries—whom they now indeed emulate each other to honour? "They build the tombs of the prophets,"—as we witnessed a few years ago in the grand proceedings at Bedford at the unveiling of the statue of Bunyan,— "and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore be they witnesses to themselves that they are the children of them which killed the prophets." Do we then find fault with them for building the tombs and chiselling the statues? Certainly not. The best thing is to honour the living prophets, the next best is to respect and perpetuate the memory of the dead prophets.

I fear there is still a secret tendency in the men of scholarship to look down with pitiful contempt on those who lack it, however worthy in other

respects they may prove themselves to be. One fact the history of the Church has indisputably demonstrated—that scholarship alone, however valuable it may be as an accessory, is not a sufficient qualification to teach the people; the mere scholars more frequently fail than succeed. I do not say that scholarship is a disadvantage; so far as it goes it is an element of power. What I say is that mere scholarship does not fit a man to be a public instructor. But though scholarship alone is not a sufficient qualification, yet learning is; and better still to have both scholarship and learning. The ministry of the apostles was characterised by learning, the ministry of the Middle Ages by scholarship; let us hope that the ministry of the future will be distinguished for its happy combination of both scholarship and learning.

2. The authorities were further of opinion that the apostles were not only disqualified educationally, but that they had no *official right* to teach. "They perceived they were unlearned and ignorant men." The word "unlearned," as already stated, refers to their want of scholarship, but the word "ignorant" to their unprofessional standing in society. They were "idiotai"—men of no profession, private individuals, in a word, laymen. And the professionals were very indignant that laymen should presume to teach, that parties outside the sacred pale of the sacerdotal order, and not commissioned by any legal or recognised authority, should set themselves up as teachers. It was tacitly understood that the

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"idiotai" were not to teach. Laymen were considered very ignorant men; the "idiotai" suggested idiots. The priests claimed an exclusive right to teach. This, however, had not always been the case in Jewry. The rights and ceremonies of religion only had been deposited to the safe keeping of the priests; the *teaching* of the people was entrusted principally to the prophets. The mind of the Lord was revealed not through the priests but through the prophets. But prophecy had long died out, and the priesthood had stepped into its place. The priests naturally assumed the functions of the prophets, and at length came to look upon themselves as the only rightful teachers of the nation; and having once possessed themselves of the power they guarded it most jealously. When the apostles claimed the right to teach, the authorities promptly met their claim with imprisonment.

Does it seem strange to you that the Jewish priests should be grieved because laymen claimed and exercised the right to address public assemblies? The same thing has occurred over and over again in Europe. A broad line of demarcation was drawn between the clergy and the laity, so that those on that side could not cross over to this, and those on this side could not pass over to that. The priest could not discharge the duties of the layman—once a priest, always a priest. And the layman could not discharge the duties of the priest—the shoemaker was sternly told to keep to his last. The now famous pedlar of Elstow was charged with insolence,

irreverence, and disloyalty for daring to stand up to deliver himself of the warm, mighty, living truths burning and blazing in his soul. The police came suddenly upon him and immured him in Bedford jail for twelve long years. He had not committed theft, nor perpetrated murder, nor even refused to pray for the Sovereign; yet he was put and carefully kept in hold during the prime of life. Why? What evil had he done? This—that he, a layman, one of the “idiotai,” should venture to trespass on the prohibited preserves of the priests! This mischievous spirit is still smouldering in certain sections of society. The ministers of Nonconformity are frequently denounced as obstinate schismatics and irreverent intruders upon an office to which they have no right. It is denied that we belong to the order of the priesthood; and, indeed, the denial is true. We do not claim to belong to the order of the priests, but we do sometimes humbly venture to think we belong to the class of the prophets. Others shall, if they like, belong to the former, but we belong to the latter; and we pray the day will never again dawn upon England when the priests will judge it their duty or shall have it in their power to imprison and kill the prophets.

II. The authorities were offended because the apostles taught the PEOPLE.

1. Some felt vexed and grieved on *personal* considerations, for the apostles, labouring to enlighten and convert the people, were indirectly undermining

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the power of the priests. The heyday of priestcraft is generally the "times of ignorance," and to continue its heyday it naturally desires the prolongation of those times. I do not mean to aver that human nature is necessarily worse in a priest than in others.

But self-interest and love of power, wherever they prevail, are very potent and dangerous elements—they carry the strongest minds captive. To protect their own interests the priests naturally wished the prolongation of the night. The rising of the Sun provoked their bitterest opposition. Indeed, they conspired together and slew Him who was the "Light of the World," but not before a few others had caught the light from Him. Peter and John held out the lamp of knowledge to the people of Jerusalem, and the authorities rushed upon the lamp-bearers and endeavoured to break the lamp. With what result? With the simple result of smashing the glass and letting the flame burn more intensely than before and kindle scores of other lamps. The apostles swung the Torch of Truth before the wondering multitudes; the torch-bearers were cast into prison. Nevertheless, that day five thousand other torches were kindled which persecution and even blood could not quench. "Howbeit many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men was five thousand."

2. Others felt annoyed on *ecclesiastical* grounds. The then hierarchical system—the irksome traditions and the frightful superstitions overlaying the original Mosaism—was built up on the dense ignorance and

the shameful degradation of the people. The priests knew, through the instinct of self-preservation, that the enlightenment of the people meant virtually their deposition. They, therefore, persecuted the Sowers of Light. The Jewish nation had at this time sunk into blacker ignorance than in any previous period in its history. "Woe unto you, lawyers, because ye took away the Key of Knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering ye hindered." A fearful charge that to be brought against the avowed leaders of a people! They had taken away the Key of Knowledge. They denied the people all opportunity to study the Divine Word and all incentives thereunto, and eventually fell into the same intellectual sloth that they were encouraging in others. They took away the Key, and made no use of it themselves.

The people had to receive implicitly and unquestioningly the word of priests and rabbis as to what the Will of God was; or worse still, they had to believe implicitly and unquestioningly their interpretation. They were denied the right to search and judge for themselves. "This people who knoweth not the law are cursed." A terrible power this to be lodged in the hands of any body of officials, however upright and scrupulous—the power to interpret God to men, whereas those men have neither the power nor the right to check, correct, or in any way modify the interpretation. The Jewish priests had now the monopoly of the Divine Word, which means that they had in their own hands the destiny of man both

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in this world and that which is to come. This monopoly plunged the people into an elaborate system of lifeless traditions and burdensome superstitions. And when the apostles demanded back the Key and desired to lead the people into the hidden dwelling place of truth, with what reward did they meet? "The priests and the Captain of the Temple and the Sadducees came suddenly upon them" and cast them into prison.

Does that surprise you? I know it does not. History repeats itself: and the history of Judæa has been enacted over again in Christendom. The Key of Knowledge was taken away from the teeming populations of European lands, and the Scriptures were allowed to lie in an unknown language. What had God to say to His creatures? Mankind had to wait obsequiously upon the priest for an answer, and what a horrible answer they got we know only too well. Luther on the continent and Wycliffe in England endeavoured to unlock the treasures, to translate the Scriptures into the popular language, and to scatter broadcast the knowledge of the Divine Will. What rewards did they receive at the hands of the high officers in Church and State? They were cursed, vilified, excommunicated, and hunted about like partridges on the mountains. Nevertheless the translation of the Bible into the vernacular of Germany, and the translation of it into the vernacular of England, caused the Papal hierarchy to topple to its ruin in those countries. Wherever the Scriptures were translated into the popular lan-

guage and distributed among the masses, the Papal superstition fell. Mark that well. Where does it still stand? In countries where the Bible is not translated, or, if translated, not distributed among the people. Priests still forbid laymen to peruse and expound the Scriptures for themselves—they must believe on authority; and whosoever dares dispute the Papal authority is put under the withering ban of the Church. The essence of Romanism is to believe on authority; the essence of Protestantism to believe on proof.

3. Others felt annoyed on *civil* grounds. They would say as all despots have in effect said—"Knowledge is power. If you educate the people, you put into their hands a most dangerous weapon which they have not the wisdom to use. What if they apply it to the dread purpose of revolution? We do not deny that knowledge is in itself good; but it is capable of being converted into infinite evil; and he who undertakes to teach the people is playing a dangerous game; and to avert the evil, we will refuse the good." That has always been the language of despotism, spiritual and political; and forthwith it proceeds to fetter, and if need be, to kill the champions of popular education. The apostles appealed to the people and strove to enlighten them; the authorities therefore rushed upon them suddenly and put them in hold.

No doubt, knowledge is a tremendous power. All knowledge is, and especially religious knowledge; and often, alas! it has been converted to mean,

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vulgar ends. But are we to reject the use of a thing because of its frequent abuse? Do not have fires, and you will have no conflagrations. Are we then to banish fires from our houses, because other houses have been burnt down? It may be affirmed that Knowledge multiplies evil. I admit it; but my answer is—It multiplies good more abundantly. “The law entered that the offence might abound.” Is that a valid objection against the law? Would it be better if the law had never entered? Certainly not; for “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Law proved in the long run more advantageous to good than to evil. Light, no doubt, does multiply the shadows; shall we on that account declaim against the sun? You can have a world without shadows if you like, but it must be a world without light—a dreary, gloomy, wretched world enough.

III. We have seen that the authorities were enraged on account of the character of the teachers, and on account of the character of the taught. I have now to remark that the principal cause of the offence was in the character of the TEACHING. “They were grieved because they taught the people and preached through Jesus”—in Jesus—“the resurrection from the dead.”

1. The teaching of Peter and John reflected deep discredit on the *tribunals* of the nation. How? Did they raise their voices against them or incite the people to rebellion? No. But they could not “preach

by the example of Jesus the resurrection from the dead" without fixing a deep stain on the courts of the nation. The leading members of those courts had conspired together against the Christ, had condemned Him to death, had delivered Him to wicked hands to be crucified; but yet God had raised Him up from the dead. That was the burden of their ministry. Now the resurrection of the Saviour was a complete vindication of His character; but to vindicate His character was to brand the character of His judges. Therefore those judges were irritated beyond measure that they should preach by the example of Jesus the resurrection from the dead. In their furious madness the infant Church saw the fulfilment of the prophecy, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" (ver. 25). You have seen a spirited unmanageable horse snorting wildly and plunging desperately—his eyes flashing fire, his nostrils breathing thunders. That is the very figure used in this chapter to describe the raging of the Jewish authorities against the Gospel—they were like wild beasts, filled with foolish and unreasonable fury.

2. Their teaching moreover was *new*. The Pharisees were very much in love with the old. The more ancient an interpretation the better it was. The fathers were deemed wiser than their descendants. And the Pharisees considered themselves the conservators of the old—the stout champions of orthodoxy. But what is orthodoxy? Is it love of the truth? Not alway, but love of an old way of presenting the truth. Love of the truth is about

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the finest excellence that can belong to man; but love of a special mode of presenting the truth and an uncompromising hostility to all others displays pitiable narrowness and bigotry. The Pharisees were the champions of orthodoxy, and in confederacy with the other sections of the Jewish Church put the apostles on their trial for healing the lame man. The Sanhedrim assembled—the court had to decide between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The miracle they could not deny; from the first they admitted the genuineness of the cure of the impotent man. The question was, “By what power or by what name have ye done this?” The gist of the examination was this: “We do not deny the validity of the miracle, we are not here to inquire into its genuineness or spuriousness; but we should like to know who gave you the authority, and in whose name you have performed it.” In other words, they only inquired into the legality of their commission—they only wanted to know if they were orthodox. And the whole trial turned upon that hinge. Were the apostles orthodox, yea or no? You know the conclusion they arrived at—the apostles were branded as heretics and forbidden to heal or to preach any more in the name of Jesus. We should never forget, in the study of Church history, that the apostles, and even the blessed Saviour himself, were charged with heresy and persecuted to death on account of it.

This teaches us two lessons. The first is that we should be careful not to reject any doctrine because

of its novelty, nor call the advocates of new opinions by bad, unpopular names. Every truth—of science as well as theology—was considered heresy on its first promulgation. Christianity was considered a damnable heresy by the Jewish Church; Protestantism was put down as a fearful perversion of sound doctrine by the Roman Catholic Church; and many views now labelled “poison” by the Protestantism of the day will be incorporated in the creed of the Church in a century to come. The heterodoxy of one age is the orthodoxy of the next. Truth is first crucified, then raised from the dead, then exalted to the throne and adored. The heterodoxy of one age is the orthodoxy of the next. Truth is first crucified, then raised from the dead, then exalted to the throne and adored. The heterodoxy of the first century has been the orthodoxy of the eighteen centuries succeeding.

The next lesson is not to refute what we deem heresy by imprisonment. Jesus Christ argued with the people of Jerusalem, and they took up stones to cast at Him. It is a very easy but a very foolish way to meet an argument with a stone. And yet it has been the universal practice till recently; opinions have been punished with incarceration and sometimes with death. The Christians hold certain views concerning life and death, and according to the text the Jews persecute them. Among Christians again, certain parties hold views different from the majority and they are burnt. Roman Catholics persecute Protestants, and Protestants in their turn

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persecute one another. Mankind are extremely slow to learn that it is a mean, dastardly, cowardly thing to kill a man for an opinion.

3. Their teaching, moreover, flatly *contradicted* that of an influential section of the hierarchy. The Sadducees are here mentioned by name. We are in comparative ignorance concerning the creed of these men; but we know enough to make the statement that it was in the main negative. It was not so much believing as disbelieving. They were the sceptics of the day, denying the resurrection and the future life. They probably prided themselves on how little they believed. They would no doubt style themselves broad thinkers; but certainly they were not broad believers. Breadth of thought is in our time, too, preferred to breadth of faith. But there is something fundamentally wrong, it appears to me, with the man whose broad thinking leads to narrow believing. I suspect that lax thinking is mistaken for broad thinking! Indeed I have no hesitation in asserting that those who consider themselves broad thinkers are about the laxest thinkers I know. Broad thinking should always lead to broad believing, and where the faith is feeble, it is to me a proof positive that the thinking is lax.

Anyhow the Sadducees conspired with the other parties to peremptorily suppress the teaching of the apostles. They especially felt aggrieved that they should preach "by the example of Jesus the resurrection from the dead." They were much irritated, and therefore conspired to put the disciples out of

the way. In the Gospels the merciless hostility of the Pharisees is in the forefront—the Sadducees flit to and fro in the background. But in the Acts the fierce enmity of the Sadducees it is that comes to the forefront, whereas that of the Pharisees partly recedes; for in the Acts the fact and the doctrine of the resurrection find a more prominent place. The Pharisees were the most active opponents of Jesus Christ, but the Sadducees were the most active opponents of the apostles, for the reason already adverted to—that they were mainly the witnesses of His resurrection.

The priests, and especially the Pharisees, would be deemed a very credulous people; the Sadducees, on the other hand, a very critical and sceptical people. The first prided themselves on their much faith, the others on their little faith. The first had a very long creed, the others a very short creed. The Pharisees would be classed with the orthodox, the Sadducees with the free thinkers. But you perceive here that both parties were alike cruelly inspired by the detestable, bloodthirsty spirit of persecution. Scepticism knows how to imprison and behead its opponents as well as superstition. Judging from the rash diatribes of infidelity, you would think that superstition—in other words, religion, for all religion is put down as a species of superstition—is the only source of persecution. If I mistake not, infidelity is a still more prolific source. Fierce persecutions, instigated by narrow-minded priests, stain the annals of the past. I fear from the drift of much of modern

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thought, and the deep tone of supercilious bitterness assumed by many of the avowed champions of unbelief, that persecutions instigated by bigoted atheists will stain the annals of the future. The believers—to our sorrow we confess it—did put to death the independent thinkers of the past; the free thinkers, I fear, will retaliate with a vengeance and put to death the believers of the future.

But have not the champions of infidelity always advocated liberty of action, of speech, and of thought? Yes, they have; not, however, because the central principle of infidelity is favourable to liberty, but rather because liberty was denied them. Refuse a despot his freedom, and forthwith you convert him into a champion of the people's rights. Infidels claimed liberty at the hands of the authorities on personal grounds—not because their teaching in its inner spirit was favourable to it. Unbelief, not faith, is the real source of persecution. Let men believe in God, and that He is stronger than the devil; let men believe in truth, and that it is more potent than error; let men believe in right, and that it will and must prove triumphant over might—let men believe all that energetically, truly, profoundly, and they can afford to be patient, they will see the futility of resorting to any force save the intrinsic force of truth, they will learn to be tolerant, they will extend to others as they claim to themselves liberty of thought and of speech. The truth of liberty is based in religion, not in unbelief. What has unbelief done on behalf of liberty? It has written. What has

Christianity done? It has bled. Infidels have pleaded for it, but Christians have died for it. Liberty, like every other good, is founded upon suffering. But the suffering of whom? Not of infidels, but of saints. Infidelity, we admit, has given something to the cause of freedom—it has given liberally of its ink. But Christianity has given liberally of its best blood. “Before there are men who demand liberty and digest the theory of it, there must be other men who take it, and who suffer for having taken it. If liberty is consolidated with speech and pen, it is founded with tears and blood; and the sceptical apostles of toleration conveniently usurp the place of the martyrs of conviction.” “What we want,” rightly observes a revolutionary writer, “is free men rather than liberators of humanity.” In fact, liberty comes to us above all from those who have suffered from it. “The priests and the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees” rushed suddenly upon the apostles and “put them in hold.”

Did their imprisonment check the mighty progress of the Gospel? Nay, rather did it help it forward. “Many of them that heard the Word believed.” Times of persecution are generally times of much spiritual prosperity. Some of the early martyrs had for their mystic symbol a candle surrounded by a crowd of angry men puffing as hard as they could to blow it out; but the harder they puffed the more brightly burnt the candle. The more Christianity was persecuted the more lustrously it shone in the darkness around it. The English Reformers were

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sorely harassed, but did they abandon the cause of Protestantism? No. Some of them devised an anvil for their coat of arms with the striking motto, "The anvil hath broken many hammers." They stood still, and let the persecutors hammer away at them with might and main. Christianity did not decline—the anvil broke all the hammers. Protestantism still flourishes; Christianity is to-day the mightiest power in the world. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Apostolic Teaching.

"They taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."—ACTS iv. 2.

A TOLERABLY full report of two or three of St. Peter's sermons is given us in the Acts, and we may take for granted that those reported are fair specimens of his ordinary preaching. A striking likeness runs through them in style and matter. As to style he deals largely in quotations from the Old Testament, and shows how those quotations were fulfilled in the history of Jesus Christ. He continually holds up to the contemplation of the Jews the striking correspondence between the writings of the prophets and the life and death and resurrection of the Saviour, adducing this correspondence as a proof of the Messiahship of the latter. Then in respect of matter, it may be summed up in one sentence—"Whom ye have slain, but whom God hath raised up." It was not necessary for the apostles to bear witness to His death, for that was as well known to the public of Jerusalem as to themselves. He was put to an "open shame," and nobody disputed the fact. But

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His resurrection was not an "open" triumph—He showed not Himself to the public, but to the select company of His followers. His resurrection, therefore, resolved itself into a matter of testimony, which testimony formed the chief burden of apostolic teaching. Accordingly we find the resurrection of Christ to be the refrain to every public utterance of theirs—it formed the peroration to every sermon. Reading the Epistles we cannot help observing a slight difference in the tone of the teaching. The resurrection is abundantly affirmed in them also; but still the atonement of Christ receives more attention than His resurrection, and the doctrinal significance of the resurrection more than the fact. How then to account for this difference? On this wise: in the Acts the apostles are speaking to men *without* the Church, in the Epistles they are speaking to men *within* the Church. Addressing unbelievers, they dwell on the simple facts of the Saviour's history, especially His death and resurrection. Addressing believers, they make a move forward, and taking the bare facts for granted, they expatiate on the doctrinal significance of those facts.

When I spoke to you before from these words I treated them in their relation to the context, and propounded as the subject of our discourse—*The Philosophy of Persecution*. To-day I shall isolate them, and propound as a fit subject for our meditation—*The Teaching of the Apostles*. The text divides itself into three sections:—

- I. They TAUGHT.
 II. They taught the PEOPLE.
 III. They taught the people THROUGH JESUS THE
 RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

I. They TAUGHT. Now the idea of "teaching" is compounded of two elements. The first consists in drawing out the mind and making it work on the object-matter presented to it. The second consists in presenting the object-matter to the mind, in bringing within its ken the proper materials of knowledge. The first is represented in the word *education*, the second in the word *instruction*. The same twofold process is observable in the world of senses. First, there must be power in the eye to see. Next, there must be light outside the eye as an element in and on which the faculty of sight may exercise itself. Eyes without light are purposeless; light without eyes is useless; good eyes and good light are necessary to clear vision.

I. Now Christianity is an educator of men in the first sense—it teaches them to *think*. That is the meaning of the word "educate"—to lead out the mind, to develop its dormant faculties. And this the Gospel is eminently calculated to do. Science, no doubt, demands thought; but it is too abstruse and too dry to *excite* thought. But the Gospel not only demands it, but is eminently adapted to excite it. The masses of men expend, perhaps, more thought upon religion than upon any other subject. The little thinking they do is chiefly in connection

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with the religion of Jesus Christ. And it stimulates thought not only in the vulgar, but also in the learned. Say what you will, Christianity has called forth more thought than either philosophy or science. Go to the British Museum—look at the piles of books there. I hazard the opinion that four out of every five discuss the problems of Christianity, some favourably and others adversely. There is a subtle, indescribable quality in Christianity eminently calculated to provoke thought. Just as the rising of the sun drives away slumber, the rays thereof quietly but effectually tickling the drowsy eye into wakefulness, so Christianity pours such a flood of white radiance on the eyes of the mind that it feels constrained to open them. Without doubt, Christianity is a wonderful provocative of thought. It stimulates the human mind wherever it goes. Previous to the advent of Christ, human thought in Judæa was calm as a lake on a summer eve; but no sooner was He born than great excitement blazed up throughout the land. “When Herod heard these things, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.” “When He entered, the whole city was moved, saying, Who is this?”

The presentation of Christianity to the mind constrains thought; and in the exercise of thought the world learns to think. The angel Uriel came down to Eden in search of the devil—so at least it is pictured in the “Paradise Lost;” and noticing a toad crouching at Eve’s ear, he touched it with his mystic wand and up sprang an angel. A fallen one,

it is true, but an angel still. Christianity possesses similar powers of transformation. If it only touch the rude, unlettered boor, there gradually will be unfolded a holy angel, glowing with enthusiasm for all that is noble and divine. Cast a glance at the wide, wide world. Which nations are the foremost in civilisation? The nations which have come most largely under the influences of Christianity. The religions of the heathen nations are to-day the greatest obstruction on the way of their progress. Up to a certain point they induced a mental movement forward—they developed thought; but through that point there runs a hard and fast line beyond which their adherents cannot go. Mahometanism is now acting as a restraint on the growth of the Arab and other tribes subjugated to its yoke. At first it infused into them a new life—they made several rapid strides forward; but now it acts as an irksome check. Buddhism acts like a nightmare on the nations of the East. Up to a certain stage it admitted and encouraged growth in the millions of India and the adjoining countries; but now they have been stationary for many a long century—thought is practically dead. The religion of Confucius presses like an incubus on China; thicker than the reputed great wall environing the empire, it effectually restrains all tendency to expansion. Those religions have subsisted long; but they have subsisted by repressing the mental and spiritual development of the nations respectively professing them. But no one will hazard the opinion that Christianity

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has lived by restraining the intellectual activity of the people professing it. On the other hand, Christianity provokes thought. Philosophy taught the learned to think but entirely neglected the masses. But Christianity aims at making every man a thinker, thereby restoring the creation to its pristine ideal. Man—what is its derivation? A Sanskrit word meaning a *thinker*. Man, mind, thinker. Man, to be man, must be a thinker. And Christianity, aiming at the development of man in the totality of his being, must teach him to think. Not only to be, to do, and to suffer, but also to think.

2. Christianity is an educator of men in another sense—it teaches them to *know*. That is the meaning of the word “instruct”—to pile up in the mind the proper materials of knowledge. No amount of hard thinking answers its ultimate purpose, unless it leads to knowing. Now Christianity brings the materials of knowledge within the reach of the human mind. An essential condition of knowledge is that there be something to be known, that the subjects be capable of human cognition; for what lies beyond our scope is to us as if it were not. And Jesus Christ and His apostles taught the people in the sense that they presented to them, and urged on their attention, subjects of the greatest moment; they brought Divine light to the mind, and in some cases into the mind. Therefore, Christianity is aptly described as a Revelation: that is, it brought Divine verities within the sweep of our intellectual vision, verities which before lay inaccessible to us.

This confers a vast advantage on us as compared with the mighty minds which lay outside the sphere of Revelation. The illustrious philosophers of old had learnt to think, but had never learnt to know. They are renowned, not for the amount of their knowledge, but for the amount of their thinking. Their proficiency in thinking was astonishing—indeed, they evolved and formulated the laws of thought for all succeeding generations. Nevertheless it was very little they knew; the quantity of their knowledge was small, and the quality thereof poor. Great thinkers but small knowers. The act of thinking they did well, but the materials of knowledge such as they sought and longed after lay too far for them. They had excellent eyes, keen and practised; still they did not see very far, and what little they did see was shrouded in obscurity. Why? Did the fault lie with the eyes? No; they had good eyes, but they lacked light. But this much-needed light the Gospel abundantly supplies. "I am the Light of the World." The ancients were straining their eyes to see in the dark; but we enjoy the light of day; we can, therefore, see more without straining than they by straining. Our eyes, maybe, are not so strong as theirs; but we can see more notwithstanding, because the medium through which we see is clearer, and the objects have been brought nearer. "Learn to think," was the maxim of ancient philosophy. "Learn to know as well as to think," is the maxim of Christianity.

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except as it leads to knowing; and Christianity as a system of instruction conjoins *thinking and knowing*, thereby perfectly fulfilling our idea of teaching. There is a school of philosophy which disparages unduly mere thinking, which runs down inordinately the metaphysics of the ancients, and which advises men to turn aside from those high and abstruse subjects, and to confine their thinking to physical science—to that region where thinking will lead to positive knowing. This school—sometimes called the Positive, and sometimes the Utilitarian—judges the thinking by the subsequent knowing, it estimates thought by its material results. Now Christianity avoids this extreme—it encourages thinking more or less for its own sake, and presents to the mind grand and momentous problems where the thinking does not always lead to positive knowing. Instead of joining the positive philosophy to exclude metaphysics, the genius of Christianity is certainly in sympathy with it, the profoundest Christian thinkers in every age feeling impelled by a kind of natural instinct to grapple with the questions which baffled the giants of ancient days. Another school of philosophy swings to the other extreme—it unduly exalts thinking, and seems unwisely to disparage knowing. “If God,” says Lessing, “was to hold Truth in one hand, and Search after Truth in the other, and offer me my choice, I should with all deference choose the Search after Truth in preference to the Truth itself.” Students of history will be able to recall memorable sayings of other illustrious

authors to the same effect. They seem to put the whole value of study in the mental perfection the mind attains in the continued exercise of thinking. No doubt the reflex influence of study on the mind is valuable, and Christianity fully acknowledges it. But they put too little stress on the Truth itself. To think is well, but to know is better. To hunt for Truth is commendable, but to catch Truth is more satisfactory. The Greek philosophers hunted well—"they were mighty hunters before the Lord;" but it was very little they caught. We do not hunt so well, nevertheless we catch more. The children in our Sabbath schools know more of God and the soul and eternity than the most accomplished writers of classic times. Christianity lays more stress on thinking than the Positivists; it lays more stress on knowing than the Transcendentalists; and thus it is the reconciliation of the opposite schools of philosophy. It does not impose on us the difficult task of making a choice between Search after Truth and Truth itself—it encourages the one and imparts the other. It bids us seek for Truth, assuring us at the same time we shall not seek in vain. Seeking will inevitably lead to finding. Thus Christianity fulfils the two-fold idea of teaching—it stimulates thought, and it gives knowledge.

II. They taught the PEOPLE. Keen students of history, sacred and profane, are able to discern two stages in religion.

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us Reverence for the *High*—worship of that which is above us. Man is born without reverence; and the first essential in the education of the race as of the individual, is to cultivate a sense of reverence, especially for that which is above us; in other words, reverence for God. This the religion of the Old Testament was eminently calculated to produce. The God of Judaism was strong and holy, and separated from humanity by an awful gulf—precisely the Being to awaken the sense of reverence in the worshippers. He is seldom ever mentioned in the Old Testament but some sublime epithet or magnificent description is appended; for the prime object of the Old Testament religion was to engender reverence in the human breast. The religions of nature served to engender fear; but a religion of Revelation, such as Judaism, was necessary to engender reverence. And it may safely be alleged that Judaism answered its purpose well in this respect—the sense of reverence became very powerful in the Hebrew people, so powerful that they always bowed respectfully at every mention of the Divine Name, so powerful that at last they shrank from pronouncing it at all. Such reverence is spurious, you say. Perhaps; but the spurious always bears testimony to the genuine, imitation always bears witness to reality. That, then, is the goal of Jewish culture—profound reverence for the High.

2. But Christianity marks a second stage in religious culture—it teaches us to reverence not only that which is Above us, but also that which is

Under us. It teaches us not only to render worship to God, but also to compassionate and succour those who are below us in the social scale. This constitutes a characteristic feature of Christianity—it endeavours to teach the “people,” to alleviate the lot of the great masses of men. Contemplate for a moment Plato’s Republic—the ideal commonwealth of ancient philosophy. The population thereof is divided into three classes—the philosophers who govern, the soldiers who fight, and the people who serve. But what is the condition of the people? Why, they are immured in slavery the most abject and helpless, without even a hope of escape. Plato never entertained the idea that the vast bulk of mankind are capable of being enlightened, elevated, made pure and wise. But Jesus Christ cherished a larger hope of the human race, and addressed Himself directly not to a few choice and trained spirits, but to the “great multitude,” and it is recorded that the “common people heard Him gladly.”

John the Baptist sent to ask Him the evidences of His Messiahship. “The blind receive their sight,” replied He, “the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up,” and, as the crowning proof, “the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.” This latter sentence may be translated in two ways—“the poor have the Gospel preached unto them,” or “the poor have taken to preach the Gospel.” Either rendering suits our purpose admirably, and either way the marvel is equally great. “Poor people have taken to the preaching of the Gospel”

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—that is a marvel indeed. “How knoweth this man letters, having never learnt? Is not this the Carpenter?” Yes; but a Carpenter who has set about to revolutionise society and remodel the world. Were not the apostles men of poverty? And yet they turned the world “upside down” and held out hopes full of the divinest inspiration to the down-trodden, toiling millions from whose ranks they had emerged. And have not the majority of Christian ministers ever since risen from the ranks of the poor, and have always carried with them their large, plebeian hearts? The Gospel has been preached *by* the poor, and that is a mighty wonder.

But it has also been preached *to* the poor. “The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.” The Saviour adduces this as the crowning evidence of His Divine descent, a more convincing evidence than even His miracles. It was easier to suspend the laws of nature than reverse the usages of society, easier to open the eyes of the blind and raise the dead than to attend to the wants, physical and spiritual, of the poor. The people were deemed “accursed” even by the Shepherds of Israel. But here at last has appeared a Teacher who lovingly cares for the poor, who strives to enlighten the poor, and who takes the part of the poor against their unscrupulous and heartless oppressors. “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” In the estimation of the then governors of society

the poor were degraded into the low level of "things." They were classed with the chattels on a rich man's estate. They were deemed not persons but property. But the Gospel has redeemed them from their servile condition and invested them with the dignity of personality. They are no longer serfs or beasts of burden—the Gospel bestows on them full and perfect liberty. But the foundations of society are being removed, exclaim the alarmists. Just so; and it is time they were removed. The Gospel intended from the first to remove them; but not at once, else society would fall to rack and ruin. The Gospel has brought salvation full and free, temporal and spiritual, to the poor; and the good work will not cease till the man who produces will be more honoured than the man who consumes, and the man who tills more respected than the man who kills.

" Rank is but the guinea's stamp,
Man is the gold for all that."

Hitherto the poor have been the gold without the stamp, though few comparatively have possessed the penetration to see the precious ore underneath the rough exterior. The gold before going into the mint is valuable; but the gold purified, stamped, and curiously wrought will add much to its intrinsic worth.

3. But it must not be forgotten that Christianity does not abolish reverence for the High—it cultivates reverence for the High *and* reverence for the Low. Did it promote one only, it would in the long run

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drive the world to an unhealthy and perilous extreme. It is the genius of Christianity that it eliminates nothing that was good in the world before it, that it is not the contradiction of anything that was noble in ancient religions or philosophies but its complement. It inculcates the worship of that which is Above us, and active sympathy with that which is Below us, thereby beautifully balancing the two extremes. Did it teach the first only—reverence for the High—it would establish gigantic despotisms on the earth, and authority would crush out freedom. Did it teach the second only—reverence for the Low—it would establish anarchy, and freedom would destroy all authority. But laying due emphasis on both, it serves as the mainstay of authority on the one hand, and the sure guarantee of liberty on the other. To the subjects it says—Submit yourselves to those who are above you. To the rulers it says—Respect the liberty of those who are under you. And thus touching the two extremes of government and filling all the space between, it is the very religion which covers all the world's wants; and notwithstanding all that is said to the contrary, it does cover them. "Thy commandment"—yes, and Thy Gospel too—"is exceeding broad." "They taught the people."

III. "They taught the people and **PREACHED THROUGH JESUS THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.**" This constituted the burden of apostolic teaching; with it every sermon wound up. And

it was not a truth which simply concerned the aristocracy of knowledge. No; it concerned the people and carried a message of salvation to the whole race.

1. They preached the *fact* of the resurrection. "They preached through Jesus—by the example of Jesus—the resurrection from the dead." "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses." "We are His witnesses of these things." Their business, therefore, was not to form an irrefragable chain of argument, but to bear witness. The language of the text is beautifully framed accordingly—"They taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." They *preached* it. They did not argue on the matter and weigh probabilities—they simply announced a fact. The sages of the old world had thought and argued much, but left the subject in a state of chaotic uncertainty. The apostles adopted a different method—they simply bore witness to a fact abundantly certified by their bodily senses. Much sophisticated reasoning has been woven around the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But it behoves believers and unbelievers alike not to forget that it professes simply to be an historical event to be verified or contradicted like other events of history, only if they like they may insist upon stronger testimony. Men form theories concerning the resurrection, and make it stand or fall according to theories. They test the genuineness of the fact as it squares with their preconceived notions. But is that the right method?

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No; the right and the philosophic method is to test the correctness of the theory by its harmony with the fact. What professes to be an historical fact must be judged by historical evidence. First establish or invalidate the history; then fashion your theories accordingly. "They preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." What evidence did they bring forward? The undoubted witness of their bodily senses—they saw Him dead, they saw Him alive again. These are two great palpable facts—death and life—concerning which any honest man's testimony is as weighty as that of the most accomplished chemist of the age. Death—that is a fact patent to the senses of any man. "Well," preached the apostles, "Jesus Christ was crucified on Calvary between two thieves, He expired on the Cross, and was buried in the new grave of Joseph of Arimathæa." "But," they added, "we saw Him alive again repeatedly, we ate and drank with Him after we had seen Him buried in the grave." And the testimony of the twelve was strongly supported by that of half a thousand. We require no theories to confirm or confute that—it is an historical fact to be accepted or rejected upon historical evidence.

But the Rationalists reply—"The evidence you adduce would suffice to establish any ordinary fact in history—half the evidence would be enough to establish beyond controversy any event in the history of Greece or Rome; but no amount of evidence can serve to establish the miraculous." That indeed is theorising with a vengeance! But you will notice

that such reasoning shifts the ground of the argument—it unconsciously removes the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the realm of history to the province of science. On the ground of history they cannot contest the resurrection of Jesus—all the evidence is in its favour, and there is not a particle of evidence against it. What then is the resort of sceptics? They contest it on the ground of science. Again we must remind them that the resurrection of the Saviour is primarily an historical question. No amount of evidence can establish the miraculous! Then did they see miracles with their own eyes, still they would not believe. But any candid inquirer can see that such reasoning is not reason but unbelief. “The man who denies that God can perform miracles,” says Rousseau, himself not on terms of amity with the Christian religion, “is not fit to be reasoned with—he should be sent to the lock-up.” To aver that miracles are not possible—to God—is not wisdom but insanity. And the language of Rationalism on the subject of the resurrection of Christ is not reason but the height of unreason. We undertake to satisfy the requirements of reason, but not of unbelief. “Jesus Christ is risen,” earnestly cried half a thousand primitive Christians, whose honesty and integrity no contemporaneous controversialist dares impugn. Renan, an author of European reputation, undertakes to write a “Life of Jesus.” Are miracles possible? Is Jesus risen? “Impossible,” cries the dainty critic. But mark—he cries “Impossible,” in the preface to

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his book, instead of in the conclusion; at the commencement of the investigation, whereas the scientific or inductive method so much vaunted in the present day, and that rightly, prescribes that the word should not be uttered till the close, if uttered at all. Miracles impossible! "The man who proclaims that," says Rousseau, "is not fit to be reasoned with—he should be sent to the lock-up." Modern apologists should not depart from the line marked out by the apostles—the old evidence is still the best. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of history and not of science.

2. They further preached the *doctrine* of the resurrection. Christianity is first a religion of facts; and out of the facts grow the doctrines. The order of the New Testament books represents the normal growth of Christian truth. First the Gospels, next the Epistles. First the foundation in history, next the development in doctrine. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. What, then, is the legitimate conclusion? That there is life after death. There is life before death. Yes, says Christianity, and there is life after death. You demand a proof. Here it is—Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Eternity is described by the great English poet as—

"That undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns."

On that we have two remarks to make. First, if no traveller has returned, then it is illogical of infidelity to declare that beyond the grave there is nothing. "No traveller returns." Well then, how does it

pronounce death to be annihilation? "No traveller returns"—then the question remains open. Our second remark is—the poet scarcely hits off the truth. "From whose bourn no traveller returns," sings he. "But from whose bourn one Traveller has returned," answers Christianity; "Jesus Christ died and is risen again." And if one traveller has returned, it is a strong presumptive proof that the other travellers continue in existence, and that we may entertain the blessed hope that they too will return. "They that are in their graves shall come forth." The return of the distinguished "Traveller," "travelling in the greatness of His strength," from the shades of death has imparted a new inspiration to poor, trembling, dying humanity. There is a way out of the grave. An ancient writer represents the fox going out one day on a prowling expedition. As he journeyed he came to the mouth of a cave, whence issued a voice inviting him in. But the wary fox, having first carefully examined the entrance, answered, "Not to-day, for I see the footsteps of all creatures leading in, but I see the footsteps of none leading out." Now that cave represents to our imagination the grave; the way of the whole earth led into it, but there were no footsteps leading out of it. Well, is there a way out? Christianity answers with a firm, unfaltering voice, "Yes, they that are in their graves shall come forth." We demand the proof. It answers, "One has come forth, even Jesus, the first-fruits of them that sleep."

3. "Preaching through Jesus the resurrection from the dead," the apostles' doctrine was much in ad-

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vance of the highest *Gentile* teaching. Philosophy unceasingly returned to this fascinating problem ; but its utterances were vague, wavering, and contradictory. Now the immortality of man divides itself into two branches—the continued existence of the soul, and the renewed existence of the body. Is the soul of man immortal? Ages passed, it appears, before the human mind was sufficiently educated to launch the question. But with the birth of reflection, however, the question came to the front. Does the spirit within perish utterly in death? Is the grave the be-all and end-all of man? Philosophy could not return a decisive answer—it could only hope. When the faculties worked harmoniously and the heart was tuned to praise, the hope was vigorous and bounding, and the language radiant with a strange lustre. But when the waves of adversity ran high and sorrows multiplied, the hope seemed to die utterly. Philosophy vacillated much.

Take the other question—Will the body survive death? Is the material part of our nature to be raised from the grave? I am not aware that ancient speculation concerned itself about the question. Philosophy is a complete blank upon the subject. The idea of the resurrection of the body never occurred to Socrates or Plato—so improbable was it and so far removed from the region of uninspired thought. St. Paul wound up his oration on Mars' Hill as usual by a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ: "Whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the

dead." What effect had this proclamation upon his audience, composed as it was of "certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics," the two chief schools of philosophy in that century? "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." They listened respectfully to his speech, fraught though it was with truth destructive of their pride and idolatry, till "he taught through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." This doctrine, so novel and apparently absurd, amused them much—they jeered and mocked—they laughed outright. The meeting broke up with convulsive laughter. The immortality of the soul they believed in after a fashion; but the resurrection of the body—they never heard of it, and laughed outrageously at the very thought!

But these two questions occupy a large place on the pages of the New Testament, and to both the answer is in the affirmative. "They preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Not the least uncertainty is discernible in its teaching: and if you demand a proof, here it is—Jesus Christ died and is risen again. Man in the entirety of his nature is to live in a world beyond the grave. What was only a plausible guess to the ablest philosophers is a demonstrated truth under the Gospel economy; and a demonstrated truth, not to the *elite* of society, like the problems of Euclid, but to the vast body of the people. The proof lies within the scope of the common under-

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standing. Thus a truth which was too high for a Socrates or a Plato to reach, is the common heritage of the meanest man who treads the streets of a Christian city. "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there have not arisen greater than Socrates and Plato; notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than they." Truths they only timidly and confusedly conjectured are the commonplaces of the Christian Church. Talk of philosophy and boast of philosophy—why, Christianity has made truths beyond the ken of philosophy the common inheritance of the common people. Christianity has raised the masses of men to a loftier altitude of knowledge than the sublimest philosophers of the old world ever achieved, notwithstanding their strenuous life-long efforts. "They taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

4. Their teaching is also much in advance of *Judaism*. Is man immortal? Very little is said on the matter in the Books of Moses. No doubt the immortality of the soul is implied, but it is not clearly expressed. Jesus Christ perceived it and beautifully evolved it in His conversation with the Sadducees; and we, reading the Pentateuch under the strong light reflected upon it by the Gospel, can perceive it in certain other passages. But it is doubtful whether the ancient Jews perceived it. But as you come on to the Psalms, the consciousness of the immortality of the soul becomes stronger and more definite; Sheol becomes an important word in

the writings of David and the Prophets. Indeed, some three or four passages teach the resurrection of the body, thereby exalting Judaism above paganism. But still the fact confronts us that when the Saviour appeared, Jewish opinion was divided as to the precise teaching of Judaism. The Sadducees, taking their stand on the Old Testament, denied man's immortality. The Pharisees, taking their stand on the same Scriptures, maintained it. The common people, it would seem, did not concern themselves much about it—as much as they could do was to exist here.

Now turn to the pages of the New Testament and observe the progress which has been made. This truth sparkles from every page. It is made a powerful factor in private life. It is no longer a doctrine to be referred to occasionally, but a doctrine which has become the headstone of the corner, and upon which the whole fabric of religion is made to depend. Under the Old Dispensation it is a truth grasped only by the noblest saints, and by them only in their divinest moments; the majority of saints do not seem to have attained to it at all. But it is the inalienable possession of every saint now—it is a doctrine preached to the people; and instead of arriving at it after a long life of painful effort, we make our departure from it. Instead of being the goal, it is the starting point. We often fall very low in our spiritual experience, but never below this doctrine. At our lowest ebb we believe in a life beyond the tomb. But this marked the highest point of religious experience under the Old Testa-

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ment. Moses, Job, David, Isaiah—great saints all; but “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than they.” The truth, which is only sparingly revealed in the Jewish Scriptures and feebly apprehended by half a dozen eminent saints, shines upon us from every chapter of the New Testament, and is become the common property of every believer. We do not half realize the benefits the religion of Christ has conferred upon the world. To say the least, it has popularized the best thoughts of Judaism and the best thoughts of Paganism—it has made them the working thoughts of the working world. That is something, at any rate. But is that all? No; it has converted their guesses into uncontroverted certainties. It gives certitude to the human mind—it has brought life and immortality to light. Certitude respecting the future, a rock under my tottering feet, Oh! that it is which I want and which I possess in the Gospel. Pascal lent the mighty energies of his soul to solve the problems of the universe; he tossed long on the waves of doubt; at last he received the testimony of the Gospel with the faith of a little child, and found what he wanted—certitude, and with certitude, rest. Pascal died; but inside the lining of his coat was found a document, and on it the memorable words—“Certitude. . . . Joy. . . . God of Jesus Christ, not of the philosophers and savans. . . . Oh! that I may never be separated from Him.” Christianity gives certitude, and certitude, joy. “They taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

VI.

On Deacons.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."—ACTS vi. 1-3.

HITHERTO the Church has made very satisfactory progress. Every day it makes new converts, and now it counts its members by the thousands. True, it had come once or twice into serious collision with the authorities; but it enjoyed much favour with the people. But in the sixth chapter of the Acts a new state of things is inaugurated. In the first verses we are made acquainted with a great danger arising from within—"there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." In the last verses we are made acquainted with a great danger arising from without—the "people" joined the authorities to persecute the adherents of the new religion. In this atmosphere of internal dissatisfaction and external persecution takes place the creation

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of an office, which has played an important part in the history of the Christian Church, the conditions of its first existence foreshadowing in some degree the conditions surrounding it ever since. The election into office of the seven men whose names are here given us took place to quell the internal discontent, but unfortunately it indirectly led to a more cruel persecution than had yet befallen the youthful community. The subject, then, of the present discourse will be *The Diaconate*.

Three points. First, the origin of the office; second, the duties of the office; third, the qualifications for the office.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE.

I. We are introduced to a class of people here called *Grecians*. "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." By the Hebrews we are to understand the Jews born and bred in Palestine, who therefore looked upon themselves as the flower of their race, because exempt from defiling contact with the Gentiles. By the Grecians we are to understand, not Greeks proper, but proselytes to the Jewish worship; and Jews born and bred in foreign countries, whose language therefore was Greek. The term used by the writer is Hellenists. Having been conquered by the Roman legions, Palestine was denuded of its population, thousands being drafted into the imperial army, and thousands more deported to colonise distant lands. And the spirit of commercial enterprise being innate in the

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Jewish race, many were tempted by the love of gain to choose foreign cities as their places of residence. In the second chapter of the Acts a long catalogue is given us of countries more or less remote, where members of the Jewish race and adherents of the Jewish cultus might be found. Their habits of thought and life were of necessity much influenced thereby. Therefore the home Jews or Hebrews looked down upon the foreign Jews or Grecians as having contracted contamination by their long contact with the uncircumcised heathen. As a natural result considerable jealousy sprang up between them. They formed two compact factions, each bound together by previous training and sympathy. Mark that the Church did not create the division—the division existed previously. So far as the Church was concerned, its direct influence was to merge the two factions into one, the statement being frequently repeated in the preceding history that they were all of “one accord.” But in process of time the old spirit of rivalry again manifested itself. The world often taunts the Church with having within its fold contentious and hypocritical people. We plead that it is so, but ask, Where have they come from? The Church has black sheep, no doubt, but it did not make them black. They were black when they first came in from the world, and remain black in spite of the cleansing influences around them. Elements of discord exist in the Church, but they are not its native produce—they are imported into it from without.

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2. The Grecians *murmured*. "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." There was no open hostility, it seems, or any unseemly ebullition of temper; but a spirit of supercilious fault-finding was clearly observable, indicative of spiritual morbidity. You place a shell by your ear, and you hear the subdued murmur of the air as it winds its way through the intricate convolutions. That is the comparison St. Luke uses to express the dissatisfaction of the Hellenists—there was a low half-articulate mutter. This disposition to grumble seriously threatened the well-being of the Church; it formed the gravest danger it had yet had to encounter. The earth is exposed to two perils. The first arises from the storms beating upon it from without, the second from the volcanic fires assailing it from within. Of the two the most dangerous are the volcanic fires. Let the winds beat as they will, the earth continues firm under our tread and steadfast in its orbit. But when the internal fires burst forth, the earth quakes to its foundations and the solid rocks shiver and split. In like manner the Church is exposed to two baneful influences. The first is the bitter spirit of persecution in the world. This has attacked the Church repeatedly; storms of persecution have beaten furiously and long against it, but it did not fall, because it was founded upon a rock. But the second and gravest danger arises from within—it is the spirit of discontent in the members. "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews," and this murmuring more seriously menaced the pros-

perity of the Church than all the cruel buffetings it suffered at the hands of the authorities.

3. The Grecians "murmured because their *widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*" It appears that only the "widows" received charitable relief, and of course those who were disabled by age or decrepitude. Men able to earn a living were doubtless bidden to go and work. To suppose that healthy, lusty men were supported by charity is a mistake—the Gospel never patronises idleness. To the hale and strong its language is—"He that will not work, let him not eat." Not he who cannot, but he who will not. To the orphans, the widows, and the aged, however, the Gospel is most kind and compassionate. And the burden of the complaint lodged by the Grecians against the Hebrews was that "their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." Who were the almoners? Officially the apostles, but practically, it appears, some Hebrew members who were called in to aid the former in the daily discharge of their onerous duties. "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews"—not against the apostles. This seems to hint that the apostles had partly delegated their power to certain members of the Hebrew party. Fault was found with their administration, because the foreign "widows" were overlooked in the daily distribution. Why were they overlooked? There was probably no why for it—it was a mere accident, arising, no doubt, from defective organisation. But the Grecians insisted that there was a set purpose in

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it. Instead of viewing it as a case of pure oversight they inquired for sinister motives, and of course, as is always the case, found them! That is generally how dissensions originate in society, whether Christian or worldly—mere oversight is converted into positive insult; hence ensue heart-burnings and upbraidings. The Prussian King passes the French Ambassador without returning the customary salute; hence war, incendiarism, bloodshed, the extravagances of the Commune, and the overthrow of a dynasty! Jealousy always distorts facts to suit its own morbid fancies.

4. The murmurings of the Grecians induced the apostles to "*call the multitude of the disciples unto them*" in order to confer together. The Jewish Church was constituted on mechanical principles: the offices and the office-holders were directly appointed by Heaven. Who were to be High Priests and who priests did not depend upon the vote of the nation. God himself elected His own officers, and the nation was expected loyally to submit. But the Christian Church is not a machine but a living organism; its functionaries are therefore dependent on the vote of the members. The apostles judiciously submitted the question of the diaconate to the "whole multitude of the disciples." Governments are of two kinds—the parental and representative. The government of the Jewish Church was conducted on the parental principle, the members being, in the language of the Apostle, under age. Nothing was left to the will or choice of the Church; everything was defi-

nately fixed by law. But the government of the Christian Church is representative; in other words, it is self-government, its members having attained their majority. The Church has to determine its offices and its officers; it extends the franchise to every member. Much controversy is waged in the present time concerning the extension of the suffrage to the labouring classes. But this principle has been long ago embodied and acted upon in the Christian polity. From the first it has accorded to every member the right to vote. "The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and thereby fully acknowledged the principle of manhood suffrage. The objection may be urged that all men do not possess the requisite enlightenment and conscientiousness properly to exercise their vote. Try them, we reply. "The vote is a trust." Very well; then trust the people. The trust will call out the qualification; new duties always evoke new abilities.

But in thus discoursing of the divine right of the whole body of believers to vote on all questions touching Church regulations, we must not forget the promise that the "Spirit of Truth" should dwell in the Church "to guide it into all truth," the truth of government not less than the truth of doctrine. This promise holds good for us as for the age of the apostles. We are not left to be guided solely by precedent. The Church is not bound even by its own past. No doubt precedent has its value, and no conscientious Christian will speak lightly of the past history of the Church. But if webs be woven

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of it to tie the hands and bind the feet of the Church now living, we make of it a bad and unjustifiable use. The object of history is not to enthrall but to liberate. The Church of to-day is as free as the Church of the first century, and is in as close communion with its Head as ever it was. No man should be bound by his past—let him exercise free volition and choose what he deems best for his present and future. "Let the dead bury their dead, come thou and follow me." And the Church should not be fettered by the traditions of primitive centuries; its liberty is as complete now as in any previous age.

We do well to investigate what the "fathers" have done and said in respect of the questions now agitating Christendom; but not with a view to follow them slavishly, but rather to improve upon them if it lies in our power. And shame upon the Church of the 19th century if it cannot improve in many things upon the Church of the first. But observe—I make a distinction between the Scripturalness of a doctrine or usage and the ecclesiasticalness thereof. What is directly or indirectly taught by the apostles is not subject to alteration or capable of improvement. In their writings we find the inspired ideal of a Church. But what they taught differed widely from what the early Churches practised—the ideal in the Epistles towered high above the actual as beheld in the lives and practices of early believers. What St. Paul taught the Corinthian Church I accept without cavil or objection; but what the

Corinthian Church practised I do not implicitly receive—I feel myself at liberty to criticise its actions, to adopt or reject its usages. The teaching of the apostles is obligatory upon all Churches; the history of the Church is binding upon none.

5. Having summoned the “multitude of disciples together,” the apostles proposed “they should *choose from among themselves* seven men of honest report” to supervise the distributions of the daily rations. By their prompt and frank procedure they instantly quelled the discontent—“the saying pleased the whole multitude.” In the first verse they murmur; in the fifth they are pleased. Marvellous the change a few kind, sensible words brought about! Were many in the place of the apostles they would have stood upon their dignity, and quietly ignored the complaint, and the low “murmuring” of the first verse would have grown into loud and fierce denunciation in the fifth. But kindness, straightforwardness, and discretion at once surmounted the difficulty—instead of murmurs we hear congratulations. Evil had always better be grappled with in its incipient stage. Rulers should never be blind to small grievances. Suppose they are small, why should there be grievances at all? That a grievance is small is no reason for its continuance, rather is it a reason for its instant removal. A small injustice is more easily remedied than a great one, and the facility makes the duty more imperative.

Thus we are taught that the Christian Church is a growth. It was not launched upon society with all

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its offices marked out and all its organisations perfected. Herein again it contrasts strikingly with Judaism. Moses was commanded "to do everything according to the pattern shown him in the mount;" the various offices and duties connected with the service of the Tabernacle were all particularly specified by Divine Revelation. The people had to originate nothing—they had to receive everything. The Hebrew polity was complete from the first—one may say more complete at the beginning than at the end. But the Christian Church is a living organism—it gradually unfolds from within. It began on the day of Pentecost without any regulations or offices except the apostolate. It was simply a germ, but a germ which had within it the "power of endless life." By degrees the germ grew and threw out new offices just as the tree shoots out new branches. Its functions are the healthy outgrowth of its life. The diaconate is instituted when the temporal requirements of the Church urgently demand it and not a day before; and should those requirements cease, there are no reasons whatever for its continuance. It is therefore idle to endeavour to give the Church a rigid, cast-iron shape for all countries and all ages. The exigencies of time and place are to determine its outward form. But you point to the Apostolic Church and deduce Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism or Congregationalism therefrom. I point to it too, and show you an Apostolic Church without as well as with office-bearers, and so elastic as

to adapt itself to the needs of the time and the circumstances in which it was placed. The offices of the Church are not an investiture from without but a development from within. In the fulness of its own spiritual life it has the power and guarantee of perpetual self-determination.

II. THE DUTIES OF THE OFFICE.

1. The "seven men," according to the text, were elected to "serve." The noun "deacon" is not used, but the corresponding verb is—"they diaconized," if I may be allowed the expression. Inasmuch as the term "deacon" does not occur here or elsewhere in the Acts, some have come to the conclusion that the "seven" were not deacons. But if the substantive form is omitted, the verbal form is used—they at least did the work of deacons. According to the English version they "served." Is there not a quiet hint to the successors of the "seven" to be more covetous of discharging the duties than of wearing the name? In the Acts we find only the verb, in the Epistles we find the noun. Here we perceive the fundamental law of language and the fundamental law of life, for language and life are at bottom one—first get the thing, next get the name. The probability is that these men were not officially styled "deacons"—they were simply known as the "seven." Gradually, however, the Church felt a need for an official title, and from the verb it developed the noun. Living in an age noted for its appearances, we go about in the first place to

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invent names and care but little about things. All our goods are electroplate. But the primitive Church was living face to face with stern realities. If it could procure the thing, it let the name take care of itself. A deacon is one who ministers or serves. "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and *serve tables*. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the *ministry* of the word." The two words in italics are the same. The same words are used to describe the work of deacons as that of apostles, the object only being different. In each case it was serving, ministering. Deacons are elected not to "lord it over God's heritage," but to render it good and faithful service. A deacon etymologically means one who waits at table, who *runs* to do service. The very word signifies that diaconal work should be characterised by docility and alacrity. People of imperious temperament are scarcely fit to act as servers of the Church; instead of running themselves, their disposition is to bid others run. Deacons are, I shall not say servants, but servers of the Church, and should always evince readiness to do its behests.

2. They were elected to "*serve tables*." What the precise meaning of the phrase is the commentators are not quite agreed, and probably it was not intended they should be able to tell. Vagueness is often useful. But speaking broadly, it means they were to attend to the temporalities of the Church. It was not, however, absolutely necessary that they should confine their operations to this department

of Church-work—hard and fast lines are not known in the Kingdom of God. Their chief duty is to manage the finances of the Kingdom; but that done to their own and others' satisfaction, they may extend the sphere of their usefulness, and assist in the furtherance of truth and goodness. The public mind is confused upon this subject. Preachers of the Word, on the one hand, are supposed to have no right to meddle with the service of tables; the right they indisputably have, but the expediency may be questioned except in very rare cases. On the other hand, deacons are supposed to be guilty of presumptuous encroachment when they take upon them occasionally to preach. If I have read the New Testament aright, they are guilty of nothing of the kind; and no rules should be enacted by any body of Christians to forbid them to exercise diligently the gifts with which nature and grace have endowed them. No hard and fast lines are drawn in the New Testament between different offices in the Church; we see them in this chapter diverging, in the following chapters we behold them again merging—Stephen and Philip “preach the Word” with irresistible power and success. Everywhere in the Apostolic Church are traceable the liberty and elasticity of life. “The tools to him who can use them.”

3. The deacons are to “serve the tables” of the *ministers*. This is not expressly stated, but it is implied. We may rest assured that the “seven,” whilst waiting on the tables of others, did not leave

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the apostles' table empty. Be it far from me to encourage "love of filthy lucre" in our ministers; but this I may venture to say—if they have the love, they for certain lack the "lucre." One important object in the institution of the diaconate was to relieve the preachers of anxiety and distraction in the zealous pursuit of the work peculiar to themselves. Is the modern diaconate a drag or a help to the ministry? A large number of deacons, I know, are useful, excellent men—all honour to them; but there is a small minority who are a disgrace to any Christian community. These latter believe it the duty of the minister to collect the money, and their vocation to treasure it, forsooth! Be it remembered that the first duty of deacons is to "serve tables," and especially the tables of their ministers, that they may "give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." Paul "fought with beasts in Ephesus," and many a modern minister has to fight hard all the year round to drive the wolf from his door.

4. They are to "serve the tables" of the *poor*. This was about the most impoverished period in the history of the Jews. In the reign of Solomon gold was as plentiful as stones; but in the Saviour's day the country was reduced into a state of abject poverty. "I have been young and am now old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The critics stumble over that verse, and declare David was mistaken, for the seed of the righteous have often had to beg bread. But

David was not writing of other ages but of his own. In his reign commerce was so prosperous and wealth so equally divided that he never saw a good man nor his children—no one who had the least thrift about him—failing to obtain an honest living. But affairs had much deteriorated in Judea since then; in the first century of our era, the country was so pillaged by Rome and its myrmidons that the population had no heart to work. Mendicants everywhere flocked the highways. “The poor ye have always with you.” Many of them joined the Jerusalem Church, and the exceptional poverty called forth exceptional liberality. Many, “having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” At their feet. Money should always be kept at people’s feet. Many keep it in their safes, and alas! many in their hearts. But the primitive Christians kept it at their feet. “They laid it at the apostles’ feet.” But the two-fold duty of almoners and preachers overtasked them; the “seven men” were therefore elected to receive the offerings of the rich and judiciously to expend it for the benefit of the needy.

In this institution of the diaconate we discover the first germ of the philanthropic efforts of modern civilisation. Judaism doubtless stood alone among ancient religions for the humane feeling pervading it. In proof of this I need only adduce the Mosaic law in reference to pawns or pledges. “If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down; for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his

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skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious." Nevertheless its highest result was negative—not to oppress or defraud. Being the first stage of religious culture, Judaism consisted in *not* doing evil rather than in doing good. The Old Testament dealt in prohibitions rather than in positive injunctions. The law said, "Thou shalt not;" the Gospel says, "Thou shalt." There is "not" in nine out of the Ten Commandments. Judaism was an elaborate system of "nots"—in every sense negative. You were not to injure your neighbour in his person, life, or property. But the Gospel bids you *do* something to benefit your fellow-creatures, to mitigate their misery, to lighten their burdens, to deliver them from physical and moral evil. What was Christ's character? "He went about *doing* good." Before, all that was demanded of a good man was that he should refrain from oppressing the defenceless or maltreating his dependents; now it is his imperative duty to alleviate the manifold evils under which they groan. Jesus Christ travelled the country succouring the poor and "healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people." His Spirit passed into the Church He established—the members sold their estates to clothe the naked and feed the hungry. In the text a committee of seven is organised to supervise the distribution of the doles. Occasional outbursts of benevolent impulses were witnessed in previous ages and other countries; now for the first time was a deliberate effort made to reduce impulse

into system and benevolence into an organisation. The "seven men of honest report" constituted, I believe, the first "board of guardians" in the world. Individual efforts there were before to relieve suffering and want; now for the first time existed a society moved and animated by love of the poor. Modern civilisation is replete with "boards"—Poor Law Boards, School Boards, Boards of Guardians, and Boards of Health. But they are all natural developments of the board or "table" of which the text speaks, to "serve tables" being precisely the same as to serve boards. In the Gospels we witness the conception, in the Acts the birth of philanthropy.

III. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE.

Of course I shall treat only of those mentioned in the text.

1. The first qualification is *integrity*. "Choose ye men of honest report,"—men of uprightness and straightforwardness. The funds being entrusted to their care, it is of prime importance that they be men above suspicion. During the lifetime of the Saviour, Judas, it is stated, "kept the bag"—he was the treasurer of the common stock. What sort of character did he bear? John answers, "Judas was a thief"—he pilfered from the bag. It is therefore of great consequence that men of strict integrity be put into this office.

2. Next comes *piety*. "Full of the Holy Ghost." A deacon needs the Holy Ghost quite as much as a minister. The judicious management of money

contribution requires interests, particularly liabilities bordering on the religious, proper, and interest between land missionaries there is a world wide Come to once evin verges on listless. tables!"

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contributed by religious charity is arduous work, and requires the special aid of God's Spirit. Pecuniary interests occupy the middle ground, and are peculiarly liable to corruption. You have noticed the border counties between England and Wales—they are the most neglected counties in the kingdom. Go into England proper, and the inhabitants are moral, religious, and tolerably educated. Come into Wales proper, and the population on the whole takes a deep interest in all social and religious movements. But between England and Wales lies a narrow belt of land much neglected; we are obliged to send missionaries there as we do to India or China. Thus there is a border land betwixt the Church and the world which Christians are very apt to overlook. Come to the vital truths, and profound interest is at once evinced; but where the business of the Church verges on that of the world men are prone to grow listless. You want the Holy Ghost to “serve tables!”

It is popularly imagined that, if a man is “full of the Holy Ghost,” he cannot attend to temporal duties, that he is only fit to sing and pray and go off into holy ecstasies. But it strikes me you do not want a very great deal of the Spirit to do that; but I tell you what—you want a great deal of Him to give and collect money, and to collect even more than to give. You require a great deal of the Holy Ghost to leave off listening to an enjoyable sermon in the middle to attend to a trivial duty at the door—only a man “full of the Holy Ghost” can do

that. Anybody can sit in his pew and be delighted with an able sermon eloquently delivered—you do not want much of the Holy Ghost to accomplish that. But to go to church when a weak brother is holding forth, to sit and look gracious when the common platitudes are droned out—oh, only a man “full of the Holy Ghost” can do that! Show me a church’s collection books, and I can estimate pretty nearly how much of the Holy Ghost that church has. A church of 100 members giving £50 a year towards the support of the Gospel at home, and its propagation in foreign parts, has not much of the Spirit. “But oh, the *hwyl* in the prayer meetings!” *Hwyl* or no *hwyl*, you have not much of the Spirit. Wolff elaborated a system to reduce all truths of philosophy into truths of mathematics; and, if I had the leisure, I could invent a system to reduce the truths of theology into truths of arithmetic. A man says, “I have faith.” “Show me thy works,” urges James; the works are the measure of the faith. You say, “We have had a powerful revival in our neighbourhood—the Church was baptized with the Spirit.” I answer, Show me your collection books; I can tell what you received by what you give; a small collection means baptism by sprinkling; a large collection—well, baptism by immersion. The best men to “serve tables” are men “full of the Holy Ghost.”

3. The third qualification is *wisdom*. That a man is honest is not enough. That he is honest and pious is not enough. He must be honest, pious,

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and wise. Without wisdom his administration will do incalculably more harm than good. The Churches often overlook this attribute. If a man is upright in his worldly calling, and faithful in his religious sphere, he is thought by his fellow-members to be abundantly qualified for the diaconate. No; he must be also a man of wisdom, or better not ordain him at all.

What is wisdom? A right application of knowledge (*gnosis*). But this implies two things. First, that he possess the knowledge to be applied. A deacon should be "mighty in the Scriptures." Ignorance should never hold office in the Church. It has been repeated till it is a truism that God does not need our knowledge to carry on His Kingdom and extend its frontiers—that He can dispense with all human means. But it has been appositely answered that if He does not need our knowledge, certainly He can do without our ignorance. Of the bishop or minister it is said that he must be "apt to teach"—he must have the power to impart knowledge. This is not necessary in a deacon, but it is necessary that he "hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." If he is not able to give knowledge, he must be able to receive it and hold it. Second, that he possess tact to apply his knowledge in the pursuit of his official duties. Men require to be managed with great delicacy and discernment. They are very sensitive instruments to play upon—a rude touch may snap the strings, and in vain you afterwards endeavour to get them to "discourse

sweet melody." Tact is indispensable; without it no success can follow. You have heard of Phæton, the son of Sol; he was desirous of driving the chariot of the sky. Many persuaded him against the attempt, as he had not the necessary practice to guide with a steady hand its fiery steeds. But he insisted on driving; and you know the result—he broke his own neck and sent horses and chariot spinning through infinite space. His intentions were good, but his skill was defective. And we have known men taking into their hands the reins of church-government—upright, pious men enough, no doubt; but for lack of tact they drew upon themselves no end of personal discomfort, drove the Church over the precipice and plunged it into inextricable confusion. Remember—wisdom is an indispensable qualification to make a deacon.

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VII.

The First Christian Martyr.

"Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law : For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."—ACTS vi. 11-15

IN the first five chapters of the Acts the writer concerns himself chiefly about Peter. But in the sixth and seventh chapters our attention is directed to Stephen. Then in the eighth chapter the story of Philip is graphically told us. Upon what principle can we account for these variations in the history? Are we to look upon the Acts as a haphazard collection of fragmentary biographies, each complete in itself and to be studied separately? I think not. The Book of Acts is composed upon a clear definite principle, to wit, what Jesus continued to do and teach after His ascension through the instrumentality of His followers. In the first five chapters this principle is illustrated best in the doings and savings

of Peter. But when another steps on the arena of Church life in whom this truth is shown in a stronger light, Peter is at once dropped; in the sixth and seventh chapters Stephen it is that occupies the forefront. The avowed object of the writer is not to show us Peter but the "Hand of the Lord;" and His hand in the present stage of the narrative is more distinctly seen in the life of Stephen than in that of Peter. The author exercises severe judgment, adopting or rejecting his materials as they serve or do not serve to illustrate the principle he has laid down in the opening verses.

We shall now then proceed to an examination of the different elements constituting the character of Stephen: and I doubt not, if we look steadfastly, we shall see him transfigured before our eyes, and "behold his face as it had been the face of an angel."

I. Stephen as a MAN. The third verse gives us to understand that he was a man of "honest report:" literally, a man "well testified of"—the public bore him good witness.

1. This means that he was an *honest* man; and not only honest, but that he had a reputation for honesty. Some people are honest in the strict sense of the word; but they habitually push bargains so hard that their honesty is suspected. They tread so near the line dividing integrity from fraud, that the public entertain grave doubts respecting the legitimacy of their dealings. But it is a duty imperative on every man to avoid the perilous extreme bordering

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on theft, and to *appear* honest as well as *be* honest. Aim at living not only above dishonesty but above suspicion as well. "Provide things honest." Is that all? No; "provide things honest in the sight of all men." Not only be upright, but convince others of your uprightness. Let your life be honourable, entirely exempt from meanness and trickery. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man." "Good understanding:" on the margin, "good success." An unsullied reputation for integrity helps a man forward even in business—it wins the confidence of the public.

2. But the words further imply that he was a *good* man. Underlying his honesty was his goodness. He was good and he seemed good. His goodness was conspicuous—he was spoken well of by all who knew him. This thought is more elaborately wrought out in one of the pastoral Epistles: "Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without." That is, a deacon should not only stand well in the family and in the Church, but he should stand well in the world. His character should be so bright as to compel unbelievers to pay him homage. Our first duty then is to be good, our second to convince others of our goodness. We should first be light; we should then "shine as lights in the world." Our goodness should be characterised by that beautiful sheen which arrests the attention and commands the admiration of beholders. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good

works, and glorify"—yourselves? No; but "your Father which is in heaven." This means that the character should be sweetly transparent. I can look at the wall, but not through the wall; but I can look at the window, and through the window, and see what is on the other side. And a good character should be clear as glass, or, to use the Biblical illustration, transparent as light—a character men can not only look at but look *through*, and see God behind and beyond.

II. Stephen as a CHRISTIAN. His character as a Christian is given in the fifth verse. He was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." The words, "of honest report," denote his moral character, the outward look of his life, his proper standing in the estimation of men. The words, "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," denote his spiritual condition, the inward state of his soul, his standing in relation to God.

1. He was "full of *faith*." This means that he was a strong, healthy believer. Faith was not only the root principle but the master passion of his life. Wavering or doubting was quite foreign to his experience. He was a powerful robust Christian, putting the whole weight of his destiny to rest on the revelation of Jesus Christ. "Full of faith." Some of his fellow-members in the infant Church were exceedingly weak in the faith, shy, timid, vacillating; but Stephen's spiritual life was deep and vigorous. He put unbounded confidence in the new religion;

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he "held fast his profession"—not feebly and loosely but fast. "A man full of faith." "By it the elders obtained a good report." Not a great report, perhaps, but a good one. Other factors, such as learning and riches, are necessary to obtain a great report. But faith alone, if strong, will secure you a good report; and a good report is better than a great one. Stephen was "full of faith," and therefore obtained a good report in the annals of the Church; and in virtue of his faith he "still speaketh," and is still spoken of.

2. But he was also "full of the *Holy Ghost*;" and to be "full of the Holy Ghost" is better than to be "full of faith." Faith at best is only the human aspiring after the Divine; but to be "full of the Holy Ghost" is for the human to possess the Divine. To trust God is good, to have God is better. "Full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."

One may be "full of faith" and yet not "full of the Holy Ghost." Many of the saints under the Old Testament were "full of faith," but none of them were "full of the Holy Ghost"—this is the sole prerogative of saints under the New Testament. Abraham was "strong in faith," but at no time was he "full of the Holy Ghost." Under the old "dispensation the Spirit was given in measures limited and scanty, because, in the language of St. John, "Jesus was not yet glorified." Hence human nature even in the choicest saints was not by any means remarkable for its Divine virtues, that is, the distinctive virtues of Divinity. The faith of Abraham

has never been excelled, but the character of Abraham has often been excelled—the ancient patriarch was guilty of sins which under the present dispensation would blast for a lifetime the reputation of any Christian professor. The worthiest of the Old Testament saints fell into sins which could not be tolerated on any consideration in the Christian Church—we should have to expel unceremoniously the great majority of them as unfit for the “communion of saints.” Do not misunderstand me: they were incomparably better than the world around them; all I say is, that they were immeasurably inferior to the saints of the New Testament. Even in their most excellent virtues we detect a smack of earthiness foreign to the type of piety prevalent in the pages of the New Testament. The “Holy Ghost” is the distinguishing feature of the economy under which we live. The apostles before the Pentecost were “full of faith,” but on the Pentecost were they “filled with the Spirit;” and as a natural consequence a process of refinement was then commenced unknown to the religious experience of the Jewish Church—humanity was elevated to a higher plane by a sudden rush of fresh energy, it became half divine. Religion shook off its grossness and coarseness; the character of its professors became much more *fine*. Under the Old Testament the Holy Ghost was “upon” men—the Holy Ghost was “upon” Simeon; He was a kind of extraneous power unable to pervade, leaven, and illuminate the nature. But under the New Testament He is “in”

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men—a sweetening, hallowing influence, refining the very fibre of our being. “Full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.” The saints of the Old Testament yearned for God; but the saints of the New Testament possess God. “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.” Why? Because the least in the Kingdom of Heaven has God within him as an actual possession. Stephen is full not only of faith but also of the Holy Ghost. He is the divinest character yet developed in the Church of God on earth. There is a touch of superhuman delicacy about his life which, before, neither grace could produce nor art imitate; the Divine interpenetrates the human and makes it beautifully luminous. The iron cold has the same properties as the iron heated, but it is not in the same state. The iron cold is black and dull; the iron heated is white and vivid—the fire imparts to it its own qualities. Thus Stephen was pervaded by the refining fire of God; he shook off the grossness and earthiness clinging to our nature and lived at the white heat of the Divine Life. His whole being was transfused with celestial brightness, and therefore his character grew in fineness of texture. When he is first introduced to us (vi. 5), it is said he was “full of the Holy Ghost.” When we bid him farewell (vii. 55) at the close of his career, it is still stated he was “full of the Holy Ghost”—the participial form of the words indicating that it was

not an occasional but habitual fulness. Again and again it is repeated that he was "full." Christianity is a religion of fulness. Men under the Old Testament were never filled; we discern the wail of hunger in their most joyous strains—they sing like men hungry. The fulness was ever future. But at last men are filled to the very brim. Stephen was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."

III. Stephen as a DEACON. His character as a deacon is set forth in the 8th verse—he was "full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people." But the largest number of ancient manuscripts read, instead of "full of faith," "full of grace." That no doubt is the genuine reading. The fifth verse says he was "full of faith," the eighth that he was "full of grace." As a member of society he was a man of "honest report;" as a member of the Church he was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" as an officer of the Church he was "full of grace and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people."

1. He was "full of *grace*." The word "grace" means favour. In all the variations of its meaning, the idea of "favour" is fixed. In its theological sense it signifies the Divine favour—the favour shown by God to sinners. But as used in the context it signifies human favour—the favour shown by Stephen to those with whom he came in contact. Stephen's duties as a deacon led him much among the destitute members of the Christian community; but he

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bestowed his favours in a kind, quiet, winsome, unobtrusive way. "Grace" some suppose to have the same etymology as "grease." Be that as it may; but the body, when well "greased" or oiled, is lithe and nimble, easy in its carriage, graceful in its movements. Now, what grease does to the body, grace does to the soul. The man without grace is formal, frigid, unbending, repelling; but the man richly endowed therewith discharges his duties in a manner pleasant and agreeable. Stephen was elected to office to distribute the charity of the Church. How did he do it? Did he haughtily impress the humble recipients of his bounty with their inferiority? Certainly not. He helped the forsaken and forlorn without degrading them in their own or others' eyes. He did it with grace—his conduct was characterised throughout by beautiful ease and comfortable homeliness. Modern Christians may here learn a valuable lesson—not to insult the objects of their beneficence in the very act of succouring them. "Draw out thy soul to the hungry." Thy money? Not only that, but thy soul. Give alms by all means, but give it with grace. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

2. Being thus "full of grace," he was of necessity "full of power." The man devoid of grace in his daily intercourse with his fellows can never be a man "full of power"—he cannot in the nature of things wield much influence over their hearts and consciences. But the man habitually kind, polite, and obliging, acquires an influence subtle but irresistible in the

sphere in which he moves. At first he may appear weak; but wait awhile, and you will discover that his apparent weakness is the "hiding place of his power." Out of his grace springs his strength. Judging by the outward show and not by the inward life, men are apt to mistake vehemence for power. Lightning is the strong thing in the popular imagination because of the flash and thunder accompanying it. But a little reflection will suffice to convince us that gravitation, notwithstanding its voice has never been heard, is the central force holding countless worlds tight in its inexorable grip. In like manner the man of wealth, of learning, of eloquence—the man who can flash and roar—is usually considered the powerful factor in a town or village. But scan society a little more narrowly, gaze steadfastly underneath the surface, and you will perceive that none of those things wield so much true power as grace. No doubt they are useful bands to tie society to a man; but no bands are so strong as the bands of love. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"—the men of goodness turn out in the long run to be the men of power. Stephen was "full of grace" first, and therefore "full of power."

3. Moreover "he did great *wonders and miracles* among the people." For a while he is the most prominent and interesting figure in Christian antiquity. And if we possessed his grace, we should also inherit his power, and do "great wonders," if

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not miracles, among the people. The same laws govern society now as then—get the grace and you will infallibly obtain the power. The great need of the present age is not physical but moral wonders—not miracles in the domain of nature but miracles in the domain of goodness. Think of our trains, steam packets, electric telegraphs, and the recently invented telephones: what physical miracles can outshine those miracles of science? No, no; it is not miracles in the realm of physics that we need—we have plenty of them; but miracles in the realm of morals. And it is within the reach of all of us to do wonders and to be wonders in goodness. How? you ask. Seek Stephen's grace and you will do Stephen's wonders. Men will stop and peer at you in astonishment and "worship God and report that God is in you of a truth." Do you doubt it? See how visitors to London pause and curiously look in the face of Peabody. His statue is a disgrace to Christian art; nevertheless men linger around it longer and examine it more affectionately, perhaps, than any other monument in the city.

IV. Stephen as a DISPUTANT. His character as a disputant is set forth in the tenth verse—"They were not able to resist the spirit and wisdom by which he spake." The context shows Stephen to be a Hellenistic Jew, that is, a Jew by blood and religion, but brought up in a foreign country; and naturally he was appointed to labour amongst the Hellenistic poor. He was therefore brought fre-

quently into the society of other Hellenistic Jews who were unbelievers in Jesus as the Messiah. By degrees a controversy sprang up between him and them. "There arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia of Asia, disputing with Stephen." It is of no practical interest whether one or two or more synagogues are here enumerated; but it is of importance how Stephen carried himself in the dispute.

1. They were "not able to resist the *wisdom* with which he spake." He proved victorious in the debate. There were two reasons for this. First, Stephen was evidently a practised logician. His Greek culture and Hebrew studies made him a man of great resource in argument. His speech reported in the seventh chapter evinced him to be a man of keen philosophic insight. He could not be easily matched in a debate. The second and chief reason for his controversial success was that he had truth on his side. The synagogue of the Cilician Jews is mentioned by name—the very synagogue of which young Saul of Tarsus was a member. This fact, coupled with the profound interest he took in the trial of Stephen arising out of this very controversy, demonstrates conclusively that he was present as a hearer if not as a speaker. Young Saul would unquestionably be quite a match to Stephen in a bare trial of dialectic skill. But Stephen, backed by the truth, was too strong for even Saul. A weak mind, supported by a great truth, can bring about

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the total discomfiture of the stoutest adversary. These Jews of Greek culture, numbering among them the accomplished pupil of Gamaliel, "were not able to resist the wisdom" with which the pious deacon spoke.

The paramount duty of every public teacher, who has to discuss the grand verities of Christianity, is to seek "to be filled with wisdom," that is, with good, sound, solid information. No amount of eloquence will make up for lack of matter. I believe God can "create out of nothing;" and doubtless He has done it before now—He has blessed sermons with little or nothing in them to the conversion of souls. Still that is not His ordinary way of working. In the history of the creation in Genesis we read but once that He "created out of nothing;" but we read repeatedly that He "created out of something"—the author being very shy of using the stronger word. That is the usual method of the Divine operation still—to bless truth rather than vapid sentimentalism, to create out of something rather than out of nothing. Let those who exhort do it with wisdom. "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words," but in the preceding verse he says "the preacher was wise and taught the people knowledge." The late Rev. Henry Rees, by universal consent the greatest preacher the Principality has ever produced, being asked which kind of sermon he thought most likely the Holy Ghost would bless to the salvation of the hearers, answered, "The sermon most likely to effect their salvation without Him."

2. But it is further added that "they were not able to resist the *spirit* by which he spake." His spirit was as noteworthy as his wisdom. In a written sermon style is of great consequence—second only in consequence to matter. Some, indeed, aver it is of greater consequence, "style only being immortal;" and the classic writers, we know, are studied more for their style than for their matter. Now, what style is to a written, the spirit is to a spoken sermon. Stephen spoke with a marvellous spirit—he imparted warmth, beauty, life, force to his arguments. His addresses were not dry, heavy, monotonous, irrefragable in their logic, but scarcely stirring the hearts and consciences of his congregations. No, they were all aglow with Divine fervour, not more remarkable for their strong sense than for their strong life. The spirit gave impetus to the reasoning. The wisdom which without the "spirit" falls flat and dead, with the "spirit" quickens the moral affections and rouses the mental faculties.

3. "They were not able to resist the wisdom *and* the spirit by which he spake." The wisdom alone they could resist. Dry argument touches only a small part of our nature, it only skims the surface, it does not stir the depths. "Intellectual preaching," as it is colloquially called, seldom moves people either way; they neither go with it nor against it—they simply stand still. Moreover, they could resist the "spirit" alone; and in this day of sensationalism it is of some moment that we remember it. Mere "*hwyl*," however delightful at the time, leaves our

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hearers securely immured in sin. Bathos is not pathos—perspiration is not inspiration. But the wisdom and the spirit joined together in holy wedlock will prove irresistible—such preaching must be the “savour of life unto life or the savour of death unto death.” Alas! to the cavilling Jews it was the savour of death. It roused their anger, evoked their fury. If they could not resist his preaching, they could and did resist his person. “They suborned men—they stirred up the people—they caught him and brought him to the council.”

V. Stephen as a PRISONER. His character as a prisoner is set forth in the 11th and succeeding verses. He was arraigned for blaspheming Moses and God, the blasphemy consisting in affirming that “Jesus of Nazareth should destroy the holy place and change the customs which Moses had delivered them.”

1. Contemplate for a moment the *speech* he made on that memorable occasion, which however it is foreign to my intention to analyse. I refer to it only so far as it sheds light on the character of the prisoner. It serves to show at least that he was profoundly versed in the Hebrew literature. It must be remembered that it was an impromptu oration, delivered at the spur of the moment under circumstances the most embarrassing, without the opportunity of consulting the original documents. I am told that twelve instances of undoubted discrepancy may be pointed out in it. How to account for

them? Simply that Stephen was obliged to address his judges from memory without the chance of correcting himself by reference to the Sacred Scriptures. Instead of overlooking the alleged mistakes or endeavouring to explain them away, the most manly way is frankly to admit them. Nothing is thereby compromised but the speaker's power of memory, no theory of inspiration or interpretation being in the least assailed. Is it a cause of wonder that, in a review so minute and so searching, the valiant deacon should commit a few trivial mistakes? The wonder, it appears to me, lies the other way—that, instead of twelve, he did not commit fifty.

Stephen's apology furthermore shows his Greek culture and sympathy. It would be almost a matter of sheer impossibility for a man born and bred in Palestine to deliver it. Native Jews like Peter and John dogmatise; Hellenistic Jews like Stephen and Paul philosophise. Stephen presents the council with a lucid and succinct philosophy of the national history. The well-known facts, instead of being held up as dry, bare shells to the contemplation of the hearers, are ripped open—the principles underlying, moulding, vitalising the facts being skillfully evolved.

“The works of God are fair for nought,
Unless your eyes, in seeing,
See hidden in the thing the thought
That animates its being.”

The same principle he proves to be running through Jewish history from the call of Abraham

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to the building of the Temple. What is that principle? That true religion is independent of any fixed rite or particular locality, and that religious progress has always meant religious change. The history of religion he demonstrates to be a history of changes,—every change, however, involving progress on the part of God, but stern resistance on the part of man. What if God hath purposed to make another great change in the establishment of Christianity, and what if the Jews like their forefathers were making a resolute stand against it!

The critics are much exercised to know how his speech can be at all viewed as a refutation of the charge of blasphemy preferred against him. But they overlook the fact that he does not defend himself except incidentally. His supreme desire is to vindicate not himself but the truth. His own interest is totally absorbed in the cause he so courageously advocates. Herein Stephen, the martyr of Christianity, contrasts favourably with Socrates, the martyr of philosophy—both alike indicted for blasphemy. Socrates, to his honour be it said, scorned to stoop to any base or unworthy artifice to save his life; his thoughts nevertheless continually reverted to himself. The first Personal Pronoun bristles through his famous apology—there is hardly a sentence but Socrates is in it. He uses the word "I" according to my reckoning 430 times, and the word "me" 141 times, besides "my" and "myself" almost as many times. But Stephen has neither "I" nor "me" on his lips so much as once—he

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wholly forgets himself in his intense eagerness to expound to the council the formative principles and historical career of the Kingdom of God. His only defence is—a philosophy of history! A most self-forgetful man!

2. But if his speech before his judges was remarkable, his bodily *appearance* was more remarkable still. "They all, looking steadfastly on him, beheld his face, as it had been the face of an angel."

Solomon says, "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed." Notice the young man before his admission to college—his countenance is marked by a certain degree of heaviness and opacity, is singularly devoid of expression for the simple reason that there is behind but little to be expressed. Observe him again at the termination of his collegiate course—his features are beautifully illuminated, his eyes flash pure intelligence. Put light within a marble vase and the granite grows translucent. And "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord"—light the candle within and the face without will shine.

Now, if wisdom is thus able to radiate through the veil of flesh, how much more goodness, and especially goodness and wisdom together? You can tell a good man by his very face. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." That wickedness stamps itself on the features is an universally acknowledged fact. I believe that Cain was a very beautiful babe—the first babe born on the planet, but I also believe that he was a very ugly

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man. Well, what brought about the change? Sin. "And Cain was very wrath." What next? "His countenance fell." The first thought of murder obliterated all traces of the original beauty—ferocity scowled darkly from the brow once so smooth and placid. On the other hand, goodness restores grace to the faded features. Many men and women, though plain enough from an artistic standpoint, possess indescribable charm. Peace, love, and joy beam forth from their countenances and render them exquisitely beautiful. Believe me, young people, nothing will so improve your looks as deep piety. Beauty and virtue are synonymous in the Kingdom of God. It is significant that the word translated "good" in the New Testament may be also rendered "beautiful." "Barnabas was a good man." Consult the commentators and they will inform you that the words may be construed with equal propriety,— "Barnabas was a beautiful man." He was good or he was beautiful, just as you like. In the Kingdom of God beauty and goodness are one and the same. Stephen was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," and therefore his face shone like a vase illumined from within. "They beheld his face as it had been the face of an angel."

But is the ordinary reflection of goodness on the face such as we daily meet among good people all that is meant? I believe not. When Moses returned from Sinai, "the skin of his face shone so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold it." The supernatural brightness dazzled their vision.

And the angelic lustre on Stephen's face was doubtless miraculous. But here as in other instances, the miraculous, so far from obscuring the natural, serves to illustrate it. It brings out into clearer prominence a law which, were it not for the transfiguration of Stephen, of Moses, and of Christ, would escape our attention—that genuine goodness is a Divine light within, whose inevitable tendency it is to make luminous both soul and body. In regeneration this Divine spark is struck, and sanctification is only the theological name for transfiguration. “Be ye transformed in the spirit of your mind:” literally, transfigured—the very same word that is used to describe the transfiguration of Christ. The Divine brightness first makes luminous the dark, dull, obtuse soul, and then the dark, dull, obtuse body. This spiritual luminousness was especially noticeable in the holy countenance of the late Rev. Henry Rees. His look was not that of lofty intelligence—it was that of high holiness. But more especially it is to be witnessed upon deathbeds. Friends beautiful in life are still more beautiful in death. They rise so high that their faces seem to catch the pure beams of eternity like mountain tops the first light of day. A soft, sacred halo swathes their bodies—their flesh looks suffused with a rich radiance like “a ruby smitten by the sun.” “All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”

“Looking upwards, full of grace,
He prayed, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.”

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VI. Stephen as a MARTYR.

1. Look at the mad fury of his *hearers*. They arraigned him for blasphemy; in the concluding sentences of his speech he charges them with always resisting God, killing His prophets, and lastly slaying His Son. "Betrayers and murderers." No sooner did these terrible words fall on their ears than "they were cut to the heart and gnashed on him with their teeth." This word "cut" is the same that is elsewhere translated "sawn asunder." The prophets of old had been "sawn asunder" by their stiffnecked forefathers; now they are "sawn asunder" by the powerful ministry of Stephen. His words were tearing their hearts like the ragged edge of a saw. They further "gnashed on him with their teeth." Only in one other connection is this strong phrase used—"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It seems as though the uncontrollable fury of the damned seized the motley crowd. "They gnashed on him with their teeth, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him." Hell seemed broken loose on the streets of Jerusalem.

2. But if the rabble were wild with rage, Stephen *himself* was calm and collected. He first offered a prayer on his own behalf, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He next prayed on behalf of his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." So deeply had he drunk of the spirit of the Saviour, that he unconsciously quotes His very words. No thought of vengeance burns in his breast. No; forgiveness flows freely to the very men who with deadly hatred

cast the stones at him. Nowhere outside the religion of the New Testament do we behold such majesty and meekness in the grim presence of death. Pagans may die heroically—Christians only die forgivingly. Heathens may die bravely—believers in Christ only die divinely. “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

No wonder that a man who breathed a spirit so Divine should see “into heaven.” His body, as we have already seen, was in a state of incipient transfiguration; his eye was therefore supernaturally strengthened, it pierced beyond the azure of the sky and swept the vast places of eternity. Men in the present day will receive only the testimony of the senses, and because they see not heaven and hell they will not believe. But are they sure the supposed weakness of the proof lies not in the weakness of their vision? Stephen, looking steadfastly into heaven, “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” And if credit is to be given—and why not?—to the dying testimony of saints, his is not a solitary case. Many saints of unimpeachable integrity, lying on the confines of the two worlds, have declared that they also have seen it—and their eyes had in them a distant gaze as if looking over the horizon of earth and searching eternity with their sweep.

But not only he saw into heaven, but heaven itself was “opened.” There was an elevation of the human—there was also a condescension of the Divine. “Behold, I see the heavens opened.” Not

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heaven, but heavens—there was an open, clear way from the scene of the dread martyrdom to the Holy of Holies of the universe, where in bright effulgence irradiates for ever the Shekinah or Glory of God. Under the Old Dispensation “the way into the Holiest of All was not made manifest;” but now heaven is “opened.” “After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven”—standing open. John did not see it being opened—it was standing open. Since Jesus Christ entered, the doors have been standing open—to offer shelter and home to the weary and persecuted pilgrims. “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” This is the only instance except twice in the Apocalypse that Jesus after His ascension is called Son of Man. Why called so here? Because He was an object clearly discerned by the bodily eyes of Stephen. To the eyes of faith He is Jesus or Christ or Lord; to the eyes of the body He will for ever be the Son of Man. When St. John thinks or writes of Him, He is always the Son of God; but when St. John is rapt up in vision He is the Son of Man. “I saw one like the Son of Man.” To faith He is the Son of God—to sight He is always the Son of Man. “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” When He first ascended He “sat” to show His indisputable right to be there; but having established His right, He sits or stands as occasion requires. Stephen sees Him standing—eagerly watching this momentous crisis in the history

of the Church. And with this magnificent panorama floating before his view, the intrepid martyr "fell asleep"—"to sleep, ay, perchance, to dream." This sleep of Stephen has given to our burial-grounds the Christian name of "cemeteries"—they are places where our friends sleep; and "if they sleep, they will do well."

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VIII.

The Temples of God.

"But Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool; what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?"—ACTS vii. 47-50.

THE Jews looked upon the Temple in Jerusalem and the ritual connected therewith as essential to Divine worship. The Temple and its services they believed were to stand for ever; and for intimating the contrary, Stephen was taken into custody and put upon his trial. "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." That was the legal charge brought against him; and we are able to discover in it the substratum of truth and the superstructure of falsehood. The substratum of truth consists, no doubt, in some statement of Stephen's that Christianity was destined to supersede Judaism, that the worship of God was not for ever bound up with the Temple on Moriah, and that inasmuch as Christ had sacrificed Himself, the

Jewish ritual must of necessity be changed, since it had now become meaningless. The superstructure of falsehood consists in converting those views into blasphemy and wilful antagonism to the Temple and its services, as though the religion of Christ encouraged iconoclasm. The expounder of Judaism was in this case confounded with the enemy of Judaism. Stephen reverts to this charge in his oration before his judges, and explains it in so far as it is true. He shows that God revealed Himself, and that men worshipped Him, before Solomon's Temple was ever built. Neither Abraham nor Moses nor David worshipped in the Temple; true religion, therefore, is not indissolubly bound up with it. And if there was a period before the erection of the Temple, when God and man held intercourse, why should there not be a period after its destruction, when the same or a closer intercourse might be carried on? God has had more than one dwelling-place on the earth; and that theology is wrong—be it Jewish or be it Christian—which binds God to any particular place or to any special mode of worship.

It is common to divide the Divine Dispensations into three—the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian. This division is not arbitrary, but is founded on Scripture language. We read in the Bible of three creations, or three classes of heaven and earth. The first is the Physical creation: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The second is Judaism, called in the Old

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and the New Testament heaven and earth: "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." Evidently the heaven and earth there alluded to are the ecclesiastical and civil polity of the Jews. The third creation is Christianity: "Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth; and the former ones will not be remembered nor come into mind." I shall cursorily examine these three creations, with a view principally, though not exclusively, of pointing out to you the *successive dwelling-places of God*.

I. Let us begin with the PHYSICAL CREATION. "Heaven is My throne; and earth is My footstool. Hath not My hand made these things?" The words refer directly to the material creation, and imply that God fashioned the heaven and the earth to be a temple to Himself, in which He might manifest His glory. It would be well for us to remember this truth in these Spring months, when we take frequent walks in the country—that nature is a Temple designed by God for His glory and worship. "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them," said God to Abraham. And it behoves us to address the same words to the inhabitants of our towns in the present day—"Look now toward heaven and tell the stars." Many of them seldom look higher than the street lamps—they seldom fix their eyes on the lamps God has hung up in the dome of the universe. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His

handiwork." Kant says that two things overwhelmed him with amazement—the heaven above and the heaven within, the infinitude of space and the infinitude of conscience. And certainly we should endeavour to work ourselves into a worshipful mood as we gaze upon the wonders celestial and terrestrial of the first creation. Abraham reared altars and offered sacrifices in the open fields. He had the earth for a floor and the sky for a canopy. He worshipped God in the Temple of Nature. The universe is a Temple. Many people, I am aware, convert it into a warehouse. They have turned our Father's House into a den of thieves—they have filled it with buyers and sellers and the exchangers of money. But, alas! where are the worshippers? Nature is exceedingly beautiful in this Principality of Wales. But the worst of it is—go where you will, the buyers and sellers and the exchangers of money are there before you; you cannot have quiet to worship in the first temple God reared for His glory and praise. Our age is intensely utilitarian.

It behoves us to remember that God is present in Nature. Not only He was present, but He is present. The ancients saw God in everything and law in nothing. We moderns have swung to the other extreme—we see law in everything and God in nothing. But the true Christian view is to perceive God and law—God in law, and through law, and above law. God still works in Nature, not capriciously, but methodically. The roses of this year are the embodiment of His freshest ideas. I do not aver that that rose is a

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part of God, but I do aver that God is in it as the source of its vitality and the principle of its beauty. A relation exists between it and God; and as long as that rose will be a living rose, God will be its God, "for God is not the God of the dead but of the living." "For God so clothes the grass of the field." How poetical, yet how true. What bare, ugly things blades of grass would be had not God clothed them! Just as I feel my heart beating at my fingers' ends, so the pulsations of Godhead may be discerned in the present rapid renewal of the earth. The Great Heart of Eternity may almost be felt throbbing—throbbing—throbbing in the wild flowers along the hedgerows. This season God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. The earth looks as new to-day as if she were born only yesterday. The curtain of heaven looks as blue and clean to-day as if it came from the factory only this week. "The former ones are not remembered nor come into mind." But however grand and magnificent the ancient Temple of Nature, God expresses His dissatisfaction with it. "Thus saith the Lord, Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool; where is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made these things?" The first creation does not afford rest to the Almighty—it is only a preparation for a better creation to follow. Notwithstanding its vastness it is not commensurate with the Power which produced it. The Creation is finite; the Power which produced it is infinite; and the infinite cannot find rest in the finite. In creating God had to work His power into

an angle, to press His Almighty into a pebble one inch in circumference. So that Nature hides more glory than it reveals, and God's noblest glory it cannot reveal at all. A second creation was needful.

II. Let us now proceed to the **SECOND CREATION OF JUDAISM.**

As we look round about us on the first creation we find it divides itself into two parts—matter and laws, substance and truths. Everything in Nature is either matter, or a law appertaining to matter. But in the second creation or Judaism God created only laws. He did not add to the matter of the universe, but He did add to the laws of the universe. The laws of Judaism again divide themselves into two classes—laws which are necessary and therefore eternal, and laws which are contingent and therefore temporary. The Lord delivered the Ten Commandments to Israel; those commandments are in a certain sense necessary and eternal. God did not make them—He only spoke them. That statement, no doubt, requires modification; but, broadly speaking, it will hold water. But as for the other laws delivered unto Israel—laws touching their civil and ecclesiastical government, God made them. The splendid fabric of ritual with its tabernacle and sacrifice and priesthood was the creation of God—not the creation of His arm like matter, but the creation of His mind.

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superior to the first. Where is the proof? In this—that spirit is nobler than matter. It is more difficult to preserve a spirit in its proper path than a planet in its right orbit. It is harder to keep the peace in the commonwealth of men than in the commonwealth of stars. In the first creation God was legislating for dead, inert matter; in Judaism He was legislating for free, living spirits. You see therefore that to make laws for a community of Jews was higher work and more arduous than to make laws for the Solar System. In every soul there is a heaven and an earth; ay, and if we do not mind, there will be a hell there too. But originally there is a heaven—powers ethereal, seraphic, divine. Love and imagination and pure reason—they form the heaven of the human spirit. But there is an earth there also—powers low, earthly, mercenary. They form what phrenologists denominate the basilar organs—the propensities which qualify man for social intercourse and worldly avocations. And to make laws for the heaven of the spirit, such as you find in the religious code of the Jews; and to make laws for the earth of the spirit, such as you find in the civil code of the Jews: to do all that demanded more thought and care and wisdom than to establish the earth and garnish the heavens.

As Judaism is thus an advance upon the system of Nature, so God became more visibly and palpably present in the former than in the latter. God became nearer man in Judaism than in the material creation. He was pleased to concentrate the symbol

of His presence in one special locality, first in the Tabernacle, afterwards in the Temple. Stephen speaks in this chapter of God as the "God of glory." Special reference is probably made to the Shekinah. God under the Old Testament was manifesting His presence in a cloud of dazzling light. The name therefore by which He was known was the Brilliant or Shining One. It was long supposed that God etymologically meant good. God, good; they were believed to be one and the same word. But further investigation seems to point out that the English god, the Latin *Deus*, the Greek *Theos*, the Welsh *Duw*—all come from an old Aryan root signifying to shine. Men thought of God, and to what could they compare Him? To nothing else than the shining splendour of the light. "God is light"—God means the Shining One. A kind of natural correspondence, therefore, subsisted between the Shekinah and God—the Shining Cloud and the Shining One. This Shining Cloud of dazzling brightness first appeared before the Gate of Eden; it appeared repeatedly to Abraham; and afterwards to Moses at the burning bush. At last it pleased God that it should dwell in the "Tabernacle of witness." The Shekinah ever burnt brightly within—a visible symbol of the presence of the Shining One. Stephen makes special reference to this Tabernacle in the verses preceding the text. During the Patriarchal Dispensation the Glory-Cloud wandered up and down the world without a fixed habitation. But on the establishment of Judaism it found a

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convenient abode in the "Tabernacle of witness." But this Tabernacle was small in size and mean in appearance; therefore David desired to build a temple unto God becoming His majesty and worthy His praise. What David conceived, Solomon was privileged to execute. "Solomon built Him an house." So far progress marks the history of religion among the Jews. God accepted the tribute of the philosopher-king and condescended to fill the magnificent structure on Mount Moriah with the cloud of His glory. The Shekinah thenceforth dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the Temple—a visible symbol of the invisible God.

In what then did the fault of the Jews consist? In supposing that the Divine presence was necessarily restricted to the Temple, and that Divine worship could neither be true nor acceptable unless directly or indirectly connected with the Jewish ritual. The local and temporary character of Judaism they entirely overlooked, which character Stephen in his oration forcibly urges on their attention. Judaism was designed to answer only a temporary purpose in the Divine economies. As God was worshipped acceptably before the building of the Temple, so will He be worshipped acceptably after its demolition. The Temple, however spacious and costly, could not afford God a permanent and congenial rest. "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will ye build Me? and where is the place of My rest?" It was gross superstition in them to imagine that God could be shut up for ever within

four walls which their own hands had built. "The hour cometh when ye shall worship the Father neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem." God is a Spirit, and what satisfaction can He find in mountains of dust? God is a Spirit, and what rest can He find in bricks and mortar, however skilfully put together? Not that we would disparage a material temple—the House of God demands our profoundest reverence. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God." "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." So long as God is pleased to dwell in it, it deserves our reverence; we drift, however, into error the moment we exalt the Temple of God above God Himself, and devote more attention to the ritual of worship than to the Object of worship. Stephen therefore was not guilty of blasphemy; he proves that the error lay at the door of his persecutors. The Temple on Moriah was not the goal—it was only a stage in the onward march of the Divine economies.

III. We now proceed to the **THIRD CREATION OF CHRISTIANITY**. "Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool; what house will ye build Me? and where is the place of My rest?" But evidently Stephen's argument does not properly conclude there—he is only paving his way to make a transition to Christianity. Neither do the prophet's words end there—he points to a Temple nobler and more spiritual and more pleasing unto God. "To

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In these dispensations, or creations of God, a certain gradation is observable. Every new dispensation is inaugurated by immediate Divine interference, every new creation is the direct result of a creative fiat. Hence corresponding with these three creations, we read of three creative words. The first is the word "*Be*" in Genesis, corresponding with the material creation. The second is "*I am*" in Exodus, corresponding with the Jewish creation. The third is "*Immanuel*,"—"the Word made flesh"—corresponding with the Christian creation. In the physical universe is seen the Word of His Might; in the Jewish the Word of His Oath; in the Christian the Word of His Essence. Be : I am : Immanuel. "Therefore, even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth."

That truths are of two kinds we have already shown—necessary and eternal on the one hand, contingent and temporary on the other. That one is the first figure in Numeration is necessary—God could not create a figure less than one. That two and two equal four is necessary—God could not make two and two equal five. But that the earth revolves round the sun in twelve months is not necessary, it might be fourteen months quite as well. That green is never used in making flowers is not necessary—it might be used in making blossoms as well as in making leaves. These truths are not necessary—they are truths which the Divine Being was pleased

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to make. And Christianity is a creation—a system of truths, of new truths, of truths which have been made. The Incarnation was not a truth always; it was not a truth in the days of Adam, of Abraham, or of Moses. But it is a truth to-day, a truth however which has been made. Atonement for sin was not a truth always; it was not a truth in the time of David or of Isaiah. But it is a truth now, a truth however which has been made. And if you compare these two classes of truths together—the truths of time and the truths of eternity—you will find that the truths of time are the more glorious. The truths God has made are in a sense more wonderful than the truths He has not made. The truths of the Incarnation and the Atonement stand out unrivalled among all the truths of the universe—they stretch out conspicuously like two mountains on a continent of level ground. Christianity is emphatically a new creation. “Behold, all things are made new.”

But what is it that principally differentiates the new creation of Christianity from the two preceding? The words of the text answer—“God dwelleth not in temples made with hands; hath not My hands made these things?” We have here come upon a very important phrase—“*made with hands*,” which suggests to us its opposite—“*not made with hands*.” They are the Scripture synonyms for the terms, “*natural*” and “*supernatural*” in modern theology. The Bible contemplates one class of the Divine works and says—They are made with hands. It

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contemplates another class and says—They are not made with hands. The first heaven and earth were made with hands, and therefore God refuses to dwell in them as in His congenial home. “Hath not My hand made these things?” Solomon’s temple was made with hands; and therefore God declined to acknowledge it as the place of His rest. “He dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” Where then will He dwell? In temples not made with hands. Christianity is described in prophecy as a “stone cut out of the mountain without hands,” and is thereby elevated to the realm of the supernatural.

I. But, more particularly, one thing of which it is predicated that it is not made with hands is the *body* or rather the human nature of Jesus Christ. “But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, *not made with hands*, that is to say, not of this building.”—Heb. ix. 11. What is there intended by the “tabernacle”? The human nature of Jesus Christ, of which it is denied that it was made with hands. The human nature of Adam was made with hands, according to Biblical phraseology; the human nature of his posterity was made with hands. But the human nature of the Saviour was radically different from them all—it was “not made with hands.” But what again is intended by “not being made with hands”? The Apostle hastens to explain—“not of this building,” or better still, “not of this creation.” Jesus Christ in His human nature does not properly belong to this creation. He is in it but not

of it. The forces of the creation did not produce His humanity, and do not explain it; it is the result of a higher and nobler operation of God. Look at the Babe in the manger of Bethlehem: He is not an unit in the solar system like you and I—He is the beginning of a new system, the foundation of a new creation. He was “not made with hands,” not produced by the intervention of the established laws of the world; He was the supernatural effect of the supernatural operation of God. “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” That is therefore the reason why He is in a pre-eminent sense the Temple of God. “All the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him bodily.” “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Here then at last is a Temple well pleasing unto the Most High. Contemplating the physical universe, God asks, “Hath not My hand made all these things?” And because made by His hands they could not afford Him a congenial home. But in Jesus Christ He finds a temple “not made with hands,” a temple therefore more akin to His own eternal nature, and in Him He deigns to dwell for ever. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

2. Another thing of which it is affirmed that it was “not made with hands” is the *regenerate heart*. “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision *made without hands*.”—Col. ii. 11. That is

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the phrase again—what does it mean? That to regenerate a man does not belong to the old system of things. No forces in the first universe, whether of mind or matter, can effect the spiritual renewal of our nature. A grand work is regeneration! There is nothing like it in the domain of Nature; it pertains to a new universe. And therefore is the second birth often designated a new creation. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The spiritual circumcision of the heart belongs emphatically to the realm of the supernatural. No amount of intellectual light or moral influence can regenerate the human heart—it is a supernatural act, the immediate result of the immediate operation of God. The natural man is said not to understand the spiritual; and no wonder—they do not belong to the same universe. They may be living in the same house, attending the same church; but, after all, they are separated by the width of a whole creation. The natural man, whatever be his intellectual acquirements or his moral character, is an integral part of the System of Nature, has been produced by its forces and is confined within its bounds. But the regenerate man has been ushered into the sphere of the supernatural, has been produced by supernatural powers and is inspired by supernatural influences. He is supernatural—a temple “not made with hands;” and therefore God dwells in him as in a home. “Know ye not that ye are the temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God

destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." "Will God of a truth dwell with man on the earth?" Yea, answers St. Paul, he will not only dwell *with* man, he will also dwell *in* man on the earth.

It has now been made clear to us that God's proper temple is holy humanity, and under the Christian dispensation He has found the temple He so earnestly coveted. In the first creation we see the works of Nature; but God declares He cannot rest therein. In the Temple of Solomon we see the works of Art; but God again declares He cannot find in it the place of His rest. "Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool; what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?" Yea, the great God, because Thou hast made them with Thine own hands, we thought them a building worthy Thy worship and praise. "No; I must have a temple not made with hands, something more akin to My own nature and perfection." What then wilt Thou do? The latter end of the verse answers—"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." A sinner trembling at His word is more pleasing to Him than a universe trembling at His nod. A bright tear rolling down a penitent's face yields more delight to Him than a bright star careering melo-

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IX.

Philip and the Eunuch.

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go towards the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou reatest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized! And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea."—ACTS viii. 26-40.

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Now that Stephen is dead, he may be considered the first of the deacons, and the next in energy and influence to the apostles themselves. On the scattering abroad of the disciples because of the cruel persecution then raging in Jerusalem, Philip went down to a city of Samaria, probably Sychar, where the Saviour once laboured for two days with marvellous success. Philip's preaching in the same town was much prospered. "There was great joy in that city." The few, who remained in Jerusalem, hearing of his great and unexpected success, thought it expedient to send to him Peter and John on a visit of inspection. What the "Evangelist" had so well begun, the two apostles helped to carry forward. The believers through their instrumentality "received the Holy Ghost." Soon after, Peter and John started on their return journey; and a Divine messenger, appearing unto Philip, ordered him to leave his fruitful field of labour and travel southward. It is to this flying visit of Philip to the South that I now solicit your attention.

I. Philip meeting the Eunuch.

II. Philip preaching to the Eunuch.

III. Philip baptizing the Eunuch.

I. PHILIP MEETING THE EUNUCH.

An "angel of the Lord," the narrative says, "spake unto Philip." Whether there was a visible representation or not, we cannot positively tell—very likely there was. Spirits seem to possess the

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power to materialise themselves. They represent a higher type of being than matter; but the higher always includes within it the lower. A spirit, though not matter, can touch matter and set it in motion. An angel possesses inherently the power of making himself visible whenever the occasion demands it. But certain it is that he spake. "An angel of the Lord spake unto Philip." Not he injected thoughts secretly into his mind, but he spake. It is not the "angel said," but the "angel spake." That men can speak with the tongues of angels is doubtful; but certainly angels can speak with the tongues of men. "An angel spake unto him." The partition wall between men and angels is very thin—they can hear us talk, we can almost hear them. Indeed, it is not a wall at all—it is only a "veil;" the two spheres of rational existence adjoin and seem sometimes to overlap each other.

If we believe the Scriptures, and I for one do, angels were seen and heard in the first century of our era—they busily interested themselves in the affairs of the early Church. Have they been withdrawn? By no means. They are as busy and useful now as ever. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?" That they do not speak audibly is not a proof that they do not speak at all. We believe that evil spirits commune with our spirits, and insinuate wicked thoughts. If that be true of evil spirits, why deny the same power to good spirits? As many of our more heinous thoughts

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are manifestly traceable to evil angels, why may we not be indebted for many of our larger and more generous thoughts to good angels? We sit leisurely in the house, when all of a sudden a thought shoots through the mind with all the force of a Divine command, that we must "arise and go towards the South,"—that we must go and visit in a certain street. It is not impulse, for impulse points in a contrary direction. It is not feeling, for feeling bids us remain where we are; but we have no rest—the thought continually recurs. At last we yield to the importunity of an extraneous power and go, and lo! we discover that our presence and assistance were sorely needed. The same agency which fetched Philip to the aid of the Ethiopian eunuch, often urges us to visit people temporally and spiritually distressed. But alas! we are not equally obedient. The history contained in Holy Writ is not peculiar to one class or age; it is peculiar only in so far as it is representative and explanatory of all other histories. It gives a few times an outward and sensible embodiment to an universal truth—the same power that prompted and guided men of old still exerts its influence. "An angel of the Lord spake unto Philip," and the angels of the Lord are as much concerned in our lives as in his. Though they do not appear to the eyes or speak to the ears, they yet convey thoughts and suggestions to us as they did to him. The form varies—the fact remains.

The "angel spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and

go toward the South, unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert,"—that is, the way. One cannot help wondering at the minuteness of the angel's geographical knowledge; he gives an exact description of a desert road, which a certain dusky foreigner was about to travel. Palestine is not the only country with whose geography angels are acquainted; they have oftentimes, doubtless, walked the hills and trod the valleys of our own favoured land, consecrated as every parish is, with the prayers and praise of our pious forefathers.

That the message delivered by the angel to Philip would prove a trial to his faith is unquestionable. It required that he should deny his most cherished personal predilections. Succeeding so remarkably in a city of Samaria, no doubt he was much tempted to prolong his stay. But the command came to him, without any accompanying explanation, to break off at once from the happy society of the new converts and depart to a desolate region. Why ordered away so unceremoniously? Why bring his work to an abrupt termination in so promising a sphere? A great trial to his reason—a great trial even to his faith! It required a mighty effort of will to acquiesce cheerfully in the Divine plan. That he knew it to be Divine, did not make it much, if any, the more easy to flesh and blood. Duty is Divine, and we all know it; but knowledge of its Divineness does not remove our difficulties in the performance of it. The Ten Commandments were

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all spoken by God, and we believe it; but belief in their supernatural source does not make it the more easy to keep them. "Arise and go towards the South unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." No sooner was the command given than Philip obeyed. He might with a great show of reason raise formidable objections, but did not. The unbeliever always raises objections, but the believer always puts them down. "He arose and went."

As soon as he arrived in the unpromising neighbourhood described by the angel, he saw a chariot driving along occupied by a "man of Ethiopia." Ethiopia was an influential kingdom south of Egypt, probably the same as that extensive region now known as Nubia and Abyssinia. The eunuch, therefore, was one of the sable descendants of Ham. Human reason is much embarrassed that God should order His faithful servant to forsake the populous city, where eager crowds listened joyfully to his ministry, to go and preach to a foreign traveller in a desolate path among the distant hills. But the longer we contemplate the story, the more consonant it appears with the "method of the Divine government." God pays as much heed to the one as to the many. His government is special attending to the minutest wants of individuals, as well as general attending to the collective wants of the multitude. The shepherd went into the wilderness to recover one sheep. The woman swept the house to discover one coin. "There is joy in the presence

of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." And the angel bids Philip go all the way from Samaria to the hill country of Judæa to enlighten one man. God lays much stress upon units.

Not only he was a "man of Ethiopia," but also an "eunuch." Many take this term to signify merely that he was a court officer. But the narrative seems to teach unmistakably that he was literally what the historian designates him. It is always well to take the literal meaning of Bible language unless there be something in the context demanding a figurative interpretation. The "letter killeth," it is true; but that does not imply that we should kill the letter in return. The only way of penetrating to the spirit is by retaining, and not by discarding, the letter. He was an eunuch. Eunuchs were numerous among Oriental nations, but were forbidden in Israel. A special law was enacted which disqualified eunuchs to join in the "congregation of the Lord." In other words, they could not be admitted as members into the Old Testament Church. Divine religion never encourages the mutilation of the body, but its subjugation. False religions always prescribe mutilation. Their only method of overcoming sin is to disable the body to commit it. But true religion views with stern disfavour the slightest attempt to disfigure the body—it is true not only to God but to nature as well. It inculcates not mutilation but subjugation. Wherefore the Ethiopian eunuch could not be incorporated into the Jewish Church; at best he

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He was employed under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was set over all her treasures. In modern phraseology he was her Minister of Finance, the most important office of all under despotic forms of government. But notwithstanding his enviable position, he was at the core of his being sadly ill at ease. His dependants doubtless thought could they but obtain what he possessed they would for ever rest and be thankful. But that is an idea which experience persistently refuses to translate into fact—it is not true to the nature of man. The Grand Vizier of Ethiopia discovered to the bitterness of his soul that earthly possessions, however vast, cannot satisfy the profound yearning of our humanity. Notwithstanding his political and worldly success, his heart was still restless and hungry. That is why we read that “he went to Jerusalem to worship.”

The best spirits of all the nations surrounding Judæa, it is well known, turned at this period with loathing from heathen religions and superstitions, and looked with hopeful eyes to the religion of the Jews. Proselytes to Judaism could be counted by the score among the thoughtful and cultivated classes. That century witnessed a general break-up of false systems of worship. Men, good and bad, learned and illiterate, had lost all confidence in the ancient forms of faith. Some betook themselves to sheer atheism. Others took a dishonest advantage of the universal

bankruptcy of the gods to cultivate witchcraft. In this very chapter we have depicted to us this deplorable tendency of human nature. Simon Magus was a clever, cunning man, taking undue advantage of the wild confusion to impose upon the public credulity by sorcery. Magicians swarmed in every land. As human nature could not get what it imperatively demanded at the hands of the priests, it tried what it could obtain at the hands of magicians. Almost every person of rank and quality kept in his employ a sorcerer, as, in ages after, it became the fashion to keep a fool.

But the better disposed of the intelligent classes passed over to Judaism. They found in it what the other systems of religion failed to give—pure morality and strict monotheism. The eunuch travelled all the way from Meröe, the capital of Ethiopia, to Jerusalem, the capital of Judæa, “to worship God.” He repudiated the disgraced idols of heathenism and learned to acknowledge the “only wise God.” But though sincere in his adherence to Judaism and morally qualified to enter within its pale, he was labouring under a physical disqualification which no devotedness could amend—he could not be grafted into the stock of Israel. Nothing therefore remained for him to do but to stand outside and press as near as the legal ordinances would admit. Hundreds came annually from remote lands to Jerusalem, like the Greeks of whom we read in the Gospel, to offer worship to Jehovah, the God of the Jews. But admittance was not granted them be-

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yond the court set apart for the service of the Gentiles—the “partition wall” reared high its head to warn them off. They were proselytes of the Gate. They would gather anxiously around the Gate which led from one enclosure to the other—they would peer wistfully through and prayerfully hope the “fulness of time” would soon arrive, when the ponderous Gate should be removed, and a free entrance to all the courts be granted to all the nationalities of the earth. The noble and dignified Ethiopian was obliged to offer his worship in the exterior court, and sincere, genuine worship no doubt it was. “He had been to Jérusalem for to worship.”

II. PHILIP PREACHING TO THE EUNUCH.

The eunuch was now returning. How did he spend his time? In surveying the beauties or the blemishes of the scenery around him? No; but “sitting in his chariot he read Esaias the prophet.” His mind was deeply imbued with solemnity, his thoughts were totally absorbed in religion. He humbly and anxiously studied the Word of God on his way from the Temple of God. *We* often erase all good impression received in the house of God by frivolous dissipating talk on our way home. But the Ethiopian eunuch, “sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet.” Some time before, a tolerably correct translation of the Hebrew Scriptures had been made into Greek by seventy learned men in Alexandria. It is usually known as the

Septuagint. By means of it the knowledge of the true God had been widely diffused, especially among the educated classes. The eunuch had probably purchased a copy and was now studiously perusing it. People nowadays, going on a tedious journey, take with them frivolous and exciting books with a view to "kill" the time. Better, I should imagine, did they learn a lesson from the religious African and read the Bible, not to "kill" the time but to improve it. "Redeem the time for the days are evil." It is a mournful picture of the degeneracy of the age that we should be always contriving to "kill" the hours instead of taking advantage of them to better our condition temporal and spiritual.

But the text gives us further to understand that he was "reading aloud." Some aver it was customary among Orientals to do so—a very unsatisfactory explanation. The word signifies, besides reading aloud, to read to another. Herein I believe consists the true reason of his reading aloud—he was endeavouring to benefit his charioteer as well as himself. A truly generous man! The section of the Scriptures he was reading was singularly striking and appropriate. The Jewish division of the Scriptures was widely different from ours. One section began in the 52nd chapter of Esaias and comprised four or five of the following chapters. And strange to remark, it is the very section which treats of the close relation eunuchs were to sustain to the Church of God under the New Dispensation.

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Not by chance was he reading this portion of Holy Writ. No, he was eagerly and tremulously studying it rather than any other that he might come to some definite conclusion respecting his own chances of ultimate salvation.

The chariot was driving leisurely along when Philip, wearied and dust-stained with his hasty journey, arrived in sight. The paths of the two men were now to intersect. "The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot." At the beginning of the journey an *angel* of God spake unto him; now that he has obeyed and his work is at hand, the "*Spirit* of God said unto him." As a reward for cheerful and implicit obedience, the presence of the angel of God is superseded by the presence of the Spirit of God. "The Spirit said unto him." Certainly not without purpose the historian makes his change in his phraseology—a deep principle is underlying it. An angel suffices to deliver an errand indicating the path of duty; if we obey, we shall be rewarded with the aid of the Spirit where the aid of a creature, however exalted, will not avail us. The angel was adequate to bid "Philip arise and go towards the South;" but the angel was not competent to bring about the conversion of the distinguished traveller. Not the angel but the Spirit could accomplish that. Angels cannot open hearts or regenerate souls any more than men—conversion is the immediate and exclusive work of the Holy Spirit. Angels minister unto the heirs of salvation, but can neither convert

them nor sanctify them. The Spirit only can do that.

“The Spirit *said* unto Philip.” He did not speak, He said. He did not converse in audible tones, as the angel did, but expressed Himself distinctly in the inward voice of the soul. Angels can never speak *in* the soul, at best they can only speak *to* it. There is an impassable gulf fixed between all created spirits—they can speak to each other but not in each other. But the Holy Spirit can cross the gulf and speak to man by speaking in man. “The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot.” The Holy Spirit was deeply concerned about the conversion of this African. We cannot help wondering at the marvellous combination of distinct agencies here brought into play to effect the conversion of one man. The Word of God and the Servant of God, the Angel of God and the Spirit of God, are all working together to bring about the salvation of one soul! The whole forces of the world, visible and invisible, have been set in motion to secure one conversion. Wonderful the patience and condescension of God!

No sooner did the Spirit convey the intimation to Philip than he “ran” and said unto the eunuch, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” “The eunuch answered and said, How can I except some one guide me?” If he did not understand, evidently he possessed the first qualification to do so—he was conscious of his ignorance and incompetency. He knew he did not understand, and was candid

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enough to avow it. "How can I except some one guide me?" Many in the present day are like him in their ignorance of the Scriptures, but very unlike him in their want of consciousness of that ignorance. They occupy exalted positions in science and literature, but the misfortune is that they presumptuously claim to understand theology likewise better than its professed students. The philosophy of the century in the persons of its popular representatives "vaunteth itself and is puffed up." Talk of the dogmatism of theology! Why, it has never been half so dogmatic as the so-called philosophy when approaching the same grand problems of existence.

Keenly alive to his ignorance, the eunuch honestly confessed his need of a guide, and beckoned Philip to take his seat at his side, and to explain to him the wonderful prophecy he had just been reading. Humble as a little child, he expressed his willingness to learn of the footsore pedestrian. Then he read over the passage again—"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth; in His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth." Then said he, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" He speaks not haughtily and imperiously; he forgets his social superiority in his intense eagerness to solve the great problems of religion; he beseeches Philip to explain the prophetic riddle. The prophet speaks of the "Servant

of the Lord." But who is this servant? "Speaketh he this of himself or of some other man?" A right honest and a right thoughtful question. We may smile at its simplicity; nevertheless it is a question of the first magnitude. It is a question still hotly debated between the rationalistic and the evangelistic school of interpretation. But of Philip's answer there can be no doubt—he pointed him in plain unambiguous language to that "Other Man." "Philip opened his mouth," and delivered himself of his momentous message. Some people the moment they open their mouths shut the Scriptures. They darken counsel with words without knowledge. But Philip "opened his mouth," and thereby opened the Scriptures. "He began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus." He began there—he did not finish there. That Scripture is the climax of the Old Dispensation, which never reached a higher strain. But the climax of the Old is the starting-point of the New. Where Esaias left off, there Philip began. "The least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." "Beginning at the same Scripture, he preached unto him Jesus."

The only way to expound the Bible is to preach Jesus. Omit Him, and it is a dark riddle which no human ingenuity can unravel. He is the key to unlock the prophecies. Read the Gospel of St. Matthew, and you will be surprised at the continuous use the Evangelist makes of Jesus to throw light on the prophecies. Where others find no trace of Him St. Matthew discovers, Him immedi-

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ately—he sees Him in passages where modern criticism finds nothing more than insignificant historical allusions. I was not long ago reading an erudite work on the “Christology of the Old Testament;” and I could not help wondering at the strenuous efforts and the ingenious expedients learned men resort to in order to empty Psalm and prophecy of Jesus. But I rather trust the instinct of the saints than the scholarship of the critics. “He preached unto him Jesus.”

In a city of Samaria, Philip “preached unto them *Christ* ;” but to the eunuch “he preached *Jesus*.” Is there any reason for this difference in the words? I believe there is. The Samaritans expected Jesus as the Christ; they were full of theories respecting the promised Christ. “I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ,” said a woman of the city. Among them, therefore, Philip had to meet that particular form of religious faith—he dwelt principally on the Christhood of the Saviour. That was the special aspect of salvation their preliminary training demanded. But the eunuch was not hampered with any set theories or preconceived notions. What he supremely desired was a personal Saviour to deliver him from his sin and misery. To him, therefore, Philip preached Jesus. The eunuch had just read of Him as a “Lamb, dumb before his shearers,” “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.” And now Philip shows him that in His chastisement he might find peace, and in His stripes he might find healing. Oh, that Other Man!

But Philip was not content with a mere exposition of the prophecy. "He preached unto him Jesus"—unto him. He pressed the Saviour on his acceptance. There is reason to fear that much of modern preaching is not personal enough. We preach at people, and before people, but we do not preach enough unto them. You pick up a volume of sermons from the bookstall, and behold—it is a volume of sermons "preached *before* the University of Oxford." Before, forsooth! We have been preaching long enough before our congregations and at them, it is high time we should now preach to them. Let the beams of the sun fall broadly on your outstretched hand, and you hardly notice it; concentrate them on one spot and they burn. And the Gospel light shines fully and broadly on our congregations, but how few the conversions! We diffuse the light instead of focusing it. We should concentrate it on the conscience and then it would burn its way to the very quick of the soul. "He preached unto him Jesus."

III. PHILIP BAPTIZING THE EUNUCH.

In an hour or two after first hearing the Gospel he was baptized into its faith. Modern Churches require candidates to submit to a tedious process of probation and to show themselves worthy of the exalted fellowship. Prudence occasionally counsels delay, but I must question its Scripturalness. On profession of faith in the Saviour, the candidate

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should at once be baptized. He is to manifest his worthiness not so much before as after admission. To walk worthy of our high vocation within the Church is hard enough; to walk worthy of it whilst yet in the world is much harder. The Eunuch was baptized immediately.

But he was baptized on making a confession of his faith, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The preponderance of opinion, I know, favours the omission of Philip's question and the Eunuch's answer from the inspired text. But if you expunge these particular words, the truth they contain will still remain intact. Only on a candid confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God can a man be legitimately received into the Christian Church. The Church of the New Testament exists to proclaim the personal union of God and Man in the Incarnate Son. Whatever else men believe, if they deny this they fling away the very truth that redeems the human race. On the other hand, if they confess this, they have clearly a right of admission into the Church of the New Testament. They may be confused in their theories of Inspiration, they may differ in their philosophy of the Atonement, and yet be good Christians; but they must all believe the vital doctrine—that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God."

Correct views on other doctrines are of great importance to a robust, vigorous spiritual life; and we

should never tire of teaching nor you of learning them. But they do not necessarily endanger our ultimate salvation. But a correct belief respecting the Person of the Saviour is an element absolutely essential to salvation—without it no man can be saved. This teaching bears hard upon Unitarianism, but I believe it to be perfectly Scriptural. Unbelief by common consent shuts out from heaven. But unbelief in what? Unbelief in God's existence? Not merely that, but unbelief in God's Incarnation. "Hereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." The Incarnation of Christ is the cardinal doctrine of the Gospel. Deny it and you have no Gospel.

The Prayer Book gives us a concise list of 39 Articles of the Christian religion; but it is not necessary that a man believe the 39 in order to be saved. We may differ in our views of 38, or nearly so, and still be saved. But we must all agree upon that which affirms the proper Divinity of the Saviour or be liable to "perish everlastingly." I do not say we must believe in the Athanasian exposition of the doctrine; but we must believe in the fact itself, explain it as we may. Faith in other truths is helpful, faith in this is essential. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

The Eunuch, being baptized, "went on his way rejoicing." Prior to his interview with Philip we have seen that he was restless and unhappy. He

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carried a burden he could not describe, a sorrow he could not explain. His profound grief found vent in the tearful strains of the 53rd of Esaias. But Philip's teaching dissipated the gloom. The strings of the burden snapped in sight of the Cross, and the Eunuch was delivered from that which he feared. "He went on his way rejoicing." Many foolishly imagine that religion is a melancholy thing. A sad mistake! "He went on his way rejoicing." I am not sure but the words signify that his joy revealed itself in glorious outbursts of praise. Shame upon our gloomy faces, desponding looks, and heavy groans! Think you that gloom is holier than joy, groans diviner than song, tears more godlike than laughter?

"The sorrows of the mind
Be banished from the place;
Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less.

"Let those refuse to sing
That never knew our God;
But children of the Heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad."

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X.

The Character of St. Paul.

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”—ACTS ix. 15.

THE Apostle Paul was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, a city remarkable for its learning. Strabo puts it before both Athens and Alexandria in the zeal with which it prosecuted the study of Greek literature. There Paul was born and bred, and no doubt laid the foundation of his subsequent studies in classical lore. At an early age, however, he was removed to Jerusalem to the celebrated school of the Rabbi Gamaliel, “a man had in reputation amongst all the people,” and who, the only time he comes before us in the Scriptures, demeans himself with gravity, generosity, and good sense. “Refrain from these men,” were his words to the Sanhedrim, “for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” A sensible, liberal-minded man—too liberal-minded to please one of

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his scholars at least. That one is young Saul of Tarsus.

Saul is animated by the burning spirit of persecution. He is very zealous for the traditions of the fathers, and in his blind fanaticism thinks the best way to uphold his own faith is to burn up every other. Accordingly we read that he was an eye-witness of the martyrdom of Stephen, and guarding the clothes of them who threw the stones at the holy man. "He consented unto his death." This means not passive, but hearty, active approval of his execution—he took pleasure in his martyrdom—he exulted in his death. And like a tiger after the first taste of blood, he grew in fierceness and determination to put to death all who walked in the new "Way." He persecuted them even to foreign cities. But on the road to Damascus Jesus appeared unto him; and whilst depriving him for a time of his bodily sight, opened the eyes of his mind. The whole current of Saul's thoughts, feelings, and life is thenceforth changed. He is led to the ancient Syrian town by his subordinates—a kind of police officers probably—in a state of blindness. The Lord Jesus appears to Ananias in a vision, and informs him of the conversion of Saul. "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name," &c.

I. "He is a VESSEL."

The word here rendered vessel may also be translated "instrument;" but either reading gives a

good sense. Paul may be viewed as an instrument in the skilled hands of the Divine Agent to carry out His gracious purposes in the world; or he may be compared to a vessel into which the Lord Jesus poured abundantly of His mind and His love. The latter figure is repeatedly used in the New Testament to describe men. We are not compared to fountains or springs which give forth, but to reservoirs or vessels which take in. "All our springs are in Thee." God is an infinite Spring giving inexhaustibly forth; men are empty vessels receiving everlastingly of His fulness. He made us not springs to originate but vessels to receive. Why did God create? That He might have vessels into which to pour of His never-failing fulness. He made us vessels capacious and empty that He might have the happiness of filling us, and that we might have the pleasure of being filled by Him. The difference between men is not in their power to originate and give forth, but in their power to comprehend and take in.

II. "He is a vessel UNTO ME."

This means that Paul was now become the actual possession of Jesus Christ. Heretofore he was in the service of the great enemy of God and men. He was the ablest and the most dangerous opponent the young Church had yet encountered. "He was yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter." This little word "yet" signifies not a sudden paroxysm of fury but a deep-rooted passion. The old

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anger which rejoiced in the killing of Stephen continued to burn on; the spirit of persecution was continually increasing in bitterness and vehemence. Cruelty had deeply dyed his whole being. "He yet breathed out threatenings and slaughter." The language means that he breathed in as well as breathed out—he inhaled as well as exhaled—he lived in the very atmosphere of ferocity and savageness. He could think of nothing else, could speak of nothing else, could do nothing else. His nature seemed for the time vulgarised and brutalised by his blind and extravagant zeal to crush the new religion.

Not content with vexing the Church at Jerusalem, he obtained letters from the high priest to the synagogues in Damascus, empowering him to harass the saints there. You have noticed an infuriated bull in a field, bellowing with his voice and ploughing the ground with his feet—"breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the terrified travellers on the road; were it not for the thickset hedge which shuts him in, he would soon execute his fury upon them. That is an apt illustration of the behaviour and disposition of Saul. Like an infuriated beast he "breathed out threatenings and slaughter" against them who were of the "Way;" and in his madness and folly he went to the high priest for letters to authorise him to go over the hedges of the law to prosecute more diligently his sanguinary work. He is the most active agent in the service of the kingdom of darkness; his vessel is full of wormwood


and gall. "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious." In the height of his sinful career, however, as he was approaching Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to claim the vessel to Himself. "Saul fell on his face to the ground;" and falling, the vessel was completely emptied of all its former contents. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

1. These words from the lips of the exalted Redeemer teach two things. First, that Saul was *being pricked*. The ploughman in Oriental lands, carried with him a long slender rod, sharpened like a spear at the point. When the oxen showed signs of intractableness he touched them with the goad; if they suddenly kicked back, the goad only penetrated more deeply into their lacerated flesh. Thus it would appear that the Lord Jesus was occasionally, from the Throne of the Universe, piercing with the sharp arrows of conviction the sensitive nature of Saul; but the latter plunged and towered and raged—he kicked rebelliously against the pricks. Possibly the angelic countenance, the dying testimony, and the beautiful sleep of the Proto-martyr had roused his conscience from its Pharisaic torpor. Perhaps the intrepid bearing, the divine composure of Christian women, as he haled them to prison and to judgment, served to give rise to sore misgivings. The thought may have frequently shot like lightning through his mind—"What if these Christian men and women who suffer so patiently and die so meekly are right?" It is just probable that some

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heavy domestic affliction might have deepened the impression. He declares of himself: "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the high priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them"—literally, "my vote." This proves that after the death of Stephen he became a member of the Sanhedrim, and had power to vote in the trials of the saints. But according to the Jewish custom, only married men were allowed a seat in the national assembly. But no mention whatever is made of Saul's wife. The probability is that she had died; and no one can bury his young and beautiful wife without being mightily exercised in spirit. Such an event, which is quite in keeping with the primitive tradition that Paul was a widower, must have stirred within him strange and mysterious thoughts. His nature must have been powerfully roused by strong upheavings. The goads of the Saviour were driving through him like sharp nails. Many a sudden twinge he must have experienced before he could understand the heinous nature and the subtle workings of sin as we know he did.

2. But Saul "*kicked* against the pricks." He resolutely rebelled against the misgivings of conscience and angrily resisted the Divine voices which warned him to desist in his impious career. Every man of strong will, determinedly set in one direction, takes a long time to be subdued. Paul was not to be easily turned from the error of his ways—more strokes than one are requisite to bend the iron



bar. He kicked—he rebelled. The fierceness of his persecuting zeal evidences a severe, inward conflict. “When the commandment came, sin revived;” the spirit of persecution rankled more bitterly than ever—his anger burned intensely hot. But the additional heat was the result and the evidence of inward friction. Others may have persecuted from principle, but Saul persecuted from passion as well. “The commandment” to surrender came, and the old proud and sinful nature vehemently resisted—sin revived and became more operative. Saul prosecuted his sanguinary work more savagely than ever. The spasmodic struggles of the dying horse are awful to witness; at the approach of death his strength temporarily revives. Thus it was with Saul: his sanguinary zeal to persecute the Church even unto Damascus was only the mad spasm which precedes death. “When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” He fell on the ground as dead; his self-righteousness was torn in shreds. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” These words are pervaded by a sorrowful tenderness. The question is addressed to him in the Hebrew language,—the language of his home and his early days, the language in which his father and mother used to address him in the family. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Instead of being addressed in the stern and withering language of a judge, he is addressed in the gentle, pitiful, soft tones of a

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familiar friend. Saul was very angry with Jesus; but Jesus was not angry with Saul—He speaks to him and yearns over him like a mother. "God is angry with me," remarked Luther to the good monk Staupitz. "No," answered the aged man, "it is you that are angry with God." The answer carried a degree of light and comfort to Luther's agitated mind. Saul was very wroth with Jesus; but Jesus was very gentle to Saul. The discovery of the Saviour's tenderness and love completely overcame the persecutor. He fell to the ground thoroughly vanquished, crying with the helplessness of a little child, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His self-will is completely broken. Not his strong will but his self-will. Self-will is an impiety, strong will is an excellence. Self-willed Paul was not any longer—self-denial, self-abnegation marks every movement and turn of his life. But strong-willed he ever continued to be, and all honour to him for it. He surrenders himself unconditionally to the Saviour; he will henceforth manifest the same strength of will in obedience as he did before in resistance. The vessel was wrested that day from the power of the enemy; henceforth he will be a vessel separated unto and honoured in the service of Jesus Christ.

III. "He is a CHOSEN vessel unto Me."

I. This must mean that he was a *choice* vessel. He was an "earthen vessel," it is true; but great difference is observable in the quality of even

earthen vessels. The clay which goes to make one is coarser and grosser than that which goes to make another. But Paul was made of the finest clay of earth—he was a very rare and choice soul. Chemical analysis, it is said, discovers considerable difference in the quality of human brains. The brain of the uneducated rustic is said to be coarse and gritty, whereas that of the man of genius is affirmed to be fine, smooth, silky and sensitive. Be that as it may, but there can be no doubt that Paul was a very superior man, a vessel manufactured with the greatest care out of the finest materials of earth. He was “separated unto God from his mother’s womb.” What do the words signify? Not that he was regenerated from his mother’s womb—that we know he was not. What then? That when he “was made in the secret parts of the earth,” God thought of the ultimate purpose to which he was to be devoted, and proceeded to fashion him accordingly. The Creator stamped refinement on his very make. The same law runs through the Kingdom of Grace as through the realm of nature—the perfect adaptation of means to ends. If God has any special design to accomplish, He does not seek to bring it about by any means, but always by the most suitable means. And if Paul was designed to be a vessel to receive God’s grandest revelations of Himself and to convey the same to mankind, then he must be specially fashioned for that purpose. Design runs through every department of the Divine Government—here as in nature it is seen in the

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proper adaptation of means to ends. "Separated from his mother's womb." Circumstances can do much, but they cannot change nature. Circumstances can determine whether the apple shall ripen under the golden shine of the sun or fall to the earth a green bead blighted by the East wind; but circumstances can never change an apple into a berry. Circumstances can modify talent, but cannot change it. Saul would have been a public man if he had never been an Apostle. He would have been an orator if he had never been a preacher. The raw material of an Apostle was wrought into his original make. "Separated from his mother's womb."

2. He was *chosen or ordained* of God unto the work of the Apostleship. "He is a vessel of election unto Me." God's choice of him preceded his choice of God. The doctrine of election has been wrongly taught by a few, and falsely apprehended by many. What is the Scriptural doctrine of election? That God chooses man before man chooses God, and the latter is only the faint echo of the former. The Divine election should be viewed in much the same light as the Divine love. "We love Him because He first loved us." Not only God's love precedes ours, but it is the cause of ours. In like manner we choose God because He first chose us; and our choice of Him is only the natural result of His choice of us. "The natural result," did I say? I beg your pardon—our choice of God is the supernatural effect of His choice of us. God

marked out Saul as a fit instrument to carry out His purposes in the world. "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," said the blessed Saviour to His Apostles—the first choice originated with Him. The fundamental principle of all false religions is that man chooses his God. Look to Hindostan or any other heathen land—everywhere the man chooses his God. But in Christianity this fundamental principle of heathenism is reversed—here God chooses His man. "He is a vessel of election unto Me;" and Paul could never afterwards sufficiently magnify God's sovereign grace for calling him and setting him in the ministry.

IV. "He is a vessel of election unto Me to BEAR MY NAME."

1. Paul bore the name of Jesus Christ in his *intellect*. His capacious mind had no room for anything or anybody else. "I count all things but dung and loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." The glorified form of the exalted Saviour, appearing unto him in dazzling light on the way to Damascus, photographed itself so deeply upon his mind that it could never afterwards be effaced. "To me to live is Christ." Sir David Brewster says, in his life of Sir Isaac Newton, that the illustrious astronomer on a certain occasion gazed steadfastly with his naked eyes on the sun shining in his meridian splendour. As a consequence, the impression on the retina was so deep that for days after he could not see anything

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with distinctness—turn which way he would he constantly beheld the image of the sun. He shut himself up for days in a dark room, but even there he could clearly discern the golden halo of the light. And Jesus Christ impressed Himself so deeply in the “great light” near the Syrian capital on the mind of Paul that His image was never afterwards effaced. Whichever way the Apostle looked he always perceived the reflection of Christ—go which way he would he always carried with him the image of the Sun. Some people read the books of Moses and fail utterly to find Christ in them; but Paul saw Him everywhere—he saw Him in types and figures which baffle the keenest criticism of modern commentators. What is the Epistle to the Hebrews? The image of Christ which Paul discovered in the Pentateuch. The Saviour completely filled his capacious intellect—he looked at every object in and through Christ.

2. He bore Christ's name in his *heart*. Paul may be compared to an “alabaster box of precious ointment”—the box is valuable, but the ointment is more precious. “The name of Christ is like ointment poured forth.” Paul was possessed of much genius. But only when Christ was poured forth upon his entire nature, when he received the unction from the Holy One, did he fill the world with his perfume. You can quote other ancient authors of equal brilliancy, perhaps of surpassing beauty; but I defy you to quote anywhere the fragrance is so sweet and so abundant. Carry the rose about your

person and you will scatter scent wherever you go. It signifies not much whether you bear it aloft in your hand or modestly conceal it between your tresses—either way the exquisite aroma will make its escape. You cannot well hide the perfume. And Paul carried about him the name of Christ—his writings are sweetly scented with leaves from the Rose of Sharon. Christ in the heart sweetens life and loads the air with delicious aroma!

We also can bear Christ's name in the heart; and if He be dwelling within, we cannot help diffusing around us the refining and sanctifying influences of the Divine Life. To raise the lid or break the box is not necessary to reveal the precious spikenard within—those near will divine the secret by the scent. Jesus Christ is an "offering of sweet smelling savour" to men as well as to God. The poet comes suddenly across a lump of clay, and lo! the clay is deliciously scented. "Well," asks the poet, "how is it, O clay, thou art so beautifully perfumed—methought perfume was foreign to thy nature?" "True," answers the clay, "in my primal state I was no better than the ordinary mire of the pit; but I was accidentally thrown into the midst of a bed of flowers; and lying among roses I caught their perfume." And Christians in their original state are not a whit better than other men—sweetness is foreign to their nature; but by holding exalted fellowship with Him whose "garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia," they catch the fragrance. "A bundle of myrrh is my well-

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beloved unto me; he (literary, it) shall lie all night betwixt my breasts." And lying all night with the bundle of myrrh in her bosom, the Church catches the scent; in communion with the Saviour life is made beautiful and fragrant.

3. But the words more especially mean that Paul was to bear Christ's name in his *ministry*. He "shall bear My name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." And in the next verse but one we see him beginning to fulfil the prediction. "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that He is the Son of God." He could not just then expound the mysteries of the Kingdom, but he could testify to the rank and dignity of the King—he was quite sure of the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel that the Saviour who revealed Himself to him in the Shekinah on the way was none other than the Son of God. Henceforth preaching became the passion and inspiration, the be-all and end-all of his life.

What then so excited his zeal? What prompted him so powerfully to bear the name of Christ to the perishing millions of the earth? To return an adequate answer, two factors must be taken into consideration. The first was a vivid, heartfelt conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Where the sense of sin is weak, the sense of ministerial responsibility is shallow, and one's grasp of theology is lax. Without a proper sense of sin, we cannot understand either the ardour or the doctrine of St. Paul. But the second and more powerful

element was his intense love to the Saviour. In 2 Cor. v. 11 he says, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"—a vivid apprehension of the judgment which will overtake the ungodly excited him to unwonted activity. But three verses further on he says, "The love of Christ constraineth us." The sense of His love was a more powerful incentive to action than the apprehension of His terror—the terror moved, the love constrained. The mill-wheel may be turned by one of two ways—either by a current of water flowing underneath or else by a stream falling upon it from above. But of the two the latter is the more efficient. And there are two ways of stimulating men to strenuous effort in the propagation of the Gospel. The first is a profound apprehension of the "terror of the Lord"—it is the undershot current and moves men from beneath. The other is a sweet and lively experience of His love—it is the overshot current, and excites men from above. But in the case of Paul the two currents worked together—the terror from beneath and the love from above; and as a consequence imparted unusual impetuosity and rapidity to his revolutions.

V. "He is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name BEFORE GENTILES AND KINGS AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL."

I. The wide scope of his ministry required certain *social qualifications* which the other apostles did not possess. Now Paul was a "freeman" of the Roman

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Empire, and therefore enjoyed all the privileges and exemptions of a Roman citizen. Born at Tarsus, where the study of Greek literature was the prevailing fashion, he became master of the Greek tongue, and sensible to all that was refined and beautiful in classic life. A Hebrew of the Hebrews and a pupil of Gamaliel, he was deeply versed in Scriptural and rabbinical lore. His writings contain forty-nine quotations from the Old Testament; and competent critics, after careful examination of the passages, have come to the conclusion that he invariably drew upon his memory. Thus in him all that was best in the three dominant types of the then civilisation beautifully met—the freedom of the Roman, the language of the Greek, and the theology of the Jew.

2. But the work allotted to him demanded great *intellectual culture* in order to its successful performance. The sphere of his labour was to be co-extensive with the habitable globe, and embraced all classes and ranks of men. "Before Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel." Great and varied culture was therefore demanded. Paul was doubtless a brilliant scholar. His writings always evince that grasp and mastery of the subject, which unconsciously impress you that he was a man of profound thought and rare erudition. Moses, the founder of Judaism, was "learned in all the learning of Egypt"—God made use of a man of extensive scholarship to establish his Kingdom among the Jews. Paul too, the demolisher of Judaism and the foremost

Apostle of Gentile Christianity, was learned in all the learning of his own and other nations. God always chooses men of education to do great and permanent work for Him upon the earth.

No doubt, Paul was an extensive reader—all geniuses are. He quotes from Aratus, Menander, and Epimenides, the minor poets of classic days; and if conversant with the minor, could he be ignorant of those whose thoughts and diction continue to mould all the youth of Europe? I trow not. But his vast powers as a thinker are patent to all—even his enemies have nothing worse to say of him than that he was the creator of Western Christianity. What alarming power such a creator must have possessed! His master faculty appears to have been the logical. He had been brought up from his youth in the science of dialectics. The age of seers and prophets was gone—his was the age of scribes and critics. Difficult questions were started in the schools avowedly for curious and recondite discussions. Singular interpretations were proposed expressly to put the acquirements and the subtilty and the vigour of the school to the severest test. No matter how intricate or interminable a discussion, if its dialectics were all maintained. Now Paul, having been trained in these schools, was a matchless dialectician. But his dialectics are never dry. Some writers in forming an argument, bring together dry and withered boughs, and, like the farmer, make a strong fence: Paul also forms a logical fence, but every rod, like Aaron's, flowers

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into beauty under the bewitching touch of his hand. His logical sword is of the best tempered steel; but the hilt is adorned with sparkling jewels and the scabbard embellished with fine tracings. John was a philosophic poet—Paul a poetic philosopher.

We are here introduced to a grand evangelistic principle—the Saviour ordained the most learned and accomplished of the apostles to be His missionary among the heathen. Missionary societies, however, often act on the reverse principle. Preachers who have failed in England are thought to be admirably suited to bring the Chinese to the worship of the Crucified. A fatal error! The most successful preachers in England are the best qualified to evangelise the heathen; the greatest knowledge is always the best instructor of ignorance. Will not any of our great, popular preachers, besides exhorting others to go out as missionaries, set the example by going out themselves?

3. But the work further demanded much *moral courage*. “Before Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel;” literally, *in the face of*. This implies that Paul would have to encounter innumerable obstacles, which only the greatest courage, moral and physical, could surmount. And perhaps true courage never towered more sublimely than in his life. Conscience was keen and strong in him, and scrupulous fidelity to its voice marks his whole career. Even when a persecutor, he was in the main true to his conscience; he put the saints to death, blindly believing he was doing God service.

He persecuted not so much for himself or his Church as for his God. And after his conversion he was always faithful to conscience. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." The sincerity of God. The idea is this: when you want to judge an object carefully, you take it to the sunlight; if there be flaws or stains, they will be then revealed. And Paul says he took his conscience to the sunlight of God—he examined it under the fierce light of eternity, and failed to discover a blot or a bruise. He could not recall an instance since his conversion in which he disobeyed the mandate of conscience. What conscience forbade, he refrained from; what duty enjoined, he faithfully performed. His conscience was free of stain under the searching sunlight of God. He was the only man, perhaps from the beginning of the world down to our own time, who could boldly make the startling assertion without fear of contradiction. He always obeyed the behests of conscience.

In the Sermon on the Mount we read of men persecuted for "righteousness' sake," and in the very next verse of men persecuted for "Christ's sake." The difference appears to be this: one class of men would die from attachment to the principles of the Kingdom; another class would die from attachment not to the principles of the Kingdom but to the person of the King. These two classes are in

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the Church of every age—men who will die for the principles of Christianity and men who will die for the Christ of Christianity—martyrs of conscience and martyrs of love—martyrs for righteousness' sake and martyrs for Christ's sake. Paul, perhaps, embraced the two types of piety as it behoved his representative character; but if there was a preponderance, it certainly lay on the side of righteousness. That was the Key-word of his life and theology—**RIGHTEOUSNESS**, or as some prefer to render it, **RIGHTNESS**. He would always do what was right—he could do nothing against conscience. He would gladly give up life rather than sacrifice principle. "To bear my name in the face of Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel." The indomitable strength of his will is nowhere seen to better advantage than in the presence of difficulties. The eagle never soars so high as he does on the day of tempest—the wilder the gale the loftier his flight. To a bird of feeble wing the gale may prove overpowering; but given a bird of vigorous pinion, and the more furious the wind the more majestically he sweeps the blue. And Paul is never more magnanimous than in the midst of difficulties; where other natures break down, there he soars sublimely. Lord Chatham, it is said, made his crutches add to the grandeur of his oratory; and Paul, dangling his chains in the face of his judge, made the most impressive peroration in the literature of eloquence.

We should not overlook the manifold troubles which befel him in the prosecution of his mission.

"I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." He gives us a full catalogue of his sufferings in 2 Cor. xi. 23-28, and an alarming catalogue it is. To read it thoughtfully is enough to make our flesh quiver. No portion of Sacred Writ is more touching than that in which he desires Timothy to "bring his cloak which he had left at Troas," and "to do his diligence to come before the winter." See the aged Apostle in prison in Rome—he is but scantily clad; he therefore beseeches Timothy "to do his diligence" to bring him his "cloak before the winter." "In prisons more frequent." At last he stands before Cæsar's judgment seat; and we all know the result—the vessel was shivered. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels;" and right bravely did Paul carry and exhibit the treasure. But at last the vessel was rudely broken, and Paul's name was added to the list of martyrs. But the treasure was neither lost nor broken. The treasure was placed in other vessels, and has been safely transmitted to us. The vessels holding it will not bear comparison with Paul; nevertheless the treasure is still the same. This treasure is pressed on your acceptance!

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XI.

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"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas ; this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died : whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber : and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed ; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes : and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa ; and many believed in the Lord."—ACTS ix. 36-42.

IN a preceding paragraph we are told that after the storm of persecution came a season of peace. "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria." "Then"—it refers probably to the conversion of Saul. Hitherto he had been the chief leader of the hostile faction—the anger in his heart it was that kept the fire of persecution burning so fiercely and so long. Now that he is converted the work of persecution flags, soon

it ceases altogether. "Then had the Churches rest."

Taking advantage of this auspicious circumstance, St. Peter went on a tour of inspection throughout the Churches of Palestine. In the course of his visitation, he came down to Lydda, a town situated somewhere in the plain of Saron; and there he miraculously healed a paralytic man named Æneas, "who had kept his bed eight years." This miracle created a profound sensation in the agricultural district round about; the sensation gradually subsided into a deep, lasting, moral impression. "They all turned to the Lord." The numerous miracles performed by Jesus Christ and His apostles in the towns produced not the moral renovation of the spectators; but this one miracle in Saron brought about the conversion of the whole population. The cause undoubtedly lay in the different temperament of the people, the inhabitants of the country being, as a rule, more susceptible and less sophisticated than dwellers in great cities. "They all turned to the Lord."

Now about twelve miles distant, on the coast of the Mediterranean, was Joppa, a town of some importance, as it afforded the only harbour along that inhospitable coast. "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha," &c.

I. "Tabitha, which by interpretation is called DORCAS."

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the *name*. Tabitha was Aramaic, that being probably the language of Palestine in the first century. St. Luke thinks it necessary to give his Greek readers its proper interpretation, an incidental proof that he was writing in Greek for the benefit of readers outside the boundaries of Palestine. "Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas." But Tabitha and Dorcas are equally meaningless to English readers. The translators have, therefore, very properly given on the margin the English synonym—"doe" or "roe," or in still more modern nomenclature, "gazelle." "Tabitha, Dorcas, Gazelle"—they are the Aramaic, Greek, and English equivalents. Whereas we in the present day go to the lily, the rose, and the violet for names to give our young maidens, the ancients often borrowed from the animal creation. A bold man would be compared to a lion; a beautiful woman would be compared to a "gazelle"—a creature noted for softness of outline, modesty of disposition, liquidity of eye, and grace of movement. Tabitha, Dorcas, Gazelle—a pretty name, fraught with tenderest poetry.

2. That St. Luke directs special attention to the name is a presumptive proof that, in this particular instance, the name was expressive of the rare *beauty* of the maid who bore it. Were the name a mere accident, St. Luke would not have been so careful to give its specific signification. "Tabitha, Dorcas, Gazelle"—the pains bestowed to explain it is sufficient proof that in her case the name was indica-

tive of rare personal charms. She was comparable to the gazelle—the most exquisite figure in amatory poetry to set forth high physical attractions. Read the Canticles, and the poet in his most sensuous mood has no apter figure to set forth the glory of Solomon or the beauty of his bride than roe, hart, hind, gazelle. In Dorcas, then, we behold beauty allied to Christianity; and beauty is recommended to us, not because it is beautiful, but because it is good. The classic theory of life exalts beauty above all things; it loves

“Beauty only (Beauty seen
In all varieties of mould and mind),
And Knowledge for its beauty; or if Good,
Good only for its beauty.”

But the Gospel theory makes goodness paramount, and makes beauty itself pay homage to goodness. Beauty is beautiful only so far as it blossoms in flowers of holiness. Beauty of form and colour is only what Dorcas possessed in common with the gazelle; on the platform of beauty humanity is no better than the hind of the mountain or the flower of the garden. Only when man makes alliance with and allegiance to goodness does his beauty rise to the sphere of morals. A beautiful face has no more merit than a beautiful landscape; a handsome figure in flesh and blood has no more moral worth than a handsome figure in Corinthian marble. The Gazelle of the text is no whit better than the gazelle of the mountain, except as her beauty is dignified by her character.

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II. "Tabitha, which by interpretation was called Dorcas, was a DISCIPLE." In the first head we were in the sphere of beauty; in the second we are in the sphere of knowledge, mental and moral.

1. She was a *disciple*, by which we are to understand that she was a follower of Jesus Christ, that she sat at His feet to learn of Him. Discipleship is common to all believers. The apostles were first disciples and afterwards apostles. In their relation to Jesus Christ they were on a level with ordinary believers, they were simply disciples, learning His will and imbibing His spirit. But in relation to society they were apostles, deputed ambassadors of Jesus Christ, to make known His mind unto men. This distinction will serve to account for the frequent use of the word "disciples" in the Gospels and its total absence in the Epistles. No one is an apostle in respect of Jesus Christ—he is only a disciple trained in His doctrine and fashioned in His image.

2. She was a *female* disciple. The word here used is not found anywhere else in the New Testament; neither is it found in classic Greek. The masculine form is used often enough but not the feminine. How is it the word was not used in ancient Greek? The word was not used because the thing was not known. Men-disciples were known to the heathen religions and the heathen philosophies; but women-disciples were very rare. Women were looked down upon; education, even in its simplest rudiments, was denied them. Women

were the toys, the instruments, the slaves of men; their friends, partners, and helpmates they were not. The idea of female students was foreign to the ancient mind; therefore the word did not enter ancient languages. The Gospel it is that has made current both the thought and the symbol of the thought.

You see that Christianity thus elevated woman to the rank of discipleship. Christianity has done and is doing much for woman; it accords her a place, and a large place, in its system of ethics. Neither Plato nor Aristotle ever had women among their pupils. The schools of the Philosophers were made up exclusively of men. But the Church has room for women as well as men. "Honourable women," not a few, sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him. He is the first celebrated Teacher to admit women to the inner circle of discipleship. Judaism, it is true, was somewhat jealous of the dignity and honour of woman; but even Judaism did not assign her a place by the side of man—his equal in dignity and rank. Judaism had its court, called the "Court of the Women," to which the women were turned like sheep to their pen. The genius of Judaism was separation, not communion. But Christianity raises woman to an equality with man; the unwarrantable moral and mental distinction between the sexes is abolished. "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, but a new creature." Truth and love are of no sex, and are accessible to all alike, "for there is no difference."

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But though the Gospel has lifted woman to the rank of discipleship, it is to be observed that it has not raised her to the rank of apostleship. That woman may prove exceedingly useful in the Church and in society we acknowledge with lively gratitude. The primitive Churches had "deaconesses," women who affectionately attended to the wants of the poor. St. Paul, writing to the Romans, greets "Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow-helpers in the Lord;" but Priscilla first, because, doubtless, the wife was more useful than her husband. Dorcas also did much good, and wielded much influence; but she still continued in the privacy of discipleship. Women should read, think, study, not with the morbid desire of excelling men and becoming the proud pioneers of thought, but that they may keep honourably up in the march of intellect. The moral rather than the intellectual is the true sphere of womanhood. Such a thing is possible on the part of woman as overstudy, to the reprehensible neglect of duties, domestic and social. Harriet Martineau was rather impatient of being a learner—she insisted somewhat vehemently upon being master. She found grave faults with all the shining geniuses of the century; nay—she was not particularly pleased with God either. The "rights of women" have been much pushed to the front lately in the Legislature and out of it; and women are not without danger of forgetting their "duties" in the more exciting question of their "rights." Considerable tact is necessary delicately to balance the two. In

the text the Church accords to Dorcas her rights—she was a disciple; but Dorcas thought nothing of her rights—she only thought of her duties, and right faithfully did she fulfil them.

III. "Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas, was a disciple FULL OF GOOD WORKS." In appearance she was comparable to the gazelle; in religion she was a follower of Jesus Christ; in character she was "full of good works." We now ascend from the region of beauty and faith to the region of character.

I. Mention is specially made of Dorcas's *works*. She was first a disciple; she was next full of good works. In her are perceived the true course and normal development of the Christian life. Her natural powers are hallowed in discipleship; her discipleship is perfected in beneficence. When the Christian life stops short in discipleship, it remains in the incipient or embryo stage, and is in danger of dying of inanition. It has been often said that Christianity is not doctrine but life; not knowledge, but practice. It would be truer to affirm that it is both; and in the text the discipleship issues in life, the knowledge leads to practice. Knowledge gets refined, chastened in work. Water is filtered as it flows onward in its channel—the impurity gets deposited in the shingle. Water stagnant becomes putrid and breeds miasma. In like manner knowledge, as long as it remains mere theory, becomes morbid and unhealthy; its vitality expends itself in

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sickly extravagances. But let it run out in good works, let it be reduced to practice, and it will grow healthful and clear. Knowledge without works is dead, and death always ends in corruption.

2. Now Dorcas's works are said to be *good*. Upon what then does the goodness of an action depend? First, upon the way or manner in which the action is done. Matthew Henry makes here a very excellent remark: "'good works and alms-deeds which she did,' which she went through with, which she performed the doing of." She did not undertake to accomplish a thing and then leave it in disorder and confusion. No; she finished her task neatly and pleasingly. Done in a rude or inelegant way, an action can scarcely be averred to be good. Goodness is of necessity beautiful; and if a deed be devoid of beauty, it is a presumptive proof that it is also defective in goodness. A slovenly life cannot be said to be a good life; its negligence seriously detracts from its goodness. It is, therefore, of the last importance that, whatever we do, we do it well. Quality is of greater importance in the Kingdom of God than quantity. "Not how much," but "how well," should be the motto of our life: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"—not much done, but well done. Reference is made, it is true, in the succeeding words to quantity; but the first reference is to quality. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." In the account of the creation we read that God

every evening carefully inspected the quality of His work. "And God saw that it was good." Not He saw that it was great, but He saw that it was good. He would destroy the work of His own hands if He found it defective in quality. "Be ye imitators of God like dear children." Every night review the work of the day to see if it is good. Let not disorder reign in your members; let every act be accomplished with elegance and precision.

The goodness of a deed further depends on the character of the doer. "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." The character of the man stamps itself indelibly on the action. A bad man—bad works; a good man—good works: that is the established law of the moral world, from which there cannot be the slightest deviation. There is no way of changing the character of the life but by changing the character of the man. First "make the tree good," and as a natural consequence you make the "fruit good." This process is aptly illustrated in the text. Dorcas was first a disciple, next full of good works; she was first made good, then she did good. Herein consists the vital difference between Christianity and that much-vaunted philosophy styled Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism proposes to improve the surroundings of men—to secure them better houses, better water, better air, better wages, better food, better clothes. Christianity proposes to improve the men themselves, being fully persuaded that if it can better the men, the men will soon better

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their circumstances. Utilitarianism seeks *to do* men good: Christianity seeks *to make* men good—its method to fill the world with good works being first to fill it with good men.

3. But the text says of Dorcas, that not only she did good works, but that she was "*full*" of them. The phraseology is peculiar. This implies that her heart was the true and prolific source of her works—the faith of her discipleship flowed out in deeds of benevolence. Look at the natural tree and look at the Christmas tree. The fruit adorning the natural tree is the ripe unfolding of the inward vitality. The connection between the apple and the tree is based in life. But the fruit suspended to the Christmas tree has no union of life with the tree—it is bound to the branches by mechanical means. This imperfectly illustrates the life of the believer and of the unbeliever. The latter is only a Christmas tree; the good works which dot his career are not a trustworthy index of his deepest life—the connection is outward and accidental. But the Christian is like a natural tree, "planted by the rivers of water;" all his good works are the normal development of his inner force.

But no one can be inwardly full unless there be a spontaneous outflow and overflow in the daily life. And Dorcas's faith in the Saviour gushed out in works of beneficence to man. There was no spasmodic strain, no painful effort—doing good seemed to be natural to her. From being an irksome, vexatious duty, it had become the supreme delight of

her life. Of the good man it is said he "shall be blessed in his deed;" not only because of his deed, or after his deed, but *in* his deed. If there were no system of rewards and punishments, that man would still persevere in his work of good-will unto men, for he has happily tasted the rare "luxury of doing good." "My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him that sent me." He is so full of goodness that it would pain him to repress it—to him it is a positive relief to visit the widow, to help the orphan, to reclaim the dissolute. The birds in May are so jubilant that they must sing; they are so full of life that they feel inwardly constrained to give it free vent in chirrup, whistle, and song. And there are men and women in the world—too few, I admit—who find it their chiefest pleasure to do good. It is as easy for them to bless their fellows as it is for the sun to shine. Like God, they do good "according to the pleasure of their will."

Here Baumgarten profoundly remarks: "The writer intends to intimate, that what is essential in them is even the soul that had inspired and animated them; that, so to speak, all her good works were not so much matter and body as rather life and spirit. It is only in this sense that these external things can be spoken of as dwelling in and clinging to their author. They were intended to be represented as works which cannot be separated from the man, but which would attend him even through the gates of death." Those remarks give eloquent expression to a precious truth. Every attempt to do

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good, whether it succeed or whether it fail, returns back upon the soul in a perceptible increase of solid strength. The tree shows its abundant life in luxurious foliage. Well, then, is the foliage waste? No; the leaves, which in Spring come out of the life of the tree, in Autumn fall thick around its roots and enrich the soil for it to draw nourishment therefrom the ensuing year. Every leaf is so much manure to replenish the life from which it grew. Thus good works return back upon the worker and abide as a rich store in his deepest soul. "Mercy is twice blessed—it blesseth him that gives and him that takes;" and oftentimes it blesseth him that gives more than him that takes. Good works add to the volume of the soul—they inhere in one through time and through eternity; and by his works must one stand or fall in the Judgment Day. Faith and good works—discipleship and usefulness; they represent the receptive and the transitive sides of religion. One without the other is dead. Without faith there is no beginning; without works there is no end. The two paramount objects of every man should be, first, "to be accepted *in* Jesus Christ," and then "to be accepted *of* Jesus Christ." We are accepted in Him by faith—that is the first step in the Divine Life. We are accepted of Him by works, by a life devoted to the service of our kind. Many are accepted in Him, who I am afraid will not be accepted of Him. They have believed in Him, they prophesy and do wonders in His name; but they have no good works to show, or,

if they have, they are like "angels' visits, few and far between." Miraculous works they have in plenty; good works none. "Lord, have not we prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you."

IV. "Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas, was a disciple full of good works and ALMSDEEDS WHICH SHE DID." In the first division we were in the sphere of beauty; in the second in the sphere of discipleship; in the third in the sphere of character; but in this division we have arrived in the sphere of action. "Almsdeeds which she did."

I. "*Almsdeeds*," not almsgifts. Dorcas was "full of good works"—she maintained a good character round about the circumference of life. In no duty was she lacking. But the particular department in which she outshone all others was in help to the poor. She was pious and devout in her worship of God; kept herself unspotted from the world. But her religion did not stop there—in taking good care of herself; she endeavoured also to take good care of others. She was full of "almsdeeds," not merely almsgifts. "When thou doest alms"—not givest but doest. Throughout the Saviour lays stress not on giving but on doing alms; the whole nature of man must go out in love and help to his fellows. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." That helpeth them or giveth to them? No; that con-

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sidereth them. The charity must come, not merely from the treasury, but from a tender and sympathetic heart.

2. "Almsdeeds *which she did.*" They were not almsdeeds which she purposed or of which she talked, but almsdeeds which she did. She was actively engaged in succouring the destitute and forlorn. No mention is made of parents or husband; she was probably a maid leading a solitary life. Will she then spend her days in idleness or vain sentiment? No; she will adopt the orphans for her family, and serve Christ in the persons of the poor. She will translate sentiment into practice; what she feels she will act. Many people's religion consists in a warm glow of sentiment; they like to feel—to rejoice or to weep under the preaching of the Word. Far be it from me to discourage emotion; but emotion is valuable only as it leads to action. In the iron-works I have observed that they economise steam; it is not blown off at once into the air; it must first do work, and it is worth nothing except it work. And we do well to get up a little steam in our public services; it is good to have our emotions well boiled at times. But are we to let the steam blow off into the air? No; let us utilise it for the practical purposes of life. If you feel under the preaching of the Word to-day, go and work in the by-ways of the town to-morrow.

There are two methods by which you may keep yourselves warm—one artificial, the other natural. The artificial way is to kindle a blazing fire, and

then to seat yourselves before it, and receive into your system the genial heat. The other way is to walk briskly in the air, or to set yourselves resolutely to work, and thus gain additional heat by accelerating the circulation of the blood. But you will all agree with me that it is still better to combine judiciously the two methods. Fire is good, but will enervate the system unless followed by labour: labour is good, but will exhaust the system unless supplemented by fire. And there are two ways in which spiritual heat may be generated. One is to sit under an able and unctuous ministry—a felicitous combination of the fire of the Holy Ghost and Welsh fire. Oh, our people are enraptured with this method! They delight to see the preacher all ablaze; they sit and smile, or they sit and weep, and are willing to sit for hours warming themselves before the pulpit fire. I ought to be the last to disparage this method; but I am bound to declare that unless this excitement in the public services leads to increased usefulness in private and social life, the inevitable result will be a rapid deterioration of the national character. Sterne could weep over a dead ass, and yet allow his mother to starve for want of bread; but John Howard, whose philanthropy has stamped itself indelibly on the history of our country, was never seen to shed a tear. Sentiment is worthless, except as it gives energy to action.

3. The “almsdeeds which she did” consisted principally in *coats and garments* for the poor—the

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under and upper garments which women wore in the East. The narrative gives us to understand that she made them with her own hands. Here we have the primary meaning of "spinster"—one who spins, and if need be, sews for the benefit of the family and society. The widows "showed the coats and garments which Dorcas made—*was making*—while she was with them." The imperfect tense shows it was her customary occupation; she made sewing for the poor the main business of her life, and thus redeemed dressmaking from the degraded service of the world. St. Paul exhorts women to be "stayers at home;" on the margin, "workers at home." It is not enough that they stay at home; they should also work at home, and save themselves from the cankerous miseries of *ennui*. Dorcas was leading a life of usefulness. Observing the deep poverty around her, her heart bled for the sufferers, and her hands plied rapidly the spindle and the needle to relieve it.

She found this to be the sphere most congenial to her character and disposition. Since then, societies have sprung up all over Christendom, bearing her name and imitating her labours. But Dorcas was not an imitator—she was an original, inventive worker. In the world of intellect men are divided into two classes—men of genius and men of talent, men who can originate and invent and men who can only imitate and follow. The same classification holds good in the realm of goodness. Some people possess genius for goodness

—they create and invent, whereas others can only travel in the beaten paths. Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday Schools; Charles of Bala, the founder of the Bible Society; William Wilberforce, the liberator of the slave: they all had a marvellous genius for goodness; they possessed such a fund of virtue that they could strike boldly out in new directions. To the same class of benefactors belongs Dorcas—she invented a new method of doing good; and her method has been perpetuated and her name immortalised in the annals of the Christian Church. “Whatsoever thy hand *findeth* to do, do it with all thy might.” I wish to lay emphasis on “*findeth*”—you should endeavour to find work for yourselves, and the work for which you are best adapted. But if you possess not the genius to find work, to invent new methods of usefulness, let me exhort you to follow diligently in the paths already marked out. Lead, if you can; but, if you cannot, then follow. Dorcas was an inventor. A lonely maid doing humble work, her name will outlive the names of leaders of armies and the conquerors of kingdoms. She was only a sweet violet blooming in the shade; but her fragrance has filled all the Churches of Europe, and the contagion of her example has filled with inspiration the hearts of thousands. In every town and hamlet, in our own country, loving hands are busily plying the needle to clothe the widows and the orphans. But in spite of all our efforts, the poverty is being yearly intensified; or rather not the poverty but the paup-

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erism. Christian charity is quite competent to deal with honest poverty; but no efforts of the Church can ever overtake the guilty pauperism occasioned by the drinking habits of the community. What then is our duty in the presence of this terrible evil? In my opinion there can be but one answer—Dry up the fountain. The only way to alleviate the pauperism of England is not by trying to fill the slough with the good works of charity, but to drain the slough. You may give coats and garments, food and fuel as much as you like; but the evil will remain unabated till the detestable traffic in intoxicating drinks is restrained. O England! the burden of thy guilt is great!

V. "Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas, a disciple full of good works and almsdeeds which she did, became SICK AND DIED."

I. She died in the *prime* of life. The fact that the Church wished to have her restored proves that she had not lived out the allotted term of life. "She became sick and died." The words leave the impression upon one that her sickness was short and violent. Probably she caught a fever on one of her visits to the haunts of the poor, and suddenly died. But mark—nothing is said of the frame of her mind in her sickness; indeed, the Scriptures are generally reticent about the deaths of the saints. Human biographies treasure up affectionately every word that is spoken on deathbeds; books have been published containing nothing but the last words of

dying men. But the Bible does not give you people's dying words—it is too sound, too healthy a book, to do that; but it gives you a clear idea of the life, and then lets you draw your own conclusion concerning the death. Men who live piously and devoutly must die in the peace of God. Piety in life—safety in death: that is a sacred and inviolable law in God's universe.

2. She died in the midst of *usefulness*. Why it was so we cannot tell. The ways of God are to us inexplicable, or, if you like better, the ways of Nature; for in questions of health and sickness, of life and death, the ways of Nature are the ways of God. Why are the good and useful cut down suddenly in the height of their career? Theology and philosophy have faced the question, but cannot solve it. But if theology cannot solve it, it can help to bring the heart to acquiesce in it. "Why were you born deaf and dumb?" asked a gentleman of a young lad. A strange light flashed in the boy's eyes, and he wrote quickly, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." Well said, unfortunate boy! Neither theologian nor philosopher ever struck a higher note. Why do the strong and useful die whilst the frail and useless "drag their inglorious length along"? Ask the philosopher and he mutters something about "hap" or about "law"—he cannot solve the problem. Ask the theologian and neither can he solve it; but he can cry, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." He cannot remove the difficulty, but

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he can put his trust in the divine Fatherhood. However dense the clouds, however dark the mystery, there is a Father at the heart of all. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

3. Dying in the midst of life and usefulness, she was naturally much *lamented*. The Church hurriedly sent a deputation to Peter; and when he arrived at Joppa, the "widows wept and showed him the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them." They did not show all she made, they only showed specimens of her handiwork. There were hanging up in the room, perhaps, coats and garments which she had commenced, but had not been able to finish. But certainly they pointed out the coats and garments which they then wore—the middle voice intimates so much. They could not speak much for their tears; but they could exhibit the tunics which they wore and the rare excellency of the workmanship; and the widows' tears and garments were more eloquent in her praise than any panegyric, however dexterously woven, from the lips of poet or rhetorician. "They stood by him weeping and showing the coats and garments." Very natural, but very touching! The poor have no grand way of manifesting their sorrow; they have never studied flattery or adulation; they have no formal "going into mourning." But they can weep genuine tears; they can point to the coats and garments graciously given them by the hands of Charity. The widows' grief was a choicer tribute

to the character of Dorcas than monuments of marble or pæans of praise. The tears they shed were indeed "sacred to her memory," and makes the Church in all ages speak of her with tenderness and pathos.

VI. But that was not the conclusion of the whole matter—Dorcas was RAISED TO LIFE AGAIN.

The Church at Joppa sent to Lydda to ask Peter to visit them in their grief. What did they want? To be comforted? Yes, doubtless. Did they hope he would restore to them the beautiful soul which had departed? Yes, probably. Was not sick Æneas restored to health at Lydda, and who knows but Dorcas will be restored to life at Joppa? They did not tell the apostle in words what they wanted; but their acts showed it and he understood it. Thereupon Peter turned them all out and turned himself to the Lord in prayer; he afterwards "turned to the body, and said, Tabitha, arise." The miracle of resuscitation was performed: "and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her to them alive." It is idle for us to pry curiously into the miracle; we must believingly receive the fact. "He presented her to them alive;" and doubtless she continued the same good work as before—she finished the coats and garments she had only begun. The thread that was broken was mended—the good work still went on. Her resuscitation rectified whatever in her death appeared wrong, and made clear whatever seemed obscure.

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This incident reduces the vast drama of the world to a scale we can grasp. Men and women die in the height of their career; the work of life remains incomplete. Reason staggers. Is there a time of restitution coming? Yes; they that are in their "graves shall be raised up;" the thread of life will be mended—the work begun will be finished. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." But alas! many die in the midst of telling their tale, they die before fully disclosing the rich meaning of their existence. A chapter or two of the tale is given, and we are delighted with the wealth of thought; but all of a sudden, the telling comes to a pause. Why? Shall it never be continued? Oh, yes; "the dead that are in their graves shall be raised up"—the voice that is dumb shall again speak, the hands that are cold shall again serve. We can write on the tombstones of our friends—*To be continued*. The tale commenced here shall be continued yonder; the life begun this side the grave shall be resumed the other side; every man and woman shall fully unfold the secret meaning of their existence. "He called the saints and widows and presented her to them alive."

XII.

The Comprehensiveness of the Gospel.

“And he saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”—ACTS x. 11, 12.

PETER was now in Joppa on the shores of the Mediterranean. His thoughts, doubtless, wandered far away over its blue waters. He was accustomed enough to the inland Sea of Galilee: oftentimes he had sailed across and around it. But he was now, perhaps for the first time in his life, on the shore of the Great Sea; and the Great Sea gave rise within him to a train of mighty and mysterious thoughts. He had been on a tour of visitation throughout the churches of Palestine; was the Gospel to be confined to that small country? What was to be the fate of the millions beyond the Great Sea on whose margin he was now standing? It may be easily imagined that Peter was somewhat exercised in mind upon these topics, to him, of supreme interest. At noon he retired to the house-

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top to meditate; and, the historian tells us, he was hungry. Slight hunger is advantageous to clear thinking. When the stomach is full, it demands the presence of the blood to carry on digestion; and the brain is left in a partially torpid state. But digestion over, the blood is at liberty to return to the brain to assist in the more spiritual process of thinking. "Plain living and high thinking" has passed almost into a proverb. Whilst in this state of physical hunger and probable mental tension, Peter fell into a trance; and in the trance the fate of the great Gentile world was made known to him. I shall now call attention to the vision he saw and its momentous consequences. The thought is—
The comprehensiveness of the Gospel.

I. The Gospel is here compared to a "GREAT SHEET." A small sheet would not suffice to convey to him the truth God was about to reveal—that all nations were to be gathered within the pale of His Church. The size of the sheet was calculated to impress upon his mind the universality of the Christian religion. Judaism was only a small sheet, just big enough to cover Palestine, whilst the great world was lying outside in wickedness. But Christianity was a "great sheet"—a clear hint as to its cosmopolitan character. And it is noteworthy that Christianity as let down from heaven is larger than Christianity as reproduced in human creeds. Christianity as revealed by God is larger than Christianity as apprehended by man. The tendency of man is

to narrow the love of God, to contract the Divine Sheet till by degrees it becomes no bigger than a pocket handkerchief. But just as the creation is larger than science, so is the Church of God greater than any one particular church, be it the Church of Rome or the Church of England. Just as God is greater than man, so is the Divine Revelation more comprehensive than any creed formulated by human wisdom.

“Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

II. The Gospel is compared to “a great sheet LET DOWN FROM HEAVEN.” In this we perceive a hint that the idea of the vast comprehensiveness of the Gospel is come down from God. This idea is emphatically Divine. Where outside the Holy Scriptures do you find it—the idea that all nations and ranks of men should be gathered together in one spiritual community and be placed on a footing of strict equality?

I. You will not find it in *heathenism*. Not only you will not find the fact, but you will not find the idea. The ancient world was very rich in ideas, much richer in ideas than in the corresponding realities. But this idea of universal fellowship based on universal equality never occurred to any of its philosophers—so foreign was it to their style of thinking. The Gospel often gives us facts of which the world

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anterior to its coming had only the ideas; it often reduces into actuality what before only flitted phantom-like in the region of ideality; and that, no doubt, is deserving of much credit. But in the present instance the idea as well as the fact is new, the theory as well as its embodiment in life. True, there was a dark, unconscious feeling after the idea in the heathen world. Plato's Republic, for instance, was a strenuous groping after the Christian Church or Kingdom of God; but it falls far short of it, because it places the ground of unity in the intellect instead of in the spiritual nature. Plato's Republic is only a Republic among philosophers; the labouring classes are reduced in it to a condition of hopeless and abject servitude. The idea of a Republic securing good fellowship and equality to all classes of men is to be found nowhere outside the Bible.

2. You will not find it in *Judaism*. Not only is it Divine as contradistinguished from human, but it is Christian in contradistinction from Jewish. It was the "mystery hid from the foundation of the world." Paul looks upon it as an integral portion of the great mystery of godliness. "Great is the mystery of godliness—God was manifest in the flesh, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world." Next to the Incarnation, it was the grandest truth of the Apostolic period, a truth which was to reconstruct human society from its very foundations. A few prophetic intimations were given in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would pay homage to the Messiah; but as usual with prophecy it concealed

as much as it revealed. "Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me." St. Paul, however, takes care to remark that it was by that "boldness" which characterises the highest thinkers that he came to say it—it was a bold venture of inspired genius, a venture that very few were daring enough to repeat or indeed to understand. But *how* the Gentiles were to reap the benefits of redemption was not known. The Jews would have answered, By first reaping the benefits of Judaism. There was not one in the lifetime of the Saviour, except Himself, who conceived that the Gentiles were to be received as Gentiles into the esoteric circle of discipleship. Many of the parables teach it; but none of the disciples, up to the transaction recorded in the text, had spiritual discernment enough to perceive their meaning.

Now, however, through this vision of Peter and the accompanying events, the mystery is made known—both Jews and Gentiles are all comprised and stand on an equality in the Kingdom of God. But notwithstanding the revelation now made and the formal recognition of it by the mother-church in Jerusalem, the majority of the believers of that day utterly failed to realise it, and sought by every means, fair and foul, to discredit it. They were the Judaisers of the apostolic period, some of whom always followed Paul to mar the good work he was doing and to disturb the peace of the churches he was establishing. Upon this truth hinged the great

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controversy of the apostolic age. Not upon the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ—that was the controversy of a subsequent century; but upon the union of Jews and Gentiles on terms of strict equality in the Christian Church. The truth was revealed from heaven; but so novel was it, so contrary to the current of thought, or, as the Rationalists would say, to the tendency of the age, that it took the whole lifetime of the apostles to establish it triumphantly in the churches. A great truth—no matter whether it be made known by Divine revelation or natural discovery—is always slow to be apprehended by the masses of men. Take, for instance, the discovery of gravitation. It took years to make headway against popular, and especially against scientific, prejudices. It is stated that at the time of Sir Isaac's death no astronomer above forty years of age believed in it. Take again the principle of Free Trade. It took years to leaven society; and to-day England is the only country in Europe which thoroughly believes in it, and not all England. But these truths were not by any means of the same consequence to society as the important truth taught Peter in the vision of the text—that all men are to be welded together on terms of strict equality within the boundaries of the Kingdom of God.

III. The Gospel is compared to a "great sheet let down from heaven, and KNIT AT THE FOUR CORNERS." What the precise meaning of this

phrase is we cannot positively tell ; it would, therefore, be wrong of us to try to make it *prove* anything. But often what will not do as a proof will serve well as an illustration. Commentators see here an intimation that the Gospel is to extend its frontiers and to exert its influence over the four quarters of the globe.

1. God began with a *family*. The principle of the Divine Government of the world is progress, progress without any retrogression so far as the Divine factor in history is concerned. The human agent in history may draw back, and has often done so ; but the Divine Agent never—His motto ever is "Forward." But to go on you must start, to progress you must begin. Through sin the whole world had apostatised from God—the kingdom of Satan, not the Kingdom of God, was set up on the earth. It must be a work of time for God to re-establish His sway in a world which had thrown off His rule ; but He is resolved to do it—He is bent upon winning the human race back. How ? He will begin with one family. He calls Abraham and separates him to Himself. In Genesis, accordingly, we find family religion—but not national—the first step in the recovery of the lost world. In Genesis God has a cause, though not a kingdom—He has worshippers, just a few, though as yet no visible organisation to embody His worship and carry on His will. But after making sure His ground by divers methods in this one family, God is prepared to make another move forward, and to extend the area of His sway.

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2. After the family, then, comes the *nation*. Out of a particular branch of Abraham's posterity God formed a nation for Himself, and thus established for the first time a Theocracy or Kingdom of God upon the earth. That is progress anyhow—from a family to a nation. It would not do to take any nation. It was necessary to have a people whose fundamental characteristic was religiousness; and it was equally necessary to train them sedulously by a complicated process; else after all they would constitute a Kingdom of the Devil, and not a Kingdom of God. At length, when the Israelites were established in the land of Canaan, there was founded for the first time a Kingdom of God upon the earth. It was not a very spiritual kingdom, perhaps, and it was in constant danger of making alliance with or succumbing to the kingdoms of this world. But it was the best which could be established under the circumstances, and served as a nucleus for a more spiritual kingdom to come.

But how can the existence of this kingdom be continued? On two conditions: that it be small in extent, and that it be fenced off from the rest of the world. Concentration and exclusiveness are indispensable to the continuance of the Theocracy or Kingdom of God under the Old Testament. If it were wide in area, the sense of oneness in the subjects would have been inevitably weakened, if not destroyed, in their then early stage of spiritual education. If it were not partitioned off in manifold ways, there would be such an impetuous and

irresistible rush of world-life into it, that the Divine element would soon be quenched. It was not Divine Sovereignty in the sense of arbitrary will that confined the Kingdom of God in the ancient world to one small nation and one small country; it was a matter of supreme wisdom, of sheer necessity. But at all events a great step in advance is here made. First, from nothing to a family; next, from a family to a kingdom. In Genesis there is no Kingdom of God—a cause there is, but not a kingdom; but in Exodus a kingdom is founded. The laws of this kingdom, however, as of every new kingdom, point to defensive, not aggressive measures. As much as it can do for centuries yet is to defend itself in presence of the huge world-powers; and in order to defence it must be consolidated in one country and one nation.

3. But as the family merged in the nation, so the nation must merge in the *world*—progress or extension being the order of the Divine Government from first to last. The text evidently points out that the final crisis has arrived in the history of the kingdom, that another bold move forward is about to be made. Peter is directed to go and convert Cornelius, an uncircumcised heathen. His conversion created a vast excitement in the early Church, more perhaps than any single conversion on record. Why? Not because one more soul was added to the number of those who were in the “way of being saved,” but because of the new principle his conversion embodied, the new policy it served to inaugu-

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rate; in other words, because it was a resolute move forward towards cosmopolitanism, the final goal of the Kingdom of God. Cornelius was the first to be admitted in his uncircumcision into the Church; hence the vast importance attached to his history. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision nothing. They were a great deal under the Old Testament; to many they were everything. But now they are declared to be nothing. This shows a marvellous change in the policy of the kingdom.

Henceforth, it is to act on the aggressive, to strike out north, south, east, and west. It is no longer to be confined to one people—it claims all nations as its own. "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem." Shem means concentration, Japheth means expansion. Therein we have summed up the characteristics of religion among the Asiatics and Europeans: among the Asiatics concentration, among the Europeans expansion. Among the Jews the principle of the Theocracy was concentration; but under the Christian dispensation its object is diffusion. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands is to swell and fill the whole world. It has already filled Europe. When Christianity first appeared, idolatry was rife in every town and village throughout the length and breadth of the continent; the idols might be counted by the million; polytheism was the established and only faith. But in a few centuries after, idolatry was demolished; not an idol was to be found in any temple or grove from the Oural mountains to

the Atlantic Ocean. Instead of Polytheism came Monotheism. From Europe idolatrous to Europe Christian, what a vast change! The imagination fails to grasp its magnitude. One of Doré's greatest pictures is that entitled "The Triumph of Christianity." It powerfully represents the whole rabble of heathen gods in a disgraceful rout before the genius of the new religion. Jupiter, the father of gods, and the chief deity of the Roman Empire, has wild terror depicted in his face; his ponderous crown drops from his head, and is represented as falling to a pit without a bottom—a suggestive hint that it will never be restored to him, that his dominion is for ever gone. And the artist is right—it never has and never shall be restored. Already in Europe, the most important of the continents, the kingdoms are become the "Lord's"—He is the sole object of worship and praise. Gradually they will become also "His Christ's"—the spirit and meekness of Christ will surely pervade them, and make them tributary to His Church.

IV. The Gospel is compared to a "great sheet let down from heaven, knit at the four corners, and containing all manner of FOUR-FOOTED BEASTS OF THE EARTH, AND WILD BEASTS, AND CREEPING THINGS, AND FOWLS OF THE AIR." Peter is here taught that the distinction between clean and unclean is abolished.

I. We trace here the same progress as in the former division. First, the *family* is made clean.

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Through the fall the whole creation had become accursed and unclean; that is, nothing therein was separated and set apart unto God. The entire creation, animate and inanimate, had become common and profane. Is it to remain so? Is God to be for ever cheated out of the world His hands had made? No; He resolves to reclaim it. Not, however, all at once, but by little and little. God will make a beginning by separating, that is, making clean one family. Abraham is called. The word "clean" is not applied to him, but the idea is there. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are each separated, made clean unto God.

2. Will God stop there? No; the order of His operation is progress. After impressing in manifold ways on the mind of this family their religious consecration or separation unto Him, God will make another move forward. After the family again comes the *nation*. The Israelites, like all other nations, were by nature unclean, lying under the curse. But by the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant they were made clean, holy, separate unto God. This, then, is a step forward in the redemption of the world—one nation at all events is made clean. But this nation is the "first fruits." What does that mean? That in due time all the other nations also will be made clean. The Kingdom of God, you will observe, did not make the world or any portion of it unclean—sin it was which effected its uncleanness; the function of the kingdom is to make clean.

Not only man had become unclean, but the irrational creation as well. Sin struck the universe with leprosy to its very heart. Neither four-footed beast, nor bird, nor reptile escaped the contagion. The animal creation, therefore, needs to be made clean. Now a certain portion of the human world—the Hebrew nation—has been made clean unto God; but the clean nation must have clean food. God, accordingly, cleanses certain species of animals. Behold then a small proportion of the rational and irrational creation made clean by the establishment of the Kingdom of God; the remainder of the world, however, continues still in its impurity. The institution of the Kingdom of God among the Jews, nevertheless, was a great stride forward; it was the second important link in the chain of progress. In Genesis all the world, rational and irrational, with the exception of one family only, is unclean; but in Exodus, one nation, at least, and a certain proportion of animals, have been made clean. That is progress anyhow. Ceremonial distinctions were created; but the distinctions were not intended to establish uncleanness, but to establish cleanness.

3. Well, then, is the rest of the world to remain under the dominion of sin? Are all the other nations and all the other animals to continue for ever in their uncleanness? No; the Kingdom of God under the New Testament undertakes the task of cleansing the *whole universe*. After the family came the nation, after the nation comes the world. All nations and all animals are made clean. Christian-

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ity does not level down—it levels up. The difference once established between the Jews and other nations is annulled, not because the Jews are made unclean, but because the Gentiles are made clean. The whole world was lying under the curse, and therefore unclean; but Jesus Christ was made a curse for the world, and consequently lifted it from men and animals. Since His sacrifice the world in its totality is clean, not morally, but judicially. The curse has been removed. "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." What Judaism did ceremonially for one nation, Christianity has done efficaciously for all nations. The whole world is now clean. All mankind now virtually belong to the Kingdom of God. The Divine Government of the world has without drawback or deviation moved steadily onward in one direction.

"I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose
runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process
of the suns."

This purification of the whole world by the sacrifice of Christ was part of the "mystery hid from the ages," but now made manifest unto us. The Apostolic Church, as already stated, could hardly realise it. The idea was so grand and novel, that the majority of Jewish Christians failed to seize it. They had been so accustomed to consider themselves as clean, and the Gentiles as unclean, that they could not change the current of their thoughts. Circumcision was still with them a badge of the

kingdom. They could not raise themselves to the grand height of St. Paul's doctrine, that in "Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." In truth, the Gentiles themselves can hardly raise themselves to the level of this high argument. We have no difficulty in realising that the whole world is unclean; but we fail to realise adequately that all men are now clean, and should therefore be won over to the Divine service. "What God hath cleansed call not thou common." Every man is sacred the whole world over; war and slavery, therefore, strike directly against the genius of the Kingdom of God. Every man is potentially, though not actually, a subject of the kingdom. He may be far from realising his privilege—he may deny it; but all the same he is a subject of it. Frederick the Great was once questioning a class of children in a school he visited. "To what kingdom," asked he, "does iron belong?"—"To the mineral kingdom," answered the children. "To what kingdom does the orange belong?"—"To the vegetable kingdom." "To what kingdom does the horse belong?"—"To the animal kingdom." "To what kingdom do I belong?" finally asked the king. "To the Kingdom of God," boldly replied the children. The king's countenance fell, he looked troubled at the unexpected answer. The king, by right, belonged to the Kingdom of God. He might be a disobedient subject of it; he might be breaking its laws; he might be in rebellion against it; but all the same he was a subject of it.

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All mankind have been made potentially clean in the sight of God; and it is the paramount duty of the Church to take possession of them in the name of the Redeemer and make them in reality what they are virtually. "What God hath cleansed"—not only pronounced, but made clean—"call not thou common."

"Clean"—this is the Keyword of the Kingdom of God. Beauty was the Keyword of Greek civilisation—its great object being to train the world's intellect to a keen and joyous perception of the beautiful. Strength was the Keyword of the Roman civilisation—the word Rome means strength; its great object being to train the world's will by force to habits of prompt and implicit obedience. But the Keyword of Christianity is "clean"—its prime function being to make clean a world horribly desecrated by sin. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its cleanness or righteousness; and all other things, such as beauty and strength, will be added unto you." "What God hath cleansed call not thou common."

V. After the vision came the INTERPRETATION. "Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there."

I. Peter *thought* on the vision. The vision was

let down from heaven, but it was necessary that Peter should think on it and endeavour to grasp its meaning. This truth of Revelation was to become a truth of reason; and as with this, so with all other truths. The Church is to continue its study of the Divine Word till all the truths of Revelation become at last truths of reason. Theologians do wrong in pitting Revelation against reason. Revelation answers its purpose only as it enters reason, passes through reason, and becomes the legitimate property of reason. Thus in the course of ages all the truths of theology will become truths of philosophy; that is, the truths of Revelation will no more be truths of Revelation but truths of reason. Many truths of the earlier Revelation have already in Europe become truths of reason. For instance, the existence and unity of God. When this truth was revealed to Israel, it was in advance of reason; no man in the native light of reason had a clear perception of it. But the reason has at last been educated up to it—it is no longer a truth of theology but a truth of philosophy; the truth of Revelation has been so thoroughly appropriated that it has become a truth of reason. Therefore some writers ask sceptically—What need was there to reveal it at all? We answer, There is no need now, but there was need then; the human mind has been much educated in the course of the three thousand years since the Revelation was made. Take again the moral Law—the eternal difference between right and wrong. When this truth was

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revealed to Israel, it was in advance of reason; no man in the light of reason had a clear perception of it. But the reason has been gradually educated up to it—it is no longer a truth of theology but a truth of philosophy. The truth of Revelation has indisputably become a truth of reason. Therefore some writers sarcastically ask—What need was there to reveal it at all? We answer as before, There is no need now, but there was need then; the human reason in the nineteenth century is not a standard by which to judge the human reason in the limekilns of Egypt.

Take again the great truths of the New Testament,—for instance, the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Bible calls it the “mystery of godliness”—it is a truth of Revelation far in advance of reason. But then is it never to enter reason? Is this truth of Revelation never to become a truth of reason? Is this truth of theology never to become a truth of philosophy? I believe it is. If it is truth, it will sooner or later enter reason—all truth must in the roll of the centuries go through reason. The day will surely arrive when the Incarnation will be a truth of reason, thought out as well as believed in by man. It will take its place with the truths of the Divine Existence and the Moral Law in the universal reason—a truth not to be doubted or controverted, but clearly seen in the light of the fundamental principles of mind. The Incarnation is no more unbelievable to Christians than the Unity of God to the Hebrews; and as the latter has passed

from the region of mystery to that of reason, so I believe will do the former. Indeed, signs of it are observable: the foremost thinkers seem to make the Incarnation a necessary complement of thought, they show that the reason demands it, they endeavour hard to convert it from a truth of theology to a truth of philosophy. They have not yet succeeded quite; but they have done enough to justify the sure expectation of success. This truth like other truths of Revelation must become a truth of reason.

Take again the truth made known in the text—the perfect equality in the sphere of religion of Jews and Gentiles, of Greeks and Barbarians. At the time it was made it was a new truth—a truth of Revelation, a truth far in advance of human reason. Peter thought on it and believed it; but his whole history shows he had never been able to think right into it and through it. To the last it was to him more of a truth of faith than a truth of reason. Paul understood it more thoroughly—he was able to reason the truth out and apprehend it firmly; but he was about the only one in the apostolic age who did so. To the rest it was only a truth of faith; and to many it was not even that. But this truth of the equality and brotherhood of all men is gradually working its way into the universal reason; it is being converted from a truth of theology to a truth of philosophy. It is one of the fundamental truths of Positivism; the advocates of this philosophy proudly claim it as a truth

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of reason. We answer, Yes, now ; but it was not nineteen centuries ago ; it was not twenty years ago a truth of reason in America ; it is not even now a truth of reason in India. In the apostolic age it was a truth of Revelation, a supernatural truth ; but in process of time a truth of Revelation has become a truth of reason—the supernatural has become natural, the standard of the supernatural continually varying with the improved enlightenment of reason. The equality of Jews and Gentiles, of Greeks and Barbarians, no philosopher will now deny ; but nineteen hundred years ago the philosophers to a man would have denied it and did deny it. It was a revelation of God.

2. But Peter was not left entirely to his own efforts to unravel the meaning of the vision—the clue was afforded him by the arrival of *messengers from Cornelius*. God always explains His supernatural revelations by natural events. Providence is the best commentary on the Bible. Just when God was stirring large thoughts in Peter respecting the universality of the Gospel, He was also working silently but effectually in Cornelius to send a messenger to the Apostle desiring a fuller knowledge of salvation at his hands. God often brings about these secret correspondences, proving that there are “more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.” Hardly is there an important discovery made in science but two or three inventors, far removed from each other and ignorant of each other’s designs, claim it as their own. The

discovery of fluxions or the differential calculus—one of the most important discoveries ever made in mathematical science, is claimed by Newton and Leibnitz, and erudite critics are forced to the conclusion that they both made it almost simultaneously. The discovery that the sun is the centre of the system, the discovery of the telescope, the more recent discovery of the telephone, have much the same history—there are two or three claimants to each of them. How then to account for these strange coincidences in the history of science—two or three in different parts of the world making the same discovery just about the same time? Are they guilty of plagiarism one from another? Certainly not; it only proves a general advance on the part of the universal reason. No individual intellect can ever be much ahead of the race. A great tide in the world of mind, extending over different countries, seems to float humanity forward unwittingly. One great Oversoul, sitting on the circle of the heavens and presiding over the separate endeavours of men, appears to give them a general impetus and direction. The same law holds good in religion. A tide of the Spirit sweeps over countries far remote, and almost simultaneously a rich crop of Reformers start up, each ignorant of the other. In proof of this I need only allude to the history of the Protestant Reformation.

The same felicitous conjuncture of circumstances took place in the first century of our era. Cornelius is a striking representative thereof. For one thing

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he was a Roman. Now the Roman Empire had extended its sway from the Euphrates to the Atlantic; it covered under its eagle-wing all the then civilised world. God raised it to be the civiliser of the nations—that was the prime function assigned to it by Divine Providence. Rome was built upon force; the name Rome, as already stated, signifies force; and without controversy force was necessary to the carrying on of the Divine purposes. Force, no doubt, is Divine; only we should remember that it is not the only thing that is Divine. By force can you tame wild animals? by force can you tame wilder men? Rome, in virtue of its force, became the great tamer of the nations; and this provided signal facilities for the rapid propagation of the Gospel. In the first century only could an Apostle Paul journey from Syria to Spain and preach Christ in every city, and yet have his life and liberty secured. Again and again he had to appeal to Roman jurisdiction to protect him against the murderous rage of his own countrymen, and he never appealed in vain. The Roman civilisation was eminently advantageous to the spread of the new religion.

But Cornelius, besides being a representative of the Roman Power, was also, as the context leads us to believe, thoroughly conversant with the Greek language. Rome was the ruler of the ancient world, but Greece was the thinker. Where the former carried material blessings, the latter conveyed the blessings of reason. The treasures of its literature were priceless; therefore the language in which

these treasures were deposited was studied far and near. Whereas Rome dictated the universal law, Greece furnished the universal language. The prevalence of one language of exceptional grace and elasticity throughout the whole civilised world, it must be obvious to all, was a signal advantage to the first missionaries of the Gospel. Wherever they went they had a vehicle ready-made in which to convey the grand thoughts which burned within them, a language well understood by speakers and hearers; and it is not to be overlooked that the New Testament itself was written in this universal tongue.

Neither does the happy combination of events stop here. Cornelius was not only a Roman officer, and conversant with the Greek language, but he had further been brought under the purifying influence of the religion of the Jews. The Roman, the Greek, and the Jewish civilisations have beautifully met, each supplying what the other lacked. The Jews were dispersed throughout the known world; they were found in considerable numbers in every country under heaven. Their Scriptures, moreover, had been translated by the Seventy into Greek, the universal language, and were eagerly read by many anxious enquirers who felt acutely the hollowness of heathenism. Many men and women of a serious devout temperament had forsworn idolatry and had adopted the worship of the one Jehovah. Thus a kind of spiritual preparation was silently carried on among the heathen by Judaism. Cornelius is himself a specimen. We are not to suppose he

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was a proselyte; but living in Cæsarea, he had, through the diligent perusal of the Septuagint, come to a saving knowledge of the true God. He fasted, prayed, and gave alms. He was "accepted of God," says Peter. But there is no argument here in favour of heathenism—it is rather an argument in favour of Judaism. His character was not the result of classic culture, but of classic culture supplemented by Divine Revelation. Seeing then that he was accepted of God before his conversion to Christianity, why not let him and others like him alone? Simply because they cannot let themselves alone. They are still conscious of a painful void in the heart, which only God in Christ can fill. In Judaism, as well as in heathenism, God is outside humanity; in Christianity alone does God come within our nature, and only God in us can satisfy us.

Is to be "accepted of God" the only desire of the heart? Nay, verily; man wants to be perfected, sanctified, united in love and fellowship to the Supreme Source of life and light. To be accepted is one thing; to be perfected another. Judaism would enable a man to be accepted; but it could not "make the comers thereto perfect." "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." Judaism therefore could only initiate. Christianity, however, is the religion of perfection; it can "perfect man in good works." This then is the reason why Cornelius needed the Gospel—the Gospel alone could fill the infinite desires of his heart and perfect him in

goodness. And what aspect of the Gospel did St. Peter present to him? First, that God in Jesus Christ came to seek man, to do him good, and to "heal all that were oppressed of the devil." In this Christianity differed from all the heathen religions. The latter always represent man seeking God, but never finding. Christianity, however, represents God seeking man, and of course always finding. Read the superb literatures of Greece and Rome, and you behold the human soul seeking, yearning, sometimes crying after God, but never finding. One of their own writers was at last obliged to exclaim—"Man cannot find God, God must therefore find man." Read the Bible, on the other hand, and you discern in every page, not man seeking God, but God seeking man. This is partly what we mean by saying that the Gospel is the revelation of God—it is the only religion besides Judaism having at its basis God seeking man. All other religions have at their basis man seeking God.

But St. Peter not only spoke of the Saviour's life, he dwelt also upon His death. Cornelius could see here what God had done for him. Other religions declared what man ought to do for God; this religion declares what God has done for man. The preaching of the Gospel thus tended directly to revolutionise the religious views, feelings, and practices of the world. All other religions are founded upon the thought of what man should do for God, Christianity upon the thought of what God has done for man. The world, so to speak, is thrown off its

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centre. In ancient astronomy the sun revolved around the earth: in modern astronomy the earth revolves around the sun. We see a corresponding change in the science of religion. In ancient worships God revolved around man—God rewarded man for what man had done. But in Christianity man revolves around God—man is rewarded, not for what man has done, but for what God has done for him. Compare the end of the chapter with the beginning. The beginning tells us what Cornelius did for God—he prayed, he fasted, he gave alms: that is the groundwork of all ancient religions. The end tells us what God did for Cornelius—He sent His Son Jesus to live and die, “that through His name whosoever believeth in Him should receive remission of sins”: that is the groundwork of the Christian Faith.

XIII.

The Church at Antioch.

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch; who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord, for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people; and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."—ACTS xi. 19-26.

THE text reminds us of the persecution which arose in the days of Stephen. This persecution compelled many of the early believers to leave Jerusalem and flee into other cities. Some travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch; but wherever they went they preached the Lord Jesus. Thus the persecution was the first means of propagating the Gospel. The object the enemies of

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the Church had in view was to stamp it out of existence. But the more they threatened, the wider spread the flames; and the fire which was burning only in Jerusalem now extends to the regions round about. Blow on the candle, and you extinguish the flame; blow on the fire in the grate, and instead of extinguishing it you increase it. Why, then, does blowing in the one case put out the fire, but in the other only increase it? The reason is in the hold the fire has upon the combustible substance. If the hold is slight and superficial, a little blowing will put it out; if deep and piercing, blowing will only intensify it. And Jesus Christ came to send fire on the earth; cloven tongues as it were of fire sat on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost; the fire spread from one to another—it ate its way down to the very depths of their spirits. The members of the Sanhedrim believed it might easily be put out; they “breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;” but their breathing and blowing only fanned the fire into wilder flames. They “breathed,” and the sparks flew into adjoining countries, and almost simultaneously conflagrations broke out north, south, east, and west.

Given a superficial movement, and a little opposition will effectually check it; but given a strong movement in the depths of our nature, and persecution imparts to it a greater wildness and an increased momentum. If you throw up a dyke to stop the flow of a living stream, you may succeed

in your object for a day or for a week; but the ultimate result is obvious—the weight and volume of the water will be so great that it will burst asunder the strongest dykes, and rush headlong through the country. The tiny stream will, because of the temporary opposition, swell into a mighty torrent and flow impetuously onward. The persecution in Jerusalem gave a new impetus to Christianity; the believers were scattered abroad and were “found everywhere preaching the word.” “And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the Hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.” The subject of our discourse this morning, therefore, will be the *Church at Antioch*.

I. You will please observe that this Church was established by LAY AGENCY.

The context clearly shows that the founders thereof were private Christians. Long before the advent of Christ in the flesh the Jewish people had shown their natural aptitude for colonisation. They had settled down for purposes of commerce in every city of the Roman Empire. But many of them, in accordance with the custom of their nation and the requirements of the Law, resorted to Jerusalem to the feasts. Hence we read that on the Day of Pentecost “there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven,”

and the country by name. The Pentecost and many of them were converted. Bei history of Jesus the distinctive fe of immediately they tarried behi years, passed; an ship with the Chu cess of instructio ties of the new re broke out, they v countries; and w the Lord Jesus. Antioch told the they had heard believed and turne

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and the country surrounding Antioch is mentioned by name. These men witnessed the miracle of Pentecost and heard the sermon of Peter; and many of them were "pricked in their hearts" and converted. Being comparative strangers to the history of Jesus Christ, and utterly ignorant of the distinctive features of the new religion, instead of immediately returning to their distant homes, they tarried behind in Jerusalem. Months, if not years, passed; and all the while they were in fellowship with the Church in Jerusalem, undergoing a process of instruction in the great principles and verities of the new religion. Now that the persecution broke out, they wisely returned to their respective countries; and wherever they went they preached the Lord Jesus. The natives of the countries around Antioch told their friends and acquaintances what they had heard and felt, "and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord."

You will notice that these men were not formally commissioned by any ecclesiastical authority to preach. They did it instinctively. The flowers do not require to be told to grow, and blossom, and look beautiful; let the sun but shine, and they do it without being told. The birds do not need an almanac to remind them that the merry month of May is come, and that the season for outdoor concerts has arrived; they know it without consulting an almanac. And as soon as a man has saving knowledge of the Saviour, he feels within him, feebly, perhaps, at first, more strongly after-

wards, a secret impulse to go and tell others of His beauties. Some Churches, I know, seriously object to what they call irregular teachers; the Holy Spirit, they believe, works in a straight line; they lay great stress on apostolic succession and episcopal ordination. They seem to me to forget that there are two ordinations, a human and a Divine. Sometimes the human and the Divine meet in one and the same person; more frequently they widely diverge. If you can get the two, all well and good; if not, give me the Divine, let who will have the human. Those disciples who escaped into Antioch were in no "orders," Aaronic or Apostolic; the hand of an apostle had not been laid on their heads. But what of that? "The Hand of the Lord was with them"—they were in the line of the Divine ordination. If the "Hand of the Lord" is with a man, who are we to cavil if the hand of a bishop has not been laid on his head? The Church at Antioch was founded by the preaching of laymen.

II. You will next observe that it was a Church established among the *Gentiles*.

It was, in fact, the first Gentile Church. The nineteenth verse tells us that the fugitives from Jerusalem "preached the Word to Jews only." But the following verse notices an exception, and a very important exception, as it afterwards turned out to be. The natives of Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the "Greeks" also. How they came

to burst through now to inquire very remarkable. Critics differ as to the events narrated. Peter had visited Antioch, it is said, but he preached at Antioch, in my opinion. Any thing that at Antioch was done to the Gentiles.

My text, the history of the Church plainly intimates that it was admitted into the Church, understood His Ascension they preached to the "Jews only," but he preached to the heathen as a brother of the mother Church. It tended with him to the primitive Church to consider it, and he himself to it. For the early Church in its infancy, the Church in its maturity, its image cannot be compared to the Churches of a hundred years ago. Churches are Churches! An

to burst through the Jewish circle we have not time now to inquire; but the fact is here recorded as very remarkable, and worthy of special notice. Critics differ as to the chronological order of the events narrated in this chapter. Some think that Peter had visited Cornelius before these men preached at Antioch; others entertain the contrary opinion. Anyhow, we are safe enough in concluding that at Antioch was formed the first Church of the Gentiles.

My text, therefore, marks a new epoch in the history of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ had plainly intimated that the Gentiles also were to be admitted into the Christian fold. But the disciples understood Him not. And for years after the Ascension they confined their evangelistic labours to the "Jews only." And when Peter ventured to preach to the heathen centurion, and to acknowledge him as a brother, he was put on his defence by the mother Church; "they of the Circumcision contended with him." We are prone to look upon the primitive Church as our pattern; we are often told to consider it, and to endeavour to conform ourselves to it. But let us not be misled by words. The early Church cannot be a pattern to us. The Church in its infancy cannot be a pattern to the Church in its maturity; the Church eight years of age cannot be a pattern to the Church eighteen hundred years old. Shame upon us, if modern Churches are not much better than primitive Churches! And I believe they are better. Our

organisation is more complete, our morality is higher, our sentiments are nobler, and our sympathies are more catholic and in sweeter accord with the Divine plan of the world. How narrow and bigoted was the Church of Jerusalem! How contentious and immoral the Church of Corinth! "They that were of the Circumcision contended with him." But life proved too much for either prejudice or argument; whilst they were contending the Church was instinctively extending its frontiers—it claimed the Gentiles also as its inheritance.

Three stages are traceable in the growth of this idea. From the establishment of the Church in the wilderness down to the Babylonish captivity, the Church was strictly Jewish. Not but that there was provision made in the Law for the stranger and the alien; but the system was more tolerant than the men, the theory more comprehensive than the practice. As a matter of fact, born Jews only were allowed to join in its ceremonial services, or to participate in its manifold privileges. There was a thick wall of partition between the Israelites and the nations round about; seldom or never were Gentiles translated from the other side of the wall unto this. But during the Babylonish captivity, Jewish exclusiveness was a little subdued, Jewish asperity a little softened. Jews and Gentiles were brought into frequent contact—they lived in daily fellowship; and, as is almost invariably the case, better knowledge of each

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other led to kindlier feelings. The Jews, therefore, on their return to their native land, attached to their much-loved temple a new court, called the Court of the Gentiles. Hitherto in their religious arrangements no provision had been made for the Gentiles—such a thought never entered the mind of Solomon or of his architects. But the sojourn of the people in Babylon enlarged their sympathies; they attached a new court to the temple for the spiritual convenience and advantage of the Gentiles; and henceforth they displayed considerable missionary spirit—they would encompass sea and land to make one proselyte. True, they did not pull down the wall of partition; but they *did* put a few gates in it through which the Gentiles might be admitted to the worship and the hope of Israel. Cornelius is supposed to be a proselyte of the *Gate*; others had entered further in. But mark—they were not received as Gentiles, but as Gentiles Judaized; not as Greek, but as Greeks circumcised. The third stage is that indicated in the chapter where my text lies. The wall is being pulled down, and Greeks may become Christians without first becoming Jews. The Church is now extending its frontiers. The Jewish Church was like the chrysalis containing life in an undeveloped state; the Christian Church is the chrysalis emerging in the winged butterfly—it looks disdainfully upon boundaries, and soars high over barriers. We can now sing what the saints under the Old Dispensation could not—“*Fly abroad, thou mighty Gospel.*” In Judaism the

Word of the Lord was standing still upon the earth; in Christianity it is flying. "And I saw an angel *fly* in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

III. You will next observe that this Gentile Church was *flourishing in grace*.

When the Church at Jerusalem heard of the great things that had taken place at Antioch, and that "God had to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life," "they sent forth Barnabas that he might go as far as Antioch." Two reasons might be assigned for this selection; first, Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, an island not very far removed from Antioch, and was therefore more or less acquainted with the city and its inhabitants. He was probably an intimate friend of some of the founders of the Church. As natives of the same island, they would naturally cultivate each other's acquaintance whilst residing at Jerusalem. But the second and main reason was his natural fitness for that kind of work. "He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." The word rendered "good" signifies more than mere moral worth; it means that he was a kind, genial, affectionate, loving man. Many good men—good, morally speaking—are nevertheless severe, stern, hard, harsh in their behaviour towards others. But Barnabas was a man of a very gracious disposition

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—cheerfulness flashing in his eye, hopefulness ringing in his voice, generosity beaming in his features. He was a very attractive man. This was the reason he was sent as a deputation. A rash, haughty, domineering man, coming down suddenly upon a Church to which he was a perfect stranger, would do more harm than good; he would alienate the affections of the people, and provoke their bitterest opposition. But Barnabas was a son of sweetness and light, one of those men who at once disarm opposition, win love, and secure confidence. "He was a good man"—meaning he was a beautiful man as well.

No sooner did he arrive in Antioch than "he saw there the grace of God." There is a sense in which grace may be said to be invisible; but there is another sense equally important in which grace may be seen. "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works?" If you have faith, you need not "say" it—show it, live it. If you have true religion in the heart, it is superfluous to go to your friends and acquaintances to declare it; live the Christian before them. You say it is in the heart, let them see it in the life. You would never know that some people are Christians unless they told you—you would never see it. An ancient poet tells the painters of Greece, in a period of great national decadence in art, to write under their pictures the names of the animals they intended to portray; to write horse, ox, ass underneath, implying that

without the name it would be impossible for spectators to tell from the shape and colour one animal from another—a very bitter satire upon the painters. And some men's religion is such that you would never suspect that they were called after the Holy Name unless they carried about them the label; they do not shine before men, that their good works may be seen and the name of God glorified. But the Antiochian Church lived Christianity. The moment Barnabas entered the town he could see there the grace of God; the moment his eye caught the canvas, he could tell the picture. Nay, so decided was the likeness between them and Christ that the uncritical public recognised it, and there "the disciples were first called Christians."

"He saw the grace of God and was glad." Is that all? No; "he exhorted the people that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." The first name of Barnabas was Joses; but "he was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, which is by interpretation the son of consolation or the son of exhortation"—the same word being used for the one and for the other. "He exhorted—consoled—the people." From this word we can partly judge of the character of his preaching; his exhortation was brimming over with comfort; his sermons were full of cheer and encouragement. His preaching was fine and stimulating rather than deep and convincing—he was a "nice" preacher rather than a great preacher. He had the good sense to know this, and therefore hastened to Tarsus to fetch Saul.

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Saul had not yet begun his astonishing career as an apostle; indeed, the welcome he had received from the believers in Jerusalem was rather formal and frigid than warm and glowing. He had, therefore, retired from public view; the Church seems to have lost sight of him; but Barnabas sought him out, discovered his retreat, and brought him to Antioch as his assistant. Barnabas would be worthy of grateful remembrance were it only for this one act—that he introduced Saul to public life and fairly started him in his course as emphatically the Apostle of the Gentiles. And no sooner does Saul enter upon the scene than the Holy Ghost uses a new word which in previous history was confined strictly to the apostles—"they now *taught* the people." Barnabas exhorted the people; but when Saul came to his help, the "exhorting" became "teaching;" deeper thoughtfulness characterised the ministry. Saul's powerful mind grappled energetically with the mighty problems of life and religion—he introduced greater depth into the preaching—he began to lay the foundations of the Church's theology. The people were now "taught." They were before grounded in love—they are now grounded in truth. They were before growing in grace—they are now growing in knowledge. Barnabas exhorted—Saul taught.

Grace and knowledge—love and truth—must meet and kiss each other in order to perfection in the Divine life. Man has a heart and a head; and religion must consist of grace and truth—grace for

the heart and truth for the head. And every true minister will, like Barnabas, strive to promote the growth of grace and knowledge in the Church; and if he cannot accomplish the twofold work himself, he will, like Barnabas, seek another to help him. Grace without knowledge is only one-half of religion; knowledge without grace is hardly a half. Let all those named after the name of Christ endeavour to unite both. Barnabas visiting Antioch saw the grace of God, and sought, by the valuable aid of Saul, to add to it knowledge. Barnabas visiting the British Churches of the present day would, I imagine, be more particularly struck with the knowledge of God. My friends, to our knowledge let us add grace; both are necessary in order to perfection in religion.

You all know what a splendid flower the dahlia is to look upon; in gorgeousness of colour it falls not a whit behind the choicest productions of the best cultivated nursery. But it is sadly deficient in one thing—scent. If its scent were equal to its beauty, its perfume to its colours, it might even enter into friendly competition with the rose, the acknowledged sovereign of the garden. Art has done its best to supply this deficiency of nature; botanists have strained their skill to perfume this magnificent flower, but in vain. No fragrance can be either imparted or developed. The dahlia is very beautiful, but not sweet. The perfection of a flower, however, consists in exquisiteness of colour combined with deliciousness of fragrance. The same

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remarks hold good in the moral world, and are applicable to individuals and to churches. The Church at Antioch was noted for its fragrance; grace, like a Divine aroma, was floating about in the air. Barnabas, with true insight, encouraged them to hold fast this virtue, and sought, by the assistance of Saul, to add to it knowledge. The Church at Corinth, on the other hand, was famous for the excellency of its wisdom, it was "enriched in all utterance and in all knowledge." But alas! the Christians of Corinth were dahlias, not roses; noted for floridness of colour, but sadly wanting in sweetness of perfume; and Paul exhorts them eloquently to add to their knowledge faith, and hope, and charity. I am afraid that in much modern preaching and in many modern churches these two elements, grace and knowledge, are separated. Which of the above-named churches do we resemble? To our knowledge let us seek to add grace. It is well to be versant in the doctrines of Christianity, but better to experience its grace likewise, vitalising the roots of our being. It is well to cultivate the Tree of Knowledge, but let us beware that we neglect not the Tree of Life. And in every garden of God, whether the Paradise of the Old Testament or the Paradise of the New, the two trees grow side by side—the Tree of Knowledge by the side of the Tree of Life. Barnabas visiting Antioch saw the grace of God; Barnabas visiting Wales would see the light of God.

The Conversion of Lydia.

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”
—ACTS xvi. 14, 15.

PAUL and Timothy, according to the preceding paragraph, travelled “throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia;” and their journey served to establish the Churches in the faith and to add daily to their number. Then the Apostle and his fellow-worker intended turning down to the left to preach the Word in Asia Minor; but they “were forbidden of the Holy Ghost.” Thereupon they journeyed onward to Mysia, intending to turn up to the right and preach Christ in Bithynia; “but the Spirit suffered them not.” By what method the Spirit interfered, whether by an inward or an outward revelation, we cannot positively tell; the main point of the narrative is—that He did interfere.

As they were permitted to go neither to the left nor to the right, they resolved upon going forward.

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“And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas,” —on the shore of the Mediterranean, the same as the ancient Troy. Having reached Troas the question again urgently presented itself—Which way to go now? Shall they go on straight across the sea or retrace their steps the way they came? Paul pondered seriously over the question, and in the night a vision appeared unto him—in the night thoughtful men generally have visions. “There stood before him a man of Macedonia and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” The question is then settled—Paul must cross the sea to Europe for the first time in his life. “And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering”—guessing? No; “assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them.” “*He* had seen”—“*we* endeavoured.” You see the change in the Pronoun. Paul was accompanied to Troas by Timothy; but at Troas they were joined by Luke, and probably by Silas. The only notice we have of that fact is a change in the Pronoun, for Luke was too modest to bring himself forward very prominently.

The narrative further informs us that they at once set sail from Troas, and in about three or four days reached “Philippi, which was the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a colony.” The chief city; on the margin, the first city; and the marginal reading is probably the correct one. Philippi was situated almost on the frontiers, and therefore the

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first city the missionaries reached on their way from the landing place. "And on the Sabbath day they went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made, and they spake unto the women which resorted thither." The word here rendered "spake" does not signify to preach, to deliver a set formal discourse; rather does it mean to converse freely and familiarly. "And there was a certain woman named Lydia," &c. The subject, therefore, is the means which happily resulted in the conversion of Lydia.

I. Lydia was LISTENING. "And a certain woman, named Lydia, *heard us.*" Great stress is laid in the Bible on hearing. "Faith cometh by hearing." In the first centuries of our era faith came by hearing, and only by hearing; for then books were very rare, and men sufficiently learned to read them equally rare. Faith in those times came to the majority of men by hearing, and by hearing only. But the invention of the Printing Press has brought about a considerable revolution in this as in other things. Now faith cometh by reading as well as by hearing. Indeed, some go so far as to predict that reading will gradually supersede hearing, and that the trade of the printers will sooner or later do away with the trade of the preachers. But for my part, whilst thankfully acknowledging the vast benefits conferred on the race by the Press, I am not at all afraid it will undermine the Pulpit. Quite the contrary. The more people read, the more

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anxious they are to hear; and whereas in ancient times faith came by hearing and hearing only, in modern times it comes by hearing and by reading—generally by hearing, sometimes by reading. “And Lydia heard us.”

II. Lydia listened ATTENTIVELY. “Whose heart the Lord opened that she *attended* unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” She paid heed—eagerly laid hold of the great truths enunciated by the Apostle. Therefore Matthew Henry suggests a slightly different rendering of the words: “whose heart the Lord opened that she applied unto herself the things which were spoken of Paul.” Some people attend the means of grace without ever applying what they hear—they let the preacher do a little application at the close. Others are diligent enough in applying; but they always apply to other people, never to themselves. But “Lydia was applying to herself”—not to her neighbours, not to the poor women sitting on the rude benches round about her—no, she “was applying to herself the things which were spoken of Paul.”

A valuable principle is here embodied—that if you lay hold of the truth, the truth will lay hold of you. Once the hearers of the Gospel reach this stage of close, anxious attention, this eager grasping of the truth, there is every reason to believe they will be led on to a full and saving knowledge of it. Wherefore the Holy Scriptures lay much emphasis on close, unfailling attention. “Let us therefore

pay the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip." "Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." When you feel deeply interested in a subject, you stretch the neck and incline the ear that you may catch every syllable. That is the very image employed by the prophet to indicate the attention our hearers ought to pay to the Word of God. Without this eager attention you will not be able to clearly discern the Divine Voice. When Elijah was hiding in the cave in Horeb there came a "great and strong wind rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind." "After the wind came an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake." "After the earthquake fire, but the Lord was not in the fire." And after the fire a "still small voice"—so still and small that Elijah was obliged to come out of the cave and stand at the mouth thereof, and listen with all his might to catch its sweet and dulcet tones. And what is the Gospel? A storm? No. An earthquake? No. Fire? No. What then? The "still small voice" of Divine Love—so still and small that it is necessary you should emerge from the cave of sin and worldliness and incline the ear to catch its gentle, tender accents. Love never speaks loud. If any one protests to you in a loud voice that he loves you, do not believe him—he is a hypocrite and a liar. Love never speaks loud—it always manifests itself in quiet, subdued, scarcely audible whispers.

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And the Divine Love does not speak loud—in storms and earthquakes and conflagrations. Its voice is very still and very small; and you must listen with all your might before you can properly interpret it. Lydia listened attentively.

III. She listened attentively with her HEART.
“Whose *heart* the Lord opened to attend.”

The mind is generally divided into intellect and heart. There are truths which appeal only to the intellect, to the total exclusion of the emotional nature. Such, for instance, are the truths of mathematics. They must be judged and measured by the intellect, and the intellect alone. But religious truths are necessarily moral truths, and moral truths must evidently be judged by the moral nature. The Bible must be interpreted through the heart rather than through the head. Just here consists the great mistake generally committed by men of philosophic and mathematical training. This, for instance, is the great fault observable in the writings of John Stuart Mill. From early infancy he was taught to crush the heart, and to smite all feeling with the edge of the sword. The moral nature of little John Stuart Mill was warped. What was the result? That the moral nature of the great John Stuart Mill was distorted. He insisted upon judging everything by the cold light of the intellect, and nothing by the warm light of the heart. He wrote a book to give to the world the history of his life; but what is very remarkable about the book is that he makes no mention whatever in it of his mother.

The word "mother," I believe, is not in the book at all. You might almost think he was the Melchisedek of the New Dispensation—that he had no mother: no mention whatever of her in a book which he wrote for the special purpose of giving to the world the history of his life. No wonder a man like that could not understand Christianity. Men who overlook their mothers cannot hope to understand either the character or the teaching of Him, who, hanging on the Cross, beheld His mother and committed her to the care of a beloved disciple.

We read in the Book of Judges of the "thoughts of the heart." And what is Christianity? The thoughts of God's heart. In the Creation round about us we see the thoughts of His intellect; in the Gospel the thoughts of His heart. And to properly understand the great heart of God we must bring to the work the little heart of man. There is a class of truths which first enter the intellect and then sink into the heart; but the truths of Christianity first enter the heart and gradually rise into the intellect. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Not the light was the life, but the life was the light. Philosophy declares the great desideratum of the world is light, more light; and that light will gradually engender life. No, answers the Bible, the great want of the world is life, more life.

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More life and fuller than we want."

And abundant life in the heart will certainly develop into light in the intellect. Herein precisely con-

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sisted the main perplexity of Nicodemus in his conversation with Jesus Christ—he put light before life, the head before the heart. He said, “We know that thou art a teacher come from God”—we know; and having the right knowledge he supposed he possessed the requisite qualifications to enter the kingdom of God. “But Jesus answered and said unto him, Except a man be *born* again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Paraphrase the answer and it is this—“Thou, Nicodemus, attachest great importance to knowledge, but I attach great importance to life. Thou believest it is through the Gate of Knowledge thou art to enter the Kingdom of God; but there thou art mistaken; it is not through the Gate of Knowledge but through the Gate of Life. Not Knowledge, but Life; not cognition, but birth.” “Except a man be born again, he cannot see, much less enter, the Kingdom of God.” A man must be born before he can see—he must be alive before he can know. Life before light—hearts before heads: that is the fundamental method of the Gospel. “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.” Learn first and take the yoke afterwards? No; take the yoke first, and learn afterwards. Be safe first, be intelligent afterwards. Possess yourselves first of the life of the Gospel, you have an endless eternity before you in which to acquire its knowledge. Lydia was listening attentively with her heart.

IV. Lydia was listening attentively with her heart

OPENED. "Whose heart the Lord *opened* to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Two things are necessary to secure the salvation of our hearers. The first is an open Bible, the second is an open heart.

But the first is an open Bible. Paul and his friends went into the wooden shed on the river side and "spoke unto the women." What did he speak? What he spoke everywhere—"he expounded unto them the Kingdom of God;" he flung open the gates and invited them to come in. Jesus Christ, overtaking the two disciples on their evening walk to Emmaus, "opened unto them the Scriptures." Before, the prophecies were tightly closed against the spiritual perception of the disciples—they had not the remotest idea of their hidden meaning; but He "opened unto them the Scriptures"—He turned the prophecies inside out; and the disciples were astonished at the wealth of their meaning. And that is the proper function of the ministry in the present day—to open unto you the Scriptures, to elicit their inner signification. In every verse in this precious Volume there is a thought concealed like an angel in a cage; and it is the peculiar business of the preacher to open the verse and let the thought come out. Some men are sufficiently able to open the verses wide and draw out large grand thoughts like angels full-grown. Others are not learned enough to do that; but if we cannot open them wide, we can open them a little; if we cannot release angels, we can set free butterflies. I prefer

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angels; but I honestly confess that I like butterflies also.

But an open Bible is not enough. There must also be an open heart to receive the open Bible. St. Paul was sowing good seed; but to secure a plentiful harvest it was necessary to open hearts to receive the seed. An open heart in the pew is as indispensable as an open Bible in the pulpit. Good seed is being sown every Sabbath from thousands of pulpits in our land; yet we see but little fruit. Why? Because hearts are not open to receive it. Closed hearts seem to me to be the real cause of all unbelief, whether it be the ordinary unbelief of Christian congregations or the systematic unbelief of our Universities and Halls of Science. Have you noticed which words of the Old Testament are oftenest quoted in the New? I will tell you: "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." They are quoted in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Acts, and the Romans—six times in the first six books of the New Testament. Why? To teach us the extreme danger of shutting our hearts against the "things spoken of Paul" and other inspired writers. The words speak of three things as being closed: the ears, the eyes, the heart.

“This people’s heart is waxed gross.” Physicians often speak of a disease which they call “The fatty degeneration of the heart.” By this, I believe, they mean that there is an unhealthy accumulation of fat around the heart, interfering unduly with its vital functions, and often terminating in sudden death. And the Jews in the time of Jesus Christ seemed to suffer from a spiritual malady of a like description—they suffered from “fatty degeneration of the heart.” They had lost all sensitiveness to spiritual things; and in this lamentable grossness of the heart is to be found the ultimate cause of their rejection of the Saviour. “Their hearts have waxed gross.”

Most of the objections to Christianity, current in the present day, I venture to think, are traceable to the same origin. Some deny the existence of God; they array a series of objections against the accepted doctrine. But do you for a moment suppose their unbelief arises from the understanding? I rather believe the Bible—“The fool hath said in his *heart*, There is no God.” It is atheism of the heart first; remove that and the atheism of the intellect will vanish into thin air. But many of the greatest philosophers of the age disbelieve in the existence of God, you say. Perhaps so; but if they are philosophers upon other subjects, they are fools upon this—“The *fool* hath said in his *heart*, There is no God.” Others again deny the supernatural in our religion; they strain every nerve to explain away the miracles of the New Testament.

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They appear very intellectual. But do you believe for one moment their main difficulties originate in the understanding? I rather believe the Bible—"O fools, and slow of *heart* to believe." To believe in what? To believe in the greatest of all the miracles, even His own resurrection. But why did they not believe? Because they were slow of understanding? No; but because they were slow of heart. "O fools, and slow of heart to believe." But many of the most accomplished writers, you say, find it too hard to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and you ought to speak very respectfully of them. Well, my friends, it is not incumbent upon me to speak more respectfully of them than Jesus Christ spoke of His own disciples when they failed to believe the same truth. What is that? "O FOOLS, and slow of heart to believe." In the Church at Corinth there were a few pre-*tentious* scholars who denied, on apparently philosophical grounds, the general resurrection at the last day—another instance of unbelief in the supernatural. How does Paul deal with them? In the 15th chapter of his First Epistle to them he removes a few of the intellectual difficulties. But he breaks off abruptly in the midst of his argument, as if new light had suddenly flashed into his mind from the great eternities, and he cries out energetically, "Awake unto righteousness, and sin not." As though he said, It is useless to argue with you, it is futile to reason with you; your objections do not originate in the head but in the heart, your unbelief

is not intellectual but moral. "Awake therefore to righteousness, and sin not"—do the right, lead a life of purity and usefulness, serve God and your fellow-men, and your unbelief will certainly disappear. "But some man will still say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" How does the Apostle answer? "*Thou fool.*" He calls him a fool to his face. It is the fashion nowadays to offer graceful apologies for the infidel; we style him a philosopher, a scientist, and a doctor; but the Bible never makes mention of him but it always calls him a fool. His infidelity has its origin in a closed heart. But Lydia was listening attentively with an open heart.

V. Lydia was listening attentively with her heart opened WIDE. "Whose heart the Lord opened wide"—that, it appears, is the literal translation.

The words imply two things. They imply, first, that there was a profound need. You have doubtless observed the young bird in the nest in early Spring; when hunger sets in, it opens its little beak wide—that is the birdie way of showing its want. And when the soul becomes vividly conscious of its great need, it opens its beak as best it can—every faculty opens its mouth wide and eagerly cries to heaven for food. Of course, every soul is by nature as needy as every other; but every soul is not conscious of its need, every heart does not feel its hunger. But when this consciousness is awakened, oh how it opens! oh how it craves for satisfaction!

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“A man of Macedonia stood before Paul and prayed him, saying, Come over and help us.” There is in the cry a painful consciousness of deep want—he prayed Paul to come over to Europe and help us. Paul came; and lo! the first soul he met was wide open crying to heaven for satisfaction. In that heart of Lydia opened wide we see the general heart of Europe—there was a universal sense of profound need, and an earnest cry to the Unknown God to come over and supply it. “Whose heart the Lord opened wide.”

But the words further signify that the Lord had made ample provision to supply the need. He would have never opened Lydia's heart wide unless He had something to put into it. He opened it because He wanted to fill it. “Come over and help us!” Paul came over and carried enough with him in the religion which he preached to break for ever the hunger of all Europe. What a precious freight that little ship transported across the Ægean! That was a very precious freight in the *May Queen* when she left Portsmouth with the Puritans on board to settle in the then unexplored continent of America; but hardly so valuable as that on board the little vessel which, setting sail from Troas, started straight for the coasts of Europe. I wonder what was the name of the little ship; I should not be at all surprised to find that she had a very fine name, the first Missionary Ship on record! But what I was saying was—that the religion of the Bible can abundantly satisfy the multifarious wants of our nature. “De-

light thyself in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of thy heart:" every wish shall be satisfied, every capacity filled to the very brim. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it, saith the Lord." Expand thy soul, enlarge thy heart, stretch out thy nature in all directions, "open thy mouth wide and I will fill it, saith the Lord." "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." Not only it is full, as in the Welsh version, but it runneth over. The cup of your nature is filled to overflowing with Divine influences. Some of you know full well what that means—you know by happy experience what it is to be so filled with Divine grace as to burst out in glorious splashes of praise. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." "Fervent," literally "boiling." "Boiling in spirit." I like to see men "boiling in spirit, serving the Lord." I like to see Christian congregations boiling, seething, fermenting in spirit. I have no objection for them to boil over sometimes as was the case in the days of our pious forefathers; at any rate, better to boil over than not to boil at all. "My cup runneth over." The other day I took my little children to the beach of the Bristol Channel. They were very diligent filling their little buckets with the water of the sea—they could not be much more diligent if Cardiff were on fire. But after filling their little buckets over and over again, the ocean still remained, ready to fill a million buckets more. And you are welcome to bring the

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cups of your nature and fill them to overflowing with the "Water of life," but after filling you over and over again, the boundless ocean of the Infinite Godhead will still remain, ready to fill millions more. Take a plunge in the ocean, and you will be filled to overflowing. "My cup runneth over."

VI. Lydia listened attentively with her heart opened wide **BY THE LORD**. "Whose heart the *Lord* opened wide that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

I. The text shows this opening of her heart was *gradual*. It was not exactly a consequence of the preaching, but something prior to and simultaneous with it. "Whose heart the Lord opened," not after the preaching, but "to attend" to the preaching. Her final conversion to Christianity would seem to be a process of years. She was a native of Thyatira in Asia Minor, and was in all probability brought up in the superstition and the heathenism of the country. But in common with many of the best men and devout women of the age, she felt paganism to be an empty show and yearned for something more solid and satisfying. Whilst yet in paganism, the Lord in a mysterious way opened her heart too wide for the idols of the Gentiles to fill. She therefore embraced Judaism. The fact of her resorting to the "place where prayer was wont to be made" is a sufficient proof that she was a proselyte to the religion of the Jews. The Judaism of that age, it is true, was very formal and corrupt :

but Judaism at its worst was immeasurably superior to paganism at its best. One thing at least may be averred with the greatest certainty—the God of Judaism was real enough. The gods of heathenism were vanity and inanity, but the God of Judaism was a blessed and infinite Reality. However hollow the Jews, their God was substantial enough. However corrupt the mode of worship, the Object of worship was pure and spotless—the God of the Jews shone high and bright in the firmament of the world. “Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship.” And in Judaism Lydia found a kind of rest for her weary soul.

But the Lord continued to work within her, and she was brought to feel that, however great was Judaism, humanity was considerably greater. Judaism was never intended to satisfy any one. Humanity was greater than Judaism: the Jew was greater than his religion. Take the choicest of the ancient saints—Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah; they all desired something they did not actually possess. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.” Judaism was emphatically a religion of aspiration and not of satisfaction; hence prophecy played in it an important part. In a religion of satisfaction prophecy of necessity dies out. Nevertheless, there are certain faculties of the soul which Judaism meets and satisfies. There is in man a faculty to worship—that is the regal faculty and imperatively demands satisfaction. Now Judaism meets and satisfies that

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faculty. Lydia found in Judaism the true Object of worship; "she did worship God," says the text. But there are in man, and especially in woman, other profound necessities. Man, and especially woman, craves for love, sympathy, and friendship. Lydia, it seems, was a widow. Why do I say that? I have three reasons for saying it: mention is made of her family, and mention is made of her business, but no mention is made of her husband. Lydia was a widow with many children, it is likely, left upon her hands. Well, what to do after burying her husband? Will she leave the business and break up the establishment? No, she is determined to carry on the business as best she can—she does trade in purple, says the historian. At the same time she deeply feels the loss of her husband—she often groans under the anxiety and the care of the business. She is glad when the Jewish Sabbath comes round that she may attend the prayer meeting by the riverside—even a prayer meeting according to the forms of the Old Dispensation brings her comfort and relief. Nevertheless she is acutely conscious of a great void in her heart; her husband's place is still vacant; and the care of the business is a sore vexation. And when Paul and his friends turned in to the meeting, and began to speak of Jesus Christ and His dying love, His tender sympathy and never-failing succour, she perceived at once that He was the Saviour she needed—a Husband of the soul instead of the husband in the cemetery, a Friend and Counsellor in all the sad

emergencies of life. The heart, before opened, was now occupied—the great void was now filled; and she passed over from the religion of aspiration to the religion of satisfaction. She was before an “Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile,” but she is now a Christian indeed in whom there is truth. To be free of guile is good, to be filled with truth is much better.

2. But inasmuch as the work was gradual, it was *gentle*. Gentleness is a necessary accompaniment of gradualness. Further on in the chapter, we read of the conversion of the jailer in the same town. His conversion was the work of a brief hour; but it was a very terrible hour—the foundations of the prison were shaken and the keeper was on the point of committing suicide. A wild lightning from Mount Sinai struck him, flashed into his spirit, and set his conscience on fire. He cried out in agony of mind, “What must I do to be saved?” But a gentler method was adopted to convert Lydia—it was brought about not by lightnings but by light; and the light always does its work better than the lightnings—very silently but very effectually. This morning about six o’clock a great battle was fought in this neighbourhood, more important by far than either Waterloo or Sedan—a battle between the forces of Light and the powers of Darkness. But did the clash of weapons awake any of you? No; not one. The victory was won gently and silently. There was infinite force but no noise. That is precisely the way in which Lydia was con-

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verted—it was a victory not of lightnings but of light. Some of you want to experience very powerful things before you join the Church of Christ; but by powerful things you mean terrible things. But remember—more powerful than the lightnings is the light; and what need is there for lightnings to convert you when the sun is shining full in your face?

The prophet compares the Word of God to a hammer breaking in pieces the rock. It falls suddenly and grinds the heart to powder. Such was the case with the jailer. One stroke from the Divine Hammer, and his heart was in a moment shattered—he believed damnation was about to overwhelm him. Oh, that is a terrible way of saving a man—to shiver his heart into a thousand atoms! But the same prophet compares the Divine Word to fire melting the wax. No noise, no violence, no shattering, and yet the rock of adamant melts into a pool of water. That is how Lydia was converted—by warmth, not by force. It would be a pity to half kill the poor widow with fright. It was only right that the swarthy jailer should be hammered a little—he had hammered many in his day; but it would be a great pity to terrify the little widow. How, then, to turn her? Gently, quietly; she must be gradually melted by the Gospel and translated from death into life without undergoing the slightest shock. And those two methods still continue. Thieves, drunkards, adulterers—it is only right that they should be converted with the

Hammer. But what about our modest young women, and our studious young men, brought up in the Sabbath School, and our shy retiring mothers groaning under the trials and sorrows of life? Oh, it would be a great pity to convert them by violent means and frighten them unduly. No, says the Gospel, I will not beat them, but I will warm them—I will not terrify them, but I will melt them as the fire melteth the wax. But either way, the change is quite real. O Lord, turn us and we shall be turned! Turn us in Thine own way! If it is necessary to smite us with the hammer, smite us; but if the light and the heat will do, then melt us! Either way, O Lord, turn us!

That Lydia's conversion was quite thorough is evidenced by her subsequent conduct. "She was baptized"—she was not ashamed to make a public profession of the new religion. She had changed her religion once before—Christianity was the third she had professed; her neighbours might bring a charge of inconsistency against her. But what has man to do with inconsistency? Man's supreme duty is not to be consistent with himself, but consistent with his God—not to be consistent with his past, but consistent with the light which he at the time enjoys. Lydia repeatedly changed her religion; but each change was in the direction of light. "She was baptized and her household." This, I believe, is the first instance in which it is recorded that the baptism of the parent was followed by the

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baptism of the family. Why? Because family religion is a characteristic of European as compared with Asiatic Christianity. Christianity in Europe is not a thing of public ceremony in Temple or Cathedral—it has entered and leavened the family. Of European converts the historian of the Acts records, that “they were baptized and their households.” And there is something very remarkable in the fact mentioned at the commencement that Christianity, on its introduction to Europe, was first offered to women and first believed in by a woman—it is more than remarkable, it is prophetic of the subsequent career of the Gospel upon our continent. The women of Europe, rather than the men of Europe, have kept Christianity alive in Europe. “A *man* of Macedonia stood before Paul and besought him, saying, Come over and help us.” A man first sought it, but a woman first received it. How to help man? By elevating woman. How to help the men of Macedonia? By improving and refining the women of Macedonia. It is the morality of woman, and not that of man, that stamps itself on the age. No sooner was Lydia converted than her family was won over to the religion of the Crucified—her children were baptized into the sacred name of the ever blessed Trinity. Some Sunday School children were asked which of the characters in Bunyan they liked best, Christian or Christiana? A little girl answered she liked Christiana best; because when Christian left the City of

Destruction he went alone, but when Christiana left she took the children with her. The mothers will not go to heaven without taking the family with them. The conversion of the mother will turn out to be the salvation of the children. "She was baptized and her household."

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XV.

The Unknown God.

“For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.”—ACTS xvii. 23.

ATHENS was a city illustrious for its learning. On her streets some of the profoundest thinkers of the race had been discussing questions the most momentous to man. The Spirit of Debate had become incarnate in the inhabitants. But during the century or two preceding the Christian era, serious and perceptible decay had taken place in the thought of the city—instead of investigating the true, the people were raving after the new. “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” And when love of the new gains ascendancy over love of the true, degeneration is inevitable. The distinction between true and false philosophy in every age consists mainly in this—the one loves the new more than the true, the other loves the true more than the new.

But the religious aspect of the city is depicted in more lamentable colours still. “The city was

wholly given to idolatry." Idolatry always flourished in this city; but it seemed now as though it had received a new impulse. Not, however, because faith in idols was stronger, but rather because it was weaker. The faith of the Greeks at this period, not only in idols, but in truth itself, was on the verge of extinction. They had groped in darkness so long after God and Truth, without any success attending their efforts, that the suspicion gradually dawned upon them that the reason they had not discovered them was—*because they were not in being*. Perhaps God and Truth are not realities! What if they are only the creation of the overheated imagination! The suspicion was so humiliating, so blasting in its effects, so awfully barren and withering, that they strenuously strove to conceal it—they tried to forget their religious bankruptcy in spiritual intoxication. And because they believed strongly in nothing, they feigned to believe in everything. Scepticism drove them to credulity. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious"—overmuch devout: an equivocal compliment capable of a double interpretation.

At this time Paul went to Athens, and the Everlasting Gospel with him; and in it there is a perfect combination of the True and the New. Glad Tidings, True News, is its distinctive appellation. The proclamation of it by Paul in the market-place created intense excitement among the populace; and "certain philosophers of the Epicureans and

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of the Stoics encountered him." In the animated discussions which followed, some lost their temper as they lost their point, and said derisively, "What will this babbler say?" They abused their opponent, compared him to garrulous rooks croaking at eventide, heaped ridicule on his head. Others felt more in earnest and desired to understand this "new doctrine whereof he spake." They conducted him to Areopagus that he might have a fair opportunity to unfold his views, and that they might have a fair opportunity of judging them. And in the text and the verses which follow, we have preserved to us a concise and lucid sketch of the noble discourse the Apostle delivered on that memorable occasion. It will be my endeavour to bring out into clearer relief the thoughts so thickly and deeply embedded in it.

He declares unto them the Unknown God:—

I. In His relation to Nature.

II. In His relation to Man.

These two relations exhaust our knowledge of God; we know Him in no other.

I. GOD IN RELATION TO NATURE.

I. The Apostle begins by affirming that "God *made* the world and all things therein"—that He was the Creator of the universe. However simple and elementary this truth appears to us, we must not forget that it was perfectly novel to the Athenians. The Greek mind had often grappled with the mysterious problem touching the origin of the world. But notwithstanding all the time and

energy expended to solve it, it continued to be shrouded in as much darkness as ever. History seems to testify that the human mind, left to its own resources, could never grasp the idea of creation, properly so called. Every school of ancient thought believed in the eternity of matter. The Epicureans believed the atoms of the universe were uncreated, and that they came together in their present shape by mere fortuity. The Stoics also believed in the eternity of the atoms, but differed from the Epicureans in that they believed the chaos was reduced into a kosmos not by fortuity, but by the direct interposition of the Divine Intelligence. The disciples of Aristotle, differing from both, maintained that the world had always existed such as we behold it to-day. We cannot too strongly insist on the fact that of a creation out of nothing the ancient heathen had not the crudest idea. Mankind seem to be entirely indebted to Divine Revelation for it.

2. This idea, however, means that God made the world in regard to its *matter*. Plato recognised God as the wise and skilful "Arranger of the Hyle." But whence issued the "Hyle"? Plato is mute. In his most ethereal flights, this greatest of ancient thinkers never caught a glimpse of creation from nothingness. But St. Paul teaches his hearers on Mars' Hill that God made the matter of the universe. The idea was absolutely new to them. Not only God shaped matter, but He produced it. Not only He built the world as an architect erects a

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house, but He made the materials likewise. Matter is not eternal—God is its Maker and Builder. It is a memorable saying of Andrew Fuller that a child may learn more in five minutes in the first verse of the Bible than the recondite sages of antiquity ever acquired in their intense and protracted studies. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." According to philosophy, ancient and modern, the world existed before in some form or other; and thus philosophy has failed to maintain the fundamental distinction between God and the world. But according to the Bible, the world existed nowhere before, nor in God nor in space; it existed in no shape before, nor in germ nor in development. It is the result of an act of pure creation—an idea too transcendent for the sublimest thinkers, in the mere strength of thought, to comprehend. What if creation out of nothing be, after all, the object-matter not of reason but of faith! "Through *faith* we understand the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things that are seen were not made of things which do appear."

3. God, however, made the world, not only in its matter but also in its *laws*. Laws are so many windows in the dark opaque walls of the world, through which we can have a transient glance at God and Eternity. Through its laws we can look out of this world into the other. But over these windows infidelity draws down the blinds and shuts God out. As we read its books, we could almost infer, from seeing the blinds down everywhere, that

He is "either pursuing, or is on a journey, or per-adventure He sleepeth." Strange, passing strange, that men should strive to bar up every avenue against God! Nevertheless the truth abides—"God made the world," its matter and its laws. Men lavish praise on each other for discovering these laws, but are slack to give glory to God for making them. But the discovery of a law, compared with its invention, sinks to utter insignificance. Galileo has been richly extolled for discovering that the earth moves around the sun. But there was not much originality in that after all; to move it at first was the difficulty—that was originality indeed. Doctor Harvey has been highly and deservedly praised for discovering the circulation of the blood in the veins. But there was not much originality in that after all; to circulate it at first was the difficulty—that was originality indeed.

4. Having created the world, God is still *present in it* as its Sovereign Lord and Director. "Seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things." "The philosophers of the Stoics," unlike the "philosophers of the Epicureans," did not theoretically deny the Divine existence, but they did deny the Divine government. They maintained that all mundane affairs were under the relentless rule of Fate. They practically disbelieved in God, but believed in Fate; hence their reckless indifference to all the ills and favours of life. In our day also, men deny the efficient operation of God in Nature—Law does everything, God does nothing. God is uncer-

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moniously deposed, and Law or Necessity is exalted to the Throne in His place. But ancients and moderns alike, the moment they draw a stroke with their pencil through God, feel themselves bound to substitute something they call Fate or Destiny or Necessity in His stead. But I cannot conceive why they should put the extinguisher on the sun, if afterwards they feel constrained to light a candle.

The Bible teaching, however, is clear and unambiguous—that God is still not only the chief but the sole Agent in Nature. Whilst on one hand we must insist upon the radical distinction between God and the world, we must on the other beware that we exaggerate not this distinction into absolute separation. God is still in the world as the inexhaustible source of its life. Behind Nature and within it is God—within it and yet distinct from it. Everything in Nature is a manifestation of some thought; but who is it that thinks? Nature? No; but God. The swallows emigrate annually to the proper clime at the right time—who keeps the time and marks the points? The swallows? No; but God. The bee builds her comb according to the severest principles of geometry—who is the mathematician? The bee? No; but God. We may blindly imagine that inexorable Law performs all the work, that relentless Fate governs all from the flaming sun to the tiny mote dancing in its beam. But the Bible uniformly represents God as the active agent everywhere. He it is that rolls the mighty planet, and He that rounds the glittering

dewdrop. Laws are not His viceregents to carry on the government in His absence—they are not even His helpmates. They are only the self-imposed rules according to which He ordinarily works. They are not powers—He is the power. In thus teaching that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the worlds, the Apostle struck straight at the radical error of ancient philosophy and ancient mythology.

From these truths two valuable lessons are deduced. The first is that "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Quite in sight of the Apostle were many temples which for simplicity of design, grandeur of effect, and costliness of material, have never been surpassed. The error of the Athenians, however, consisted in conceiving that they were thus honouring God instead of being honoured by Him. They imagined that by erecting magnificent structures they were conferring favour upon God and putting Him under obligation to come to their rescue in the day of their extremity. But the Apostle teaches that, inasmuch as He is the Creator and the Lord of all the earth, it is preposterous to think that He stands in need of or is confined to any structure, however superb, built by the feeble hands of man. "He dwelleth not in temples made with hands." He is the Maker of the universe. What is there in a temple of the whitest marble for Him to covet? Were He a forlorn fugitive, an impoverished God, He might be glad of a shelter anywhere. But that is not His condition—He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and has the resources of both at His command.

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The other lesson is that "He is not worshipped or served with men's hands as though He needed anything." The Athenians in common with all idolaters supposed religious rites to be enacted for *God* and not for man, for *His* advantage and not for our benefit. They looked upon their offerings as gifts unto God—gifts of which He stood in actual need. God was supposed to be dependent on the world, instead of the world being dependent on God. Many professors of religion in this Christian country, I fear, commit the same grave mistake. They consider their pecuniary contributions towards the support of religion as gifts unto Him, as though God lived upon the charity of the world! It is, however, the very reverse of the truth: we do not give to Him, He it is that gives to us. The mistake of the Stoics about God in respect of Nature, was that of all idolaters in respect of Religion. They conceived it was His prerogative to receive; but St. Paul teaches it was His property and function to give. "Neither is He served with men's hands as though He needed anything, seeing it is *He* that *giveth* to all life and breath and all things." The gift is not from man to God, but from God to man. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of Lights." "He ascended to give gifts unto man." Unregenerate men always perpetrate the same mistake, supposing religion to consist in giving. The world-principle varies not. But the Bible teaching is a direct contradiction of

the world-principle. As creatures we receive; as worshippers we receive too. "The head and front of our offending" is not that we give too little, but that we receive too little. Religion like Nature is a system of giving on God's part, and of receiving on our part. Temples are erected and rites instituted not because they are profitable to God, but because they are advantageous to man. God depends not on the universe, the universe depends upon Him. In this part of his oration, therefore, the Apostle struck at the root of everything false in the world, false in philosophy, and false in religion.

II. GOD IN HIS RELATION TO MAN.

I. He begins here again by affirming that God *made* man. "He made of one blood all nations of men." However simple and elementary this truth appears to us, we must not forget that it was strikingly new to the Greeks. The origin of man had baffled the most ingenious efforts of the philosophers to unravel it. The popular opinion among the Greeks was that they had grown from the soil. According to one of their own writers, the "first men had sprung up in Attica like radishes." The idea of God cannot be degraded without at the same time debasing the idea of man. As God among them was confounded with Nature, so man was absorbed in the world. Humanity was only a product of the soil! Thought moves in circles; and the same theory differently arrayed is advocated in

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in high quarters in England. God is involved in Nature according to the fashionable Pantheism of the age; and man is evolved out of Nature according to the fashionable anthropology of the age. Man is developed from the ape; the ape from the primeval protoplasm; the primeval protoplasm from the ground. Thus the English philosophy of the nineteenth century meets the Athenian philosophy of the first. But in opposition to the Athenian and every other philosophy which excludes Divine intervention, the Bible teaches that "God made us and not we ourselves."

The Apostle further proclaims the unity of the human race. The theory prevalent in Greece and feebly advocated by a few recent writers is that known as the autochthonic. That is, it was believed every nation was indigenous to the soil on which it was found, having developed out of the earth like the flowers or the trees. No organic connection was believed to exist between the different peoples of the earth. The Greeks viewed themselves as the aristocracy of the world, separated even in origin from all other nations, whom they contemptuously designated Barbarians, and whom they jealously excluded from participation in their national privileges. Exclusiveness was as characteristic of the Greeks as of the Jews; only that of the latter was religious and founded upon the Divine Election, whereas that of the former was political and founded upon national pride. But the Apostle eloquently proclaims in their hearing the unity of the human

race—a truth destructive of their most fondly cherished prejudices. Every nation is tied to every other by the bonds of consanguinity. Mankind are one in their fall and redemption, simply because they are one in their origin. Whilst the autochthonic theory tended to sever the nations, the Biblical theory tends to cement them all in one vast, universal family. Error always tends to diversity, but truth always to unity. And in proportion as men believe in the unity of the race will contentions cease and peace and plenty reign.

“ For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be ;

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Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were
furled,

In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.”

2. Having made men, the Divine Being continues to *rule* them. He did not heartlessly fling them upon the world to be the sport of chance, but “determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation.”

The one object in view, however, in this Divine government of the world was that men “might seek the Lord, if haply they might find Him.” All events were so disposed as to be helpful to mankind in their search after God. We blindly imagine that were the external circumstances now and again arranged a little differently, it would result in the spiritual advantage of the nations. But St. Paul intimates that all things have happened so as to aid

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and encourage men in their quest after the Unseen, Divine Revelation alone lacking. God did not, it is true, seek after the Gentiles as He did after the Jews; nevertheless He lent them every natural aid to seek after Himself. He did not vouchsafe them Light from Heaven; but He granted them every assistance and facility to kindle a light of their own. They "felt" after Him—endeavoured to discover Him as it were by the touch. They groped for centuries in the darkness of their heathenism, "if haply they might find Him." They had no fixed principle to guide them in their researches, it was all "hap;" and at last the "hap" turned against them. "The world by wisdom knew not God." They found idols by the thousands; and for the moment they might imagine that every new idol was the God they felt after. But a short experience would undeceive them, and again the search would be recommenced. Athens alone contained over 30,000 idols; but the 30,000 together failed to fill the human heart. An empty altar still existed within for another god to come and occupy. They gave it external expression in the material world—they built an altar, void and desolate, and on it a transcript of their own experience—TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. This painful sense of void in the soul which the 30,000 idols could not fill prepared humanity for the revelation of the Unknown God—it testified to them that there must be a God which they had not yet discovered. A celebrated astronomer, Leverrier by name, observing slight

disturbances in the Solar System, which no known causes could adequately account for, set himself to explain the phenomena, and came to the conclusion that there must be another world in a certain quarter of the heavens, a world hitherto undiscovered by science. When the telescope was turned to the particular point indicated by him, behold, there was the unknown world. That discovery is rightly considered one of the most marvellous triumphs of human genius. In like manner the disquietude of the human spirit—its strange aberrations disturbing all the pronostications of reason—kept the consciousness alive that there must be another God in the heavens, not included in the 30,000, a God stronger and holier and juster than they all. The consciousness was so vivid that it constrained the Athenians to give it utterance in the outer world. The chief object of the Divine government of the Gentiles was to shut them into this conviction. Whereas Judaism by its truth prepared salvation for the world, heathenism even by its aberrations prepared the world for salvation.

3. The Apostle announces a nearer relation still—he declares God to be the *Father* of man. “For in Him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.” The poet from whom the quotation is made is Aratus, who like the Apostle was a native of Cilicia. The same sentiment is to be found in several other poets. It was used by

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them in an idolatrous or Pantheistic sense; but Pantheism, like every other error, has underlying it a substratum of truth. The truth in this instance is—that God and men are of a homogeneous nature, that we are in a high and ennobling sense partakers of the Divine Life. This truth St. Paul recognises and extricates from its encrustation of error and converts into monotheistic purposes. “We are also His offspring.”

God is the Maker of Nature, but He is the Father of Man. He is the Creator of the brute, but He is the Begetter of Spirits. To me it appears scriptural to allege that souls are not only made but begotten of God. “He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” God seems to have communicated to him a portion, so to speak, of His own mysterious life. “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness.” The white man carries about him God’s image in ivory; and the coloured man, as one has beautifully said, His image in ebony, but none the less an image for that. “We also are His offspring.” Thus the Bible traces back the human race to its fountain head in the Divine Nature. How striking the genealogy in Luke iii.: the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of Noah, the SON OF GOD. Our ancestry has its root in Godhead. Adam is not our first nor our best parent, but God. “God’s Kingdom is a figure, His Fatherhood the profoundest reality. He may be justly compared to a King, but He is a Father.” “We are also His offspring.”

From this homogeneity of nature between man and God the Apostle makes a practical inference. "Forasmuch then as we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone." Athens abounded in idols, but none of them properly represented God. Not only they did not represent Him adequately and fully, but they did not represent Him at all, homogeneity of nature being entirely wanting. The Divine likeness cannot be stamped on gross matter, it must have intelligence for its canvas. Now man possesses intelligence; he is therefore more like God than any statue his hands can chisel. Consequently man's fault has always been in looking for the living among the dead, in seeking God among material objects, believing Him to be like the first king of Israel, "hid among the stuff." But inasmuch as we are partakers of His nature, it cannot be that "He is far from any one of us."

He is not far as to place. There is a sense in which the sun may be said to be over ninety millions of miles distant; and there is a sense, equally and legitimately true, in which it may be said to be nearer us than any other created object, celestial or terrestrial. Its beams pierce our frame, its light enters the eye, its warmth pervades the body. "In it we live and move and have our being." In like manner God may be affirmed to be infinitely removed from us in the solitudes of His own eternity; but there is a sense in which He may be affirmed to be nearer every one of us than any other

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being can possibly be. As no two atoms of matter, scientifically speaking, precisely touch each other; so no two created spirits can be declared to come into actual contact. But the Infinite Spirit permeates the finite; He interpenetrates both body and soul; He completely saturates our very fibre. "He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being."

But the principal thought in the Apostle's mind was that "He is not far from every one of us" as to His nature. His spirituality and not His omnipresence is the leading idea. As already stated, man and God are very much alike. We are apt to suppose that God resembles everything more than ourselves. We liken Him to "gold, silver, and stone," "to birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Man goes a circuitous and interminable way to arrive at Him; but the context shows there is a shorter way. Which way is that? Does it lead round about the stars? No; it goes straight through our own nature. In our own spirituality can we best understand the nature of the Deity. More God is hid in me than in all the systems of astronomy put together. "Inasmuch as we are His offspring, we ought not to think Him like gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device."

"Art": this is the only direct mention made in the Bible of Art. What attitude does the Apostolic exponent of Christianity assume towards it? Some have answered that St. Paul here sets his face sternly

against it. When he surveyed the city and viewed the images, instead of being pleased, the historian distinctly states "his spirit was stirred—roused—painfully shocked within him." He fell into a paroxysm of grief. Lucian, the poet, visiting Athens, declares he was filled with delight and wonder; Paul, the Apostle, visiting the same city, was filled with sorrow and indignation. Why? Did not Paul discern the æsthetic taste everywhere displayed? Did he behold nothing to admire in the immortal works of Pericles and Phidias? Doubtless he did; though, perhaps, from his severe Hebrew training he was not so sensible as a born Greek of their beauty and grandeur. The artistic faculty is constitutionally weak in the Hebrew race. But in consonance with the genius of his nation, Paul intuitively seized the moral element, and found it so degrading to man and dishonouring to God that it neutralised all the æsthetic properties which Athenian art might have possessed. In all human works, artistic or otherwise, the ethical element of necessity predominates; and they must ultimately stand or fall by the moral standard. However exquisite the workmanship, however curious the device, however costly the material, if art tend to go between man and God, it must be ruthlessly condemned. This then is the principle upon which Paul proceeded in pronouncing his inexorable censure on Greek art, that in spite of the æsthetic taste and manual dexterity evinced, it was deficient in spiritual truth—the truth which leads man into

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communion with his Maker. Nay; not only it was deficient in spiritual truth, but it was a spiritual lie—a colossal, gigantic falsehood—a gross perversion of the truth respecting the spirituality of the Divine Nature; therefore, an insurmountable barrier on the way of human communion with the Father of Spirits. Genius is an immeasurable good; the perversion of genius an immeasurable evil. Christianity, therefore, is not opposed to art—it is favourable to pious art; it is only opposed to unspiritual, irreligious art—to that art which leads the spirit astray from God. Greek art, it is averred, was true to human nature. Perhaps; but it was false to the Divine Nature—it converted the truth of God into a lie. Therefore it deserved and received Apostolic condemnation. The statue of Athene in the temple on the Acropolis, within sight of the Apostle's eye, moulded by the hand of Phidias, has never been surpassed as a work of art. But when a work of art is exalted to be an object of worship, it must no longer be judged by the canons of art but by the canons of religion. Art as art is good; it is not good as worship. A statue as a statue is good; it is not good as a God. No amount of genius or artistic skill can condone for the spiritual degradation of our idea of God; for degrade our idea of God, and you tarnish the whole universe.

4. Having shown that God is the Creator, Ruler, and Father of man, the Apostle is prepared to present Him to his wondering audience as our

Redeemer also. From the Fatherhood to the Redeemership the stride is not so very great. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth every man everywhere to repent." Winked at—overlooked. That is, God did not by promise or threat directly interfere in the history of the Gentile nations. The words, of course, do not signify that He entirely disregarded the heathen world. That would be a flat contradiction of the affirmation contained in the preceding verses that "He determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." Put the two verses together and they mean this—that, whereas God often interposed in their geographical and political history, He left them to work out their religious problems for themselves. Their times of ignorance He overlooked; but those times have now come to an end, and God inaugurates a new dispensation. He begins to interfere in the religious history of the Gentiles as He had before done in the religious history of the Jews. Henceforward He will actively mingle in the history of the whole world. "He now commandeth every man everywhere to repent." The "*now*" is significant of a change of policy on the part of the Supreme Ruler. Men had long sought God; but now God seeks men. The history of the world antecedent to the Incarnation may be summed up in one sentence—man seeking God. The history of the world subsequent to the Incarnation may be summed up in another sentence—God seeking

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man. "He now commandeth every man everywhere to repent."

This injunction was doubtless followed up by a promise of forgiveness "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This is not expressly stated in the abridged report transmitted to us; but we have sufficient ground for believing it. Dionysius, one of the judges, and Damaris, were converted to Christianity by this eloquent harangue; and it is specially noted that in his disputations in the market-place he was a "setter forth of strange gods." The Greeks recognised two classes of gods—gods by nature (*theoi*) and deified men (*daimonia*). The last is the word adopted in the narrative. He preached unto them Deified Men—Jesus being one, and the Resurrection being in their mistaken view the other. He preached unto them Jesus, the man who was very God. And if Jesus formed His theme in the market-place, is it likely he would omit Him on Mars' Hill? "He now commandeth every man everywhere to repent."

It is not a matter of no consequence whether you embrace Christianity or not. "He commandeth you." The Gospel comes to you with all the authority of law. You have broken other commandments, will you persist in breaking this also? Disobedience to this, in other words, unbelief, will unspeakably aggravate the sins of the whole life. "He commandeth you to repent." Paul's hearers had been all their lifetime endeavouring to atone for sin; now, however, they are bidden not to atone

but to repent. "Every man everywhere." The Gospel embraces every human being. None are too high to need repentance; none are too low to have it. "Every man everywhere." Christianity finds its fitting type in the "New Jerusalem that descended out of heaven from God." "The city had twelve gates; and it lay foursquare, and the length was as large as the breadth, and on each side there were three gates; on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates." It signifies not where you live, the front of the city is ever towards you, and three gates are always open for you to enter to enjoy its privileges. North, south, east, or west, the city always confronts you. "Every man everywhere."

5. The last relation God sustains to man is that of *Judge*. "For He hath appointed a day in the which He will Judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained." Paul was now standing on the site of the most venerable court in the whole world—the celebrated court of Areopagus. It is just possible, though not probable, that he was now being himself tried before the Athenian magistrates. At all events, this Hill was associated in the public mind with the most famous trials of antiquity. Here Mars was tried, according to the legend, for his crimes and immoralities, before a bench of magisterial gods, and therefore the Hill was called after his name. Here Orestes was tried for the murder of his mother, a crime afterwards

popularised and immortalised in one of the most famous of Athenian tragedies. Here Socrates was unjustly condemned to drink the cup of hemlock for his honest and manful opposition to the idolatry, the debauchery, and the frivolity of the city. What therefore more natural than that Paul should wind up his oration by a solemn reference to the time when the whole world must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that—." Yes, there is an awful Hereafter, notwithstanding the creed of Epicureans. "And after that—the Judgment." Ask the effeminate voluptuous pleasure-seekers, the Epicureans of every age and clime, What is death? And they answer, A full stop to life. No, says Paul in Areopagus, it is only a colon, perhaps only a comma; the sentence must be continued to the other world. We must all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ; hence the necessity to repent forthwith of our sins. Oh the infatuation, oh the madness of those who, having been solemnly warned to prepare to meet their God in judgment, spend their day of grace in reckless indifference, saying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

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