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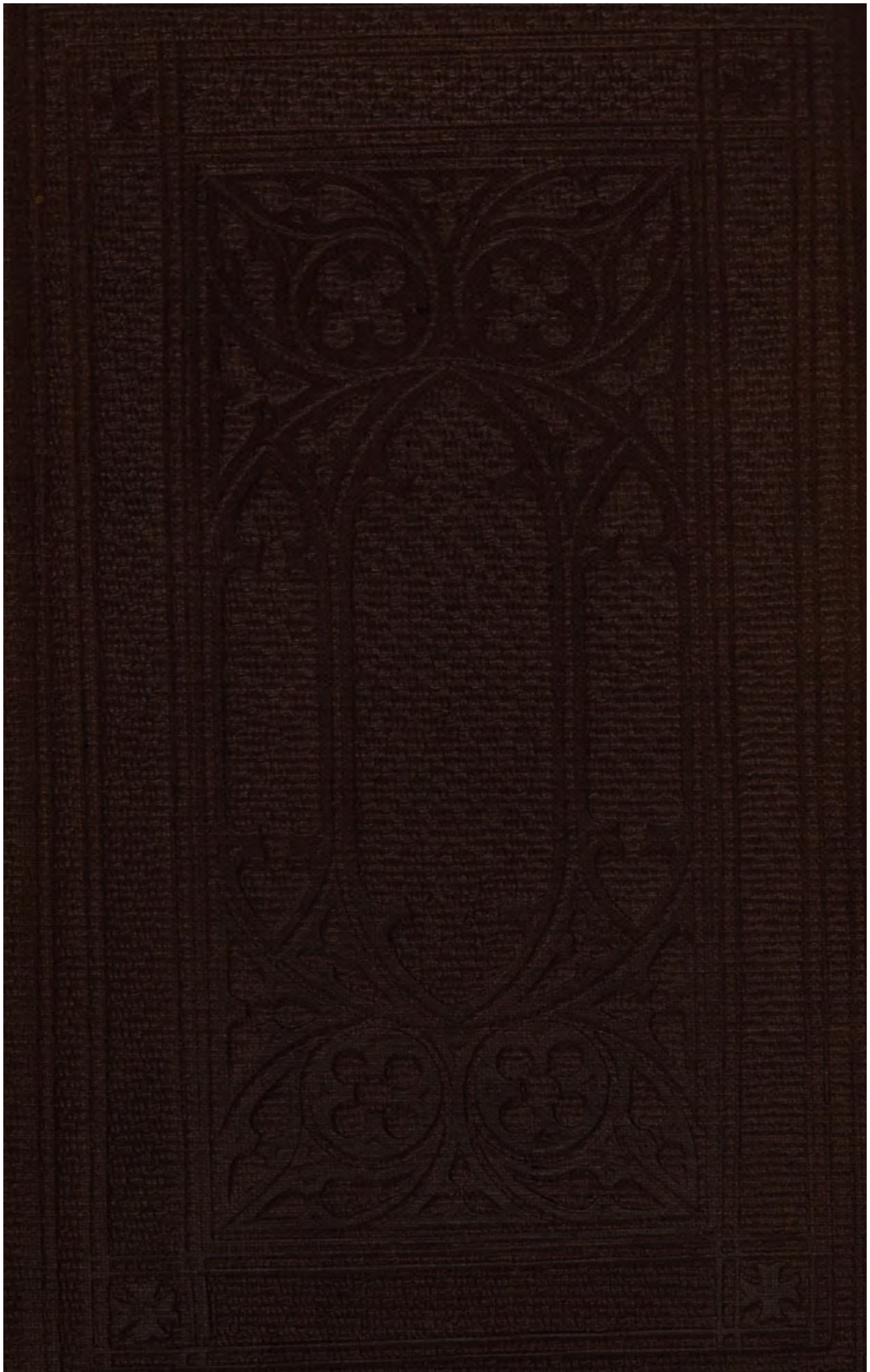
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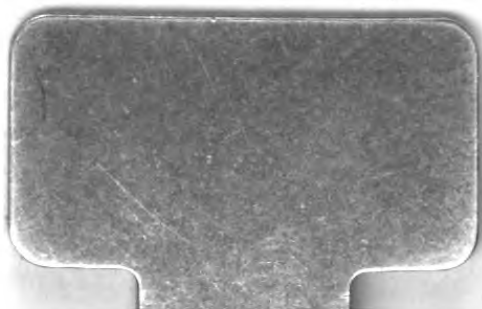
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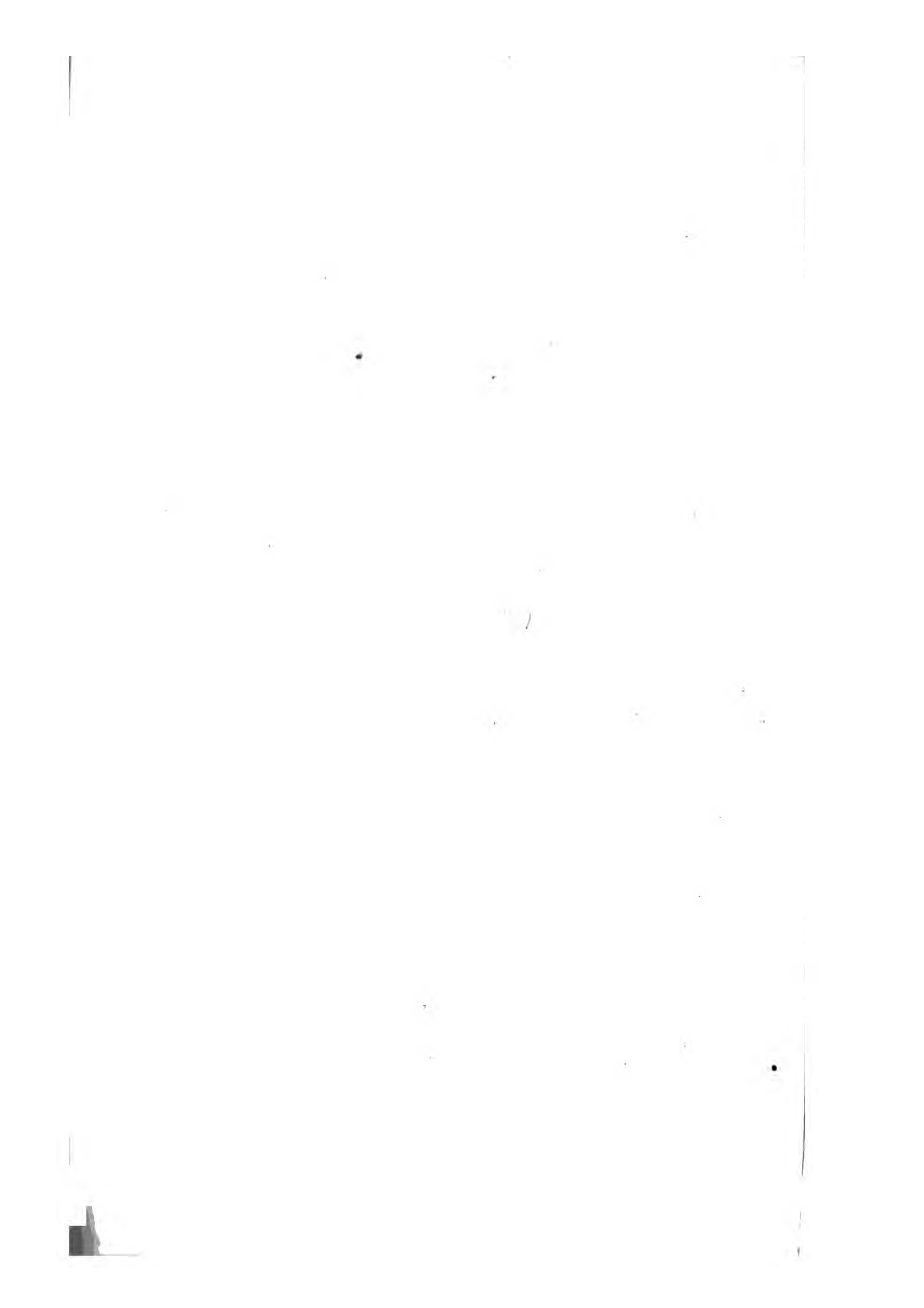


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# SERMONS

ON THE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY

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## PREFACE.

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IT is at least remarkable, that the Author of these Sermons should, on the last occasion on which he preached in his pulpit, have uttered the following sentence: "Very near our rest may be, (oh how quickly sometimes do some who have been actively, piously, and charitably mixed up with the details of common life, both small and great, pass from this world of care, and toil, and strife, to the home they have looked and longed for since they began to serve the Lord,) but distant we know it cannot be."

For it was even so with himself. There was no failure of energy; no symptom of decaying power; the earnest and kindling manner, the animated and stirring voice, the burst of generous enthusiasm, all these were at their



height when he was called away. As we read these sermons the man himself is before us. Never was a style more suggestive of him who wrote it; never were periods set down more completely recalling the well-known voice and manner. No hearer of his could deliver these sentences except as *he* delivered them; no one, hearing them so delivered, could fail to recognize the Teacher, now alas for ever withdrawn from us.

Let us think what that teaching was, that we may not only be calling up the memory of a beloved friend, but adding zest, and if it may be edification, to our own perusal of this volume, and also to its perusal by others, who knew him not.

His teaching was, if ever any teaching was, THOROUGH, and EARNEST. There could be no mistaking what he meant by what he said. Straight to the point; from the heart to the heart; from the mind of the speaker direct to the mind of the hearer: this was its character, and this, among other things, made it especially delightful to sit and hear him. You were in clear, healthy air. There never need be a suspicion of weakness concealed, of rhetoric doing duty for logic, of a dust of words raised

to divert your attention from a conscious failure in argument. You faced a man who faced his conscience and his God. You felt ennobled by it. You felt that it was good for you to be there; and even if you could not think all he thought, or feel with him in every thing, you had learned *how* to deal with the great verities of life, and went home the better for the atmosphere of heartiness and genuineness which you had breathed.

But much more might be said on this head. How grand were those outbursts of impassioned eloquence, which, coming twice or thrice in a sermon, revealed the inner life of the man; his contempt for the world's estimates, and for party names and phrases: his fervid admiration for whatsoever is just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report. Let one who is more deeply indebted to him than words can ever express, record how he owes to these the stirring of thoughts, the awakened glow of blessed feelings, hitherto dormant, but since then alive and active, in his own being. Let him thankfully acknowledge how, not by the force of conscious imitation, but by that of spontaneous sympathy, his own sermons caught from those of his beloved friend a life and

a freshness of feeling which they had not before—how the infection of his earnestness and heartiness passed into one who had less of his own, and taught one, whose vocation was the teaching of others.

The Sermons in this volume are not without noble specimens of these fervid outbreaks. Such are the description of the hidden workers, pp. 25—29: that of the end of one of God's saints, pp. 46—48: the paragraphs, pp. 80, 81; pp. 104—107; pp. 221—223; pp. 239—244: and many others which will kindle and delight the reader as he passes on.

His teaching was also eminently bold and uncompromising. The world's favourites gained no favour with him; nay, sometimes it would almost seem as if he were naturally too disposed to run down that which men in general praised. But this was never done without reasons, founded in the clearness of conscience, and union of heart and life, in which he himself lived. He was perhaps least of all tolerant to two of the world's faults; its adulatory worship of worthless men and things, and its general dereliction of duty for the sake of pleasure. Many instances of his strong protests against both these will be found in this volume. Nor

will it be readily forgotten among his hearers, how unflinching he was in his invective against the unworthy apportionment, by the wealthy, of the world's share and God's share, in the bestowal of their property. None who knew him could have expected less than this from him, ministering as he did in a part of London where wealth and luxury abounded; yet he was sometimes too plain-spoken for his hearers: and some were found, who stigmatized his earnest remonstrance as *scolding*, and even left his ministry in quest of others who would speak to them smoother things. As regarded the practical duty thus enforced by him, his own conduct was exemplary indeed. His bestowals, whether upon public or private charities, were truly noble and generous: and none whom this part of his preaching did not please could say that he failed to practise that which he so plainly enforced.

On topics of the day connected with the hopes, fears, and duties of the individual Christian and of the Church, his voice was ever heard among the foremost; his trumpet never gave an uncertain sound. Numerous examples of this will occur to those who heard his sermons, or are familiar with his printed

volumes. The most affecting of any, in connexion with his own end, little then suspected to be near, was on the occasion of the mournful bereavement of our Queen and nation at the beginning of the present year. Of all the sermons given to the public on that sad subject, his was, I believe, generally confessed to stand first, as the worthiest tribute to him who had passed away, and the most effectual exhortation to the duties incumbent on us in consequence of his loss.

And this naturally leads me on to say, that earnestness and boldness were not the only characteristics of his teaching. There ran through it all a vein of exquisite pathos and tenderness. The same voice which kindled into invective at the mention of the pleasure-seeker, or the world's heroes, softened into almost feminine gentleness in the description of deeds of pure affection, and self-denying love; and in touching the condition of the bereaved, or the dejected. Instances of this will be found more abundant in his volume of sermons on Old Testament characters, where the family lives of the patriarchs were frequently dwelt upon:—and in such occasional memorials as that mentioned above.

If I were required to speak of the doctrinal character of his teaching, I should say that it consisted rather in taking for granted, than in setting forth, the distinctive elements of our Christian faith. These were always present, though not always apparent on the surface. It would be no difficult task to extract from his sermons plain statements of them all in order: but these would be taken, not so much from the main lines of his arguments, as from incidental and secondary thoughts. It was very rare to hear him preach what is called a *doctrinal sermon*. His cast of mind was intensely practical: not so much given to the pure science of theology, as to its mixed application to the affections and the habits of life.

The same tendency seems also to have kept him from ever dealing much with exegetical preaching. Practical expositions indeed we have from him in rich abundance, in this and his other volumes: but expositions, purely as such, workings into and layings forth of the context of Scripture for Scripture's sake, I never knew him deliver.

Such, I think, in the main, was the teaching of him whom we loved, and for whom we can never cease to thank God who gave him to

the Church. Hearty, fervid, uncompromising : tender and attractive, when once the decision of manner became familiar : grounded on the great verities of the Catholic faith, and gathering all its power from them.

If we must feel in his case, as in each of our own, that all men cannot do all things, we must also feel that what he has done, he has done nobly : and we can hardly fail to acknowledge, as we read this and his other volumes, that in this particular branch of the pastoral work, we have lost in the living voice,—but we have retained in the printed record,—one of the greatest of the preachers of our time.

H. A.

Deanery, Canterbury,

*Nov. 7, 1862.*

# CONTENTS.

---

## SERMON I.

### THE FORTY DAYS.

ACTS i. 3.

	PAGE
“ Being seen of them forty days ” . . . . .	1

*(Between Easter and Ascension Day.)*

## ✦ SERMON II.

### HIDDEN WORKERS.

ACTS i. 8.

“ Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ” . . . . .	19
--	----

*(St. Simon and St. Jude.)*



## SERMON III.

## WEALTH IN POVERTY.

ACTS iii. 6.

PAGE

“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” . . . . . 36

(*St. Peter's Day.*)

## SERMON IV.

## EARLY FAITH AND EARLY LOVE.

ACTS iv. 33.

“With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” . . . . . 55

(*Trinity Sunday.*)

## SERMON V.

## THE HYPOCRITE'S DOOM.

ACTS v. 1, 2.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the Apostles' feet” . . . . . 75

(*January 19, 1862.*)

## SERMON VI.

## THE FIRST MARTYR.

ACTS vii. 55, 56.

	PAGE
“ But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God ” .	92

*(St. Stephen's Day.)*

## SERMON VII.

## THE CHRISTIAN ELOQUENT IN DEATH.

ACTS vii. 59 ; viii. 1.

“ And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit . . . . And Saul was consenting unto his death ” . . . .	109
---	-----

*(St. Stephen's Day.)*

## SERMON VIII.

## THE GENTILE CONVERT.

ACTS viii. 35—38.

“ 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

	PAGE
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” . . .	124

## SERMON IX.

### CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS ix. 1, 2, and ver. 6.

- “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”
- “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” . . . . . 142

*(January 26, 1862.)*

## SERMON X.

### THE PRAYERFUL CONVERT.

ACTS ix. 10—16.

- “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus,

	PAGE
<p>named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand upon him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and how he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon Thy name. 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; for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" . . . . .</p>	163

*(Conversion of St. Paul.)*

## SERMON XI.

THE INGATHERING OF THE GENTILES.

ACTS x. 15—17.

“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what the vision which he had seen should mean, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate" . . . . . 181

## SERMON XII.

A WORLD-EMBRACING FAITH.

ACTS xi. 18.

PAGE

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” 200

(*December 11, 1859.*)

## SERMON XIII.

ST. PETER IN PRISON.

ACTS xii. 5.

“Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him” . . . . . 217

(*St. Peter's Day.*)

## SERMON XIV.

“THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION.”

ACTS xiv. 21, 22.

“And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting

	PAGE
them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” . . . . .	234

(*July*, 1861.)

## SERMON XV.

ST. PAUL AT ATHENS.

ACTS xvii. 16, 17.

“ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him” . . . . . 250

## SERMON XVI.

ST. PAUL AND THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS.

ACTS xx. 32—35.

“ And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so

PAGE

labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” . 268

(*April 23, 1854.*)

## SERMON XVII.

ST. PAUL BEFORE THE JUDGMENT-SEAT.

ACTS xxiv. 14—16.

“ This I confess unto thee that, after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men ” . . . . . 286

## SERMON XVIII.

FAITH'S ANSWER TO THE WORLD.

ACTS xxvi. 24.

“ And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness ” . . . . . 306

(*December 29, 1861.*)

## SERMON XIX.

TRIAL AND SERVICE.

ACTS xxvii. 21—25.

PAGE

“But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me” . . . . . 322

(*December 30, 1855.*)

## SERMON XX.

ST. PAUL AT ROME.

ACTS xxviii. part of v. 14.

“And so we went toward Rome” . . . . . 339

(*May 2, 1858.*)





# SERMON I.

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## THE FORTY DAYS.

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ACTS i. 3.

“ Being seen of them forty days.”

*(Between Easter and Ascension Day.)*

THE interval here spoken of between our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension is one which we may dwell upon with some advantage. It was not for nothing that He stayed so long away from His home after His great work was accomplished; and it will be very appropriate to the season if we touch briefly upon the events of that period and shew how kindly all was ordered for the comfort and guidance of the Apostles in their future course. There was no necessity, of course, for the risen Saviour to commune so often with His friends; the morrow of the day on which He left the grave might have been chosen for the day of His final parting, and almost before they had recovered from the first wonder

of seeing Him alive again after His Crucifixion they might have stood upon Mount Olivet, and watched Him with straining eyes till a cloud received Him out of their sight. But again and again He came to them ; not once only but many times over He taught them more perfectly the things concerning Himself ; and weeks went by before the time came when all was ready for His departure.

Already our Easter day is passed and the time for commemorating our Lord's Ascension is nearly come. Instead, therefore, of taking a common subject in hand to-night, we have chosen this of the "forty days" during which our Lord was seen of His disciples, being well assured that it is one which will prove instructive if we listen to it with humble and teachable minds.

I. Mark, then, first of all, how careful our Saviour was to have the fact of His Resurrection certified to His disciples beyond the possibility of doubt. Strictly speaking, one meeting was enough. Had He appeared to Mary Magdalene only on the morning of His Resurrection, and then been seen no more, the eleven would have been bound to receive her testimony even as we receive theirs. But proofs were multiplied, as His visits were repeated. They grew familiar with His look and aspect ; heard

Him talk as they had been wont to do, and laid up His words, from time to time, among memory's choicest treasures ; and after all this, they could never suppose that they had been deceived, or that a vision had been imposed upon them for a reality. The positiveness with which they always spoke on this subject was an important element in their preaching, and it was their Lord's purpose, while He was with them, to build them up in a confidence which should never be shaken. So we read of at least *five* public appearances besides some interviews of a more private nature, as with Mary Magdalene, the repentant Peter, and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus ; the *first* to all the Apostles but Thomas, and to some of their friends, on the evening of His resurrection-day ; the *second* to the eleven, including Thomas, a week later ; the *third*, recorded by St. John, at the sea of Tiberias ; a *fourth*, not noticed by the Evangelists, but referred to by St. Paul, when five hundred disciples were present ; and the *fifth*, when the favoured company of selecter friends, as it seems, received His parting benediction, and witnessed the first stage, at least, of His journey heavenward. There may have been as many more, but we are sure of these, at least ; and in the course of them the purpose we speak of would be fully answered. The minds of the Apostles had grown familiar

with this new wonder ; the commonest of their Lord's miracles would seem no more certain to them now than the last and greatest of them ; the precious lessons of that season, partly explaining what had puzzled them hitherto, and partly preparing them for the great enterprise which was yet before them, would mingle with all their thoughts and plans ; and as they were chosen to be " witnesses of the resurrection," first to see it, and then proclaim it for the world's conversion, they were well prepared for future service by Him who doeth all things well, who chooseth His instruments at pleasure, and shapes them to His own purposes with unfailing wisdom. Certainly never did men declare so great a truth with such unhesitating boldness, yet with such perfect simplicity ; never did men stake so much upon their testimony, yet speak with so much of calmness and self-mastery. Through the " forty days " to which our text refers the work of education was going on ; and the fruits were seen in the forty *years* which followed.

II. Mark, however, that this period was not one of uninterrupted intercourse, but of brief meetings, followed sometimes by *days*, or possibly *weeks*, of separation. Very graciously the Lord condescended to His friends, as He had ever done ; very blessed were these seasons when they came, warming their hearts, clearing

their sight, elevating their faith; but still there was not the companionship of former days, no dwelling beneath the same roof or sitting at the same board, no labours or journeys undertaken in concert, nothing now of that privileged human intimacy which friend enjoys with friend, and brother with brother. The grave was passed, the work of atonement finished, the great design brought to its consummation for which the Son of God had humbled Himself to man's estate; and now He, who was born of a woman and made under the law, stood forth in His proper character as the Divine Mediator, to whom all power was committed in heaven and earth. The Apostles had to learn this truth, and act upon it. Their approaches to the Mercy-seat, while it was permitted them to speak freely and ask boldly, were to be marked with that solemn reverence without which all worship is a mockery. "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name," was our Lord's saying; and they are words which mark the *first era* of the Apostolic history. He had been the Teacher, the Guide, the Pattern, the Friend,—the patient Teacher, the unfailing Guide, the perfect Pattern, the heavenly Friend; but no more. Henceforth they were to ask *every thing* in His name. From the day of His Ascension onward through the second era of their being, till they were

gathered, one by one, to their great reward, He was their Advocate with their Father, and through the channel of His intercession every prayer went up, and every blessing came down. These forty days separated the two eras. From the one they were passing to the other ; and to us there seems a divine wisdom in the training which was appointed for them. They saw *enough* of their Lord, and not *too much* ; enough to prove to them that He was the same compassionate and sympathizing Master, yet not so much as to bring down their loftier feelings, or make their future devotions unduly free. "Touch me not," He had said to Mary Magdalene on the morning of His Resurrection when she, probably, would have embraced His feet ; and so His dealings with the eleven at that period seem to say, "Come not too near me now ; my love cannot fail you ; blessings you shall have without end when I sit upon my kingly throne ; ye are still my friends, and must ever be,—more than ever, when ye shall peril all things for My name's sake, and stand alone against the world that you may leaven it with my word and doctrine ; but remember as I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world, so now I leave the world and go to the Father. You must not hope to keep company with me as you have done. I will not break away too suddenly, nor

leave you in your solitude till I have given you food for grave and solemn meditation in coming months; but you must be ready to let me go, and to receive in my place the Comforter who will teach you more fully what you need to know. He will shew how all our meetings and partings have been for your gain, and for the Divine Glory."

On these terms, with views and purposes like these, we suppose, our Lord was seen of His disciples during those "forty days;" and surely all was well and wisely done. Surely the day of Pentecost, and all that followed it, was the proper sequel of this time of measured intercourse. Surely the men who loved their Lord so well, who spake of Him with such adoring reverence, who witnessed so manfully of His death and passion, and yet told the world to prepare for His future coming in the clouds of heaven; who could recall the thrilling words and scenes of the last night before His Crucifixion, and along with them all that He had said most grandly of His power and kingdom; who talked historically at one time of "Jesus of Nazareth, the Man approved of God by miracles, and signs, and wonders," and prophetically at another of the great Almighty Judge before Whom heaven and earth should flee away; surely these men, to whom such a charge was committed, and who did their part



so well, proved that they had been well schooled while their Lord was with them, and retained the savour of His heavenly discourse through all their future years? God be praised for all that they said so wisely, and did so bravely! May we feed upon their doctrine, as the life of our souls, and find the promise true which was spoken to them, but reaches beyond their company to the whole family of God's children in every age; "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

III. Once more;—time was given in the course of these forty days to teach the Apostles much of their Lord's will, and to send them forth well equipped for their future work.

Thus we find particular directions given from time to time. They were to tarry at Jerusalem for the present, where danger seemed to be most imminent, where their enemies mustered strongest, where, judging from past experience, they would sow their seed as upon a rock, and peril their lives for nought. They were to begin their preaching there, where their Lord had finished His, to tell His crucifiers that He was the Lord of glory, to proclaim, hard by the blood-stained spot, on which He had poured forth His soul unto death, that

“no other name was given among men whereby they might be saved.” From that centre light was to radiate, not only through Judæa, and the surrounding countries, but East, West, North, and South, over the wide surface of this fallen world. Special gifts, moreover, were promised to them for their work; gifts of healing like those which their Lord dispensed so freely; “power from on high,” when the Spirit should come upon them, and clear their sight, and unloose their tongues. Mistakes and prejudices, too, were corrected; for still the Jewish feeling, we find, was strong within them, and the hope was not dead that the Son of David would ascend His Father’s throne, and restore the kingdom to Israel of which Gentile oppressors had despoiled her. Above all, the great truth was enforced, explained and illustrated, that their Lord’s death was the world’s life; and they, to whom His cross had been a stumbling-block once, gloried in it henceforth, as soldiers will wear the trophy which recalls their captain’s most illustrious triumph. He spake to them, as the verse from which our text is taken informs us, “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,” and the largeness of the phrase leaves us free to conceive of very varied discourses, communicating an ample store of most precious knowledge, and giving them skill to expound

the mysteries of godliness immensely beyond all their previous attainments. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets," moreover, we learn respecting one particular conversation, "He expounded unto" some of "them in all the Scriptures concerning Himself," taking for His text the significant and far-reaching question, "Ought not Christ to have suffered first, and then to enter into His glory?"

A flood of light, therefore, was poured upon them in that blessed interval between the time when they met in their upper room, and thought the Hope of Israel was perished, and that other time when they met there again, and filled up their ranks, with high resolves, and glorious hopes, for the world's conversion. The "forty days" were fruitful in blessings to themselves, and produced a rich harvest for mankind. Not all at once they grew up to be what the world saw them in later days; but many difficulties were explained; much of ignorance was removed; their understandings were cleared and strengthened; the mysteries of Providence seemed to them no longer as a hopeless riddle. The soil was prepared, and the seed was sown; then came the Pentecostal shower, and the green blade shot up, and grew to the full ripe ear. Truths but imperfectly apprehended before, or half obscured by some prevailing error, shone out clearly to all of

them at once, and the world's teachers stood up a spectacle to men and angels, fully equipped for their work, speaking with a power which the learned could not gainsay, and winning moral triumphs such as the world never saw either before or since.

I think that we have gone over no unsafe or uncertain ground in dealing as we have done with this portion of the Gospel narrative. It is one which is too little adverted to by many. The scattered incidents are often dwelt upon. We all listen with interest to the memorable conversation with Thomas, and marvel at the patience which bore with his perverseness, and convinced him by his own test. The thrice-repeated question to St. Peter clings to our memories, and we feel, looking back on his noble career from the day of his denial to the day of his martyrdom, how his words were verified, and his appeal proved to be no empty boast, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love Thee." But we forget too much what was doing through those eventful weeks to strengthen the men who were to be pillars in the Church; and it is well for us to be reminded that precious lessons were being learnt, and a great preparatory work was going on, while our Lord lingered, as it were, on the threshold of His Heavenly home, and turned

back with one message after another, for those whom He left as His witnesses behind Him.

It is well, too, that, for our own guidance and improvement, we should notice the lesson of patience which is taught by this portion of our Lord's history. Think what was before Him, and how contentedly He waited for it. No hasting to His crown till all was ready, no anticipation by a single moment of the day of Jubilee, no eagerness, even now that His suffering work was accomplished, to ascend where He was before, and to display His trophies before the Hosts of Heaven! We may well suppose that there was eagerness on their part. Their harps were ready strung, and the song was on their lips, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." But even yet their King has work to do in this lower world; and the march of triumph must be deferred. His own blissful meeting with His Father, the rapture in store for millions of happy and holy spirits when the tidings shall be carried back by the Conqueror Himself, that hell is spoiled, and the way to the Holiest laid open for all the sons of Adam; the vision of earth and heaven from His lofty throne, now that earth looks fairer than it has done since the fall, and heaven is to be fast peopled with ransomed sinners whom His arm

set free; all this is waited for till the hour shall come that is fore-appointed of the Father, and weeks are not thought to be ill spent if some good may come of them to the Church, and to the world.

Let us learn our lesson, my brethren, from this portion of our Lord's history as from every other. Let us not only put up with our many crosses, but wait patiently for the good things that are yet in store for us. What we sow in faith we shall reap one day; and let us be quite sure that God's harvest-time is the best, whenever it shall come. We long to see our own schemes prosper when we think that they tend to the world's good, and our Master's glory. We long to see the Church advancing faster in her march of triumph, and sowing the incorruptible seed in countries which have been polluted and covered with idolatry. We long to see Christ's name more honoured among ourselves, His servants more diligent in their calling, His Gospel moulding the mind and heart of the nation, so that England may be like a garden of the Lord, planted with trees of righteousness from end to end. We pray, many times hopefully, and many times in sorrow and sadness, "Lord, let Thy kingdom come apace, and let every opposing power of earth and hell be crushed beneath Thine arm of might." Let us not wish less fervently,

but let us wait more humbly. Let us feel that if God lets us work for Him in any field, the honour and the gain are ours; and if we see not the fruit of our toil, if others shall reap what we have sown, we must neither wonder nor repine.

The end is not yet. Centuries rolled away before the Son of God was manifested, and many more may come and go before He shall come back again in glory. After all was finished on the cross He still waited for His crown. Through "forty days" He came and went among His friends. While angel-bands were ready to salute Him, He was at Jerusalem, or Emmaus, or by the sea of Tiberias, or blessing the disciples on Mount Olivet. Now from His throne He marshals His followers, and gives them success at one time, and tries them with failures at another. But all is ordered well and wisely. The promises are sure, and cannot fail. Much is doing that we see not, to bring in the reign of universal righteousness. Ten thousand unconscious agents in different lands are doing His work, and fulfilling His pleasure. Let *us* do knowingly and wittingly what *they* do in ignorance and thoughtlessness, and let us hope and pray for better times, while we bear with all that is evil in our own. Let us try to fill up our little span of life with works of piety and charity,

and leave the future with Him who knows the end from the beginning, with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

*That* is the lesson which we learn from our Saviour's own tarrying about the world which He came to save. But let us learn that other lesson, too, which He taught His disciples while He tarried. They knew Him well before, we have said, as the *human Friend*; they made acquaintance with Him, now, as the *Divine Redeemer*. My dear brethren, in both characters may we know the Son of God! In both characters may we think of Him as ascended to His throne! In both characters may we realize His presence with ourselves! *Our* preaching is vain, and *your* hearing is vain, remember, unless we be brought thus far. You must not so degrade the Saviour as to think of Him *only* as the world's great Prophet, or even as the perfect Pattern which men wanted long, and never found, to shew them what living goodness was. You must not, in your attempts to exalt Him, or in your forgetfulness of the specific office which He sustains by the Father's appointment and His own choice, lose sight of the blessed truth that He carried His human nature with Him to heaven, and wears it, as His robe of glory, in the heavenly temple.



“Such an High Priest became us,” perfect in holiness, Almighty to save, yet “touched with the feeling of infirmities,” because He lived where we live, wept tears like our own, met the Tempter in the world which he deemed his own, and died like a common man, though He were the Prince of Life. “Such a High Priest became us,” I say; such a High Priest liveth for us at the Father’s right hand; such a High Priest pleads *for* every mortal man, and pleads *with* every mortal man, longing to “see of the travail of His soul,” and to bring fresh sons and daughters to glory.

But then the question comes as to our part in this great salvation,—our own hold upon the promises, our own personal faith in the ascended Saviour. How beat our hearts towards Him? What is the strain of our confessions and our prayers? What do we know practically of “the mind that was in Christ?” What distinct apprehension have we of the *Christian* life, as distinct from the sobriety which satisfies our consciences, and the decorum which satisfies easy-judging neighbours? “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life,” is a plain text made up of plain words, but a text of deep and far-reaching signification. The man to whom the Spirit of God has expounded its meaning, who knows and serves and loves his Lord, who follows Him

to heaven now in heart and hope, and is well assured that his prayers are not a wasted offering, because he puts them daily into the hands of One whom the Father heareth always ; that man will find a better life stirring within him than that which connects him with this doomed world, and will walk, feebly it may be and with many a halting step, but still cheerfully, and resolvedly, towards his Father's house. He will not be the world's drudge. He will not be dazzled with the world's shews. He will not look with the world's eyes on the Great whom it honours often to meanness and sycophancy, not because they are virtuous but because they are prosperous, nor on the poor and weak whom it tramples, often, under its feet, though they be brethren unto angels. Christ's cause will be his cause, Christ's friends his friends ; and by the same rule, because his faith is a reality, and he finds every word of his Lord come true, the name of Christ is his tower of strength, and the grace of Christ sustains him in his daily conflict with evil.

Wherefore let each man ask himself whether the risen Saviour be all this to him. We are not commending any thing that is wild and dreamy. We are not disparaging whatever has a seemly and virtuous look in the ordinary relations of life. We do but say that the true believer lives upon his Saviour, and has heart-

warming communion with his Saviour from day to day; and the fruit is seen in a well-ordered, religious life, higher, purer, nobler, truer than the world's beggarly morality, and the formalist's wretched pretence of godliness. May the Spirit of Truth guide you into all truth, and give you to know Him who is the Son of God and the Son of Man; who has Archangels for His worshippers, yet calls the saints His brethren; whom truly to know, as our Lord and Saviour, our Pattern and Righteousness, is eternal life; who liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore;— who hath all power committed to Him in heaven and earth, waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

## SERMON II.

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### HIDDEN WORKERS.

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Acts i. 8.

“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

*(St. Simon and St. Jude.)*

A HIGH commission, truly! for the speaker is the Lord Himself. St. Luke, taking up his narrative at the point where he had left it at the conclusion of his Gospel, says that our blessed Saviour was taken up “after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen.” To this selected company he informs us, that their risen Master “shewed Himself alive by many infallible proofs,” and on one particular occasion, the very day, as it seems, on which He was parted from them, and “a cloud re-

ceived Him out of their sight," this special charge was given them as to the office which they were henceforth to sustain in the world. The words are very simple; yet how comprehensive and significant! "Ye are witnesses unto Me," or more properly, "Ye are My witnesses, men chosen for this work of testifying unto the world, respecting My person, My work, how I lived, and for what I died." They were to be qualified for this work, moreover. Courage would be given them, and patience, and godly zeal, and wisdom both in speech and action which should be as an armour of defence against captious gainsayers and cruel persecutors; the Holy Ghost was to come upon them, and make unlearned men, with their plain story about Jesus and the Resurrection, more than a match for the world's teachers and masters. Their field, too, was no narrow enclosure like that which had hitherto shut in the children of Abraham, a little strip of territory peopled by a despised race in a remote province of the vast Roman empire, but the empire itself, with its tributary kingdoms, even "unto the uttermost part of the earth," without any limitation, save such as geographical barriers might impose upon them, and the necessary difficulties of foreign travel for men of small resources.

Among the men thus "called to be Apos-

bles," thus "separated unto the Gospel of God," thus sent abroad on a mission of mercy by the Great Head of the Church, who knew what was in all men's hearts, and chose His instruments at pleasure, we find two in St. Luke's list, styled "Simon called Zelotes, and Judas, the brother of James," that is, *not* the son of Zebedee, but the son of Alphæus, who had been named immediately before. For some reason or other the Church has coupled these two men, St. Simon and St. Jude, together, and devoted one day in the Calendar to the commemoration of their names, just as we find St. Philip and St. James coupled together in another portion of the Prayer Book. And now, as I like to follow the Church's guidance in my selection of subjects, let us see what we can find in their history or writings for our day's lesson. Every reader of Scripture knows that they are not prominent characters in any of the Gospels, or in the Acts of the Apostles. Their case is very different from that of St. Peter, or St. John, or St. Paul, about whom many sermons may be written without exhausting the incidents of their story. But we need not pass them by on that account. The least distinguished of that noble company rank above Princes and Emperors in the account of all who receive their doctrine and love their Lord; and we would rather try to extract instruction

from some topics which have relation to them than wander at random over the wide field of Scripture.

Now let us see what can be gleaned respecting the pair we speak of.

In St. Matthew's list and St. Mark's we read not "Simon Zelotes," but "Simon the Canaanite." The very little, the almost nothing, that is told us respecting this Apostle was almost sure to be supplemented by fictions in the early Church; and we find a tradition recorded that "Canaanite" meant an inhabitant of Cana in Galilee, and that Simon the Apostle was the bridegroom who had the Lord for his guest at the wedding-feast. But learned men tell us that the appellative is no local term, only the Hebrew form of "Zelotes," which is Greek,—both probably describing Simon as belonging, before his conversion, to a well-known sect among the Jews.

If we take that interpretation, then it sums up all we know concerning him. No word is recorded that he ever spoke; no deed is recorded that he ever did. Wherever the Apostles are mentioned, doubtless he is included. What is ascribed to the whole multitude belongs to him in common with his better known brethren. He kept company with our Lord, heard our Lord's discourses, saw our Lord's miracles, sat with Him at the Last Sup-

per, fled from Him on the day of Crucifixion, heard the pardoning and reviving words on the day of Resurrection, "Peace be unto you," had his share in the Saviour's parting benediction on Mount Olivet. To him along with the sons of Zebedee, and Simon Peter and Andrew, the words were addressed, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" so, standing within the line of demarcation, he has his share in every word of blessing and promise uttered during the memorable night which began with the washing of the disciples' feet, and ended with the betrayal and capture of their Lord. But specifically, we repeat, nothing is told us respecting this man; his name, and no more, is inscribed on the roll which has this heart-stirring title at the head of it, "Men of whom the world was not worthy."

And is there no moral here? Shall we learn nothing from the silence of the sacred penmen? Doubtless, St. Luke knew much respecting Simon Zelotes, though he never mentions him after the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, in which we learn that all the eleven, he among the rest, met, immediately after our Lord's Ascension, in that upper room at Jerusalem, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brethren, and some faithful women, and there "continued with one accord in prayer



and supplication." His duties were defined, and were precisely the same as St. Peter's and St. John's. He had a place by their side, shared their counsels and their dangers, was obedient to the voice which pursued him, like an ever-present Friend and Counsellor, through all the stages of his longer or shorter pilgrimage, somewhere between Jerusalem and the "uttermost part of the earth," witnessed *of* Christ and *for* Christ, among men of like passions with ourselves; but in what direction he went forth, or how he fared, whether little or much came of his preaching, neither the Holy Book hath told us, nor any other trustworthy record beneath the sun. See then how quietly a man may work for God, and how little of worldly fame may cleave to him, though his place was once in the foremost rank of Christian heroes. See how little pains were taken by those who had drunk in wisdom from the Fountain-head, sitting at the Lord's feet, and hearing His private and public discourses, to blazon forth their own deeds, or the deeds of their best-loved companions. See how in this ill-judging and mis-judging world public worth is often divorced from public fame, and some, who did most for mankind, have no record of their virtues, save that which is in God's keeping.

And this is true, not of Apostolic times merely, but of all times. We know each other

very imperfectly, and our range of vision is a very confined one, and God's work, like the seed-corn, groweth "we know not how." Numbers work usefully out of sight. Their piety leavens households, and the next generation will have cause to bless them, though they will lie under a turf grave, without a name even upon a tombstone. Christian mothers of small gifts plant a few simple lessons in young pliant minds, teach hymns and prayers in lowly cottages which are never forgotten, talk over Scripture points about Joseph first persecuted and then exalted to honour; and Samuel who heard the voice of God in his bed; and David who slew the giant, and was modest as well as brave, not seeking greatness though the shepherd-boy became a king; and Daniel who prayed at the peril of his life; and (best of all) about Him, the Lord of life and glory, who took little children in His arms and blessed them: and these lessons, it may be, half forgotten while the battle of life is being fought, are yet mingled with blessed memories of loving looks and tones, which to the tempted and struggling man recall a vision of Paradise almost, compared with scenes of guilt; and middle life finds him learning afresh the lessons of his childhood, and making his humble home a nursery of piety.

Aye, and humble men and humble women

become Evangelists too. Like the hidden stream whose course is marked by fresher, greener herbage, there are witnesses for Christ, and messengers of good tidings in secluded places, who are eloquent in their way, often mightily persuasive among neighbours whose eyes and ears are open, because they walk humbly with God, and have lips seasoned with grace, and shew the power of Religion in common duties well done. They have an outspoken or silent rebuke for scoffers; they have a word in season for youthful listeners; they make sick rooms brighter by their presence; they can point a dying man to the Lamb of God when worldly relatives do but stand by and weep, marvelling at the mystery of death, but with no comforting message ready out of the Book of Life: and all this, in a world so full of sin and sorrow, is like angels' work, yet done by stealth, done for God, done without any thought of human praise, done to be acknowledged in that day when He, who beautified their lives by the gift of His own Spirit, shall say to ten thousand such,—gathered out of many lands to the common meeting-point of men who abused high trusts, and of those who put out their little gifts to interest,—“Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

My dear brethren, let us be content to be

humble, unnoticed workers, if we may do any thing, any where, any how, for God. Who are we that we should covet fame? Who are we that we should disdain mean services by which our Master shall be honoured, and our brethren helped? They who shall sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel, have some of them a line, and no more, in the book which tells us of the early triumphs of the Gospel. What scenes they may have witnessed! How boldly they may have confronted the powers of this world! What a work they may have done for Christ, the King of Saints, hard by temples of Jupiter, or in the face of mocking Jews, who blasphemed their Master's name! What a noble dying testimony they may have borne to the Lord who bought them, when the sword of persecution was unsheathed, and dogs of Christians, as men called them, were dragged from Roman prisons to make sport amid hungry lions for a Roman populace! Meaner men may be well content without any human record, if their record be on high. Oh, let us be diligent in well-doing where we are, whether it be in high places or among mean companions, whether friends help us in our works of charity, or uncongenial neighbours advise us to let the world alone, and not meddle with its sins and troubles.

We may just say, before we leave this topic,

Remember who were held in honour, see whose names are inscribed on the page of history, while some of the Lord's Apostles have not a single sentence of commendation, not a passing notice from any writer sacred or profane.

Tiberius sat in the palace of the Cæsars; and well nigh the noblest history in the world, certainly one of the most precious records of antiquity, is that which paints Rome and its senators and citizens in that day of gloom; the sullen tyrant, ever with fair words upon his lips, yet cruel, malignant, guarding his throne by hatching accusations against all possible rivals, and making subservient nobles his executioners; swayed by favourites for a time worse even than their master, and then taking revenge for his own blindness by offering a hecatomb of victims, friends and kindred, far and near, along with the one guilty culprit; darkening the capital with his presence through many years, and then, at an age when most men's passions have burnt out, turning a beautiful pleasure-garden into a hell of lust, and bequeathing to it a name of infamy to last while the world lasts. This man had his biography written, his praises sung, his virtues commended by men descended from the old Patricians of the Republic; and Pilate had his day, with courtiers to commend him for crucifying the Man of Nazareth; and Herod,

too, we hear about, who made a vain-glorious speech, and drank in the flattering words like music. "It is the voice of a God, and not of a man." Oh! the last are first often, and the first last. It was so then, it is so now; it will be so while men judge one another by a false standard, and God's eternal rule of right, expounded by the lips and life of Him who was Embodied Truth and Wisdom and Holiness, is not bound upon their consciences.

And what of St. Jude? for *half* the day is his. What record have we of him? A single sentence in the Gospels, yet a precious sentence, contained in our Lord's last discourse, and suggestive of deep thoughts, in the way of self-application, for attentive readers. Thus runs a brief dialogue in St. John's 14th chapter: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," said our Lord, "he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. Judas saith unto Him (not Iscariot), Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

The man did not speak in vain who asked

that question, and got that answer. Let us ponder it, my brethren. Religion is a personal thing, or else a dogma, a ceremony, a dress, a bond of union between men who consent to worship in the same place, and use the same mode of prayer. To be a soul-saving thing, it *must be* personal, something that enters into each man's own soul, giving him right thoughts of God, humble thoughts of himself, grateful thoughts of Christ not only as the world's prophet, but as his own deliverer from death and hell; compassionate thoughts, too, of the world's blindness; painful thoughts of the strange mystery of sin, and the half-revealed secrets of the invisible world, mingled with reverence for the awful holiness and justice of the Supreme Lawgiver; and hopeful anticipations of seeing what now looks like a blotted page in the book of Providence, all legible and clear, yea, bright as the golden sunlight, in some appointed mansion of our Father's House.

St. Paul speaks thus, you remember, of the time of his conversion, "It pleased God to call me by His grace, and to reveal His Son in me;" and we see the fruits of that inner revelation in a life made from that hour a thank-offering to God, and laid out for man's highest benefit, with an intensity of zeal, a steadfastness of purpose, and a magnanimous self-devotion, to which, perhaps, none cast in

the mould of humanity, however beautified after the pattern of their Lord, have since attained. Beware how, because the Apostle of the Gentiles stands alone, or almost alone, in the height of his stature, the measure of his graces, and the fruits of his ministry, you think that another quality of Religion may serve and save you. Christ must be revealed in *you*. Each man for himself must wash in the cleansing stream, put on the new robe, and walk in the narrow path. There must be self-renunciation, sorrow for sin, the heart's cleaving to Christ for life, the heavenward aim and victorious Faith which shall make the world's heavy chains fall off, and set us free to obey the biddings of conscience at the cost of present ease, and in defiance of human sneers or censures. Beware how forms hide from you the Mercy-seat, and Him that sitteth thereon. Beware how mere acquiescence in human teaching, through easiness of nature or the absence of seducers, is made to pass for the Faith which lays hold of Christ, and proves itself genuine by "patient continuance in well-doing." Beware how you put respectability according to a low worldly standard in the place of spiritual-mindedness which is learnt in the school of Christ, and in no school of philosophy or morality besides. Oh! to me and mine, to you, my dear brethren, as men



whom I must try to teach according to the mind of the Spirit, for your souls' cleansing and health and freedom, may the Lord, in very deed, "manifest Himself as He does not unto the world!"

We have another record, as you know, of St. Jude, namely, one of the Canonical Books of Scripture, the Epistle which bears his name. In it there are some passages which are hard to be understood, or allusions rather to unrevealed facts, which give it an air of obscurity, as for instance, Michael the Archangel contending with the devil and disputing about the body of Moses. But some texts are plain enough, and well worth remembering; among them this, to which I dare say the Collect for the day has reference, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints."

Mark that word "earnestly," and remember that the Gospel in its simplicity and purity is worth contending for. We hear and read much now-a-days which implies that there is a haze, so to speak, over the landscape when we take God's word in hand, that nothing is so clearly revealed that we may be very positive about it, that words are not realities, but only the

symbols of realities, and human intellect is so feeble, and so liable to mistakes, that the symbol may carry different meanings to different minds, and therefore no man has any right to dogmatize about Christian verities. The men who talk in this strain affect the reputation of liberality: they judge no man; they ask to be judged of none; they are men of contemplation rather than of action; they sit still, and seem to think something is gained when they have discovered some fresh element of uncertainty in the sacred records, or the received doctrines of the Christian Church.

We believe these men are shallow philosophers; we are sure they give no sign of being well-instructed Christians. Surely the faith for which St. Jude's contemporaries were to "*contend earnestly*" was not something unsubstantial, something guessed at but not revealed, something that men were free to dispute about, like the questions which divided the Schools when the "Light of the world" came to shine into them, and scatter the gloom of centuries. We can afford to differ on many points of interpretation. Questions relating to matters of discipline and Church-Government let men settle according to their light. We have no sympathy with the bigotry which turns human opinions into Articles of Belief, and proscribes and excommunicates all sects and Churches,

save that which adopts to a nicety its own Shibboleth. On the contrary, we believe that "the faith once delivered to the saints" was a broader, as well as a deeper and loftier thing than that which is professed by many modern zealots, who forget too often that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." But still Christian Truth, that which is to reach our consciences, to purify our characters, and save our souls alive, is something positive and well defined, something that plain men can grasp and understand, something for devout minds to feed upon, like food for the hungry, and cordials for the sick at heart. Man's guilt and ruin, our natural alienation from God, and exposure to His "wrath and damnation" (Article IX.); Christ the only Saviour, the All-sufficient Saviour, by virtue of His One Sacrifice on the Cross, and His never-failing intercession; faith in Him, the germinating principle of a new life, and glorying in His Cross as the saints' badge in all times; the Holy Spirit, God's gift to His children to illuminate, and guide and comfort and sanctify and make meet for heaven,—these are no doubtful matters; we cannot make them debateable ground; they are to be our chart and compass when we sail over tranquil seas, and the anchor of our souls in the day of storms. May they prove so to us, my dear brethren;

may God help us to understand them and live upon them! May we hold them with a firm grasp living and dying! Yea, (to quote St. Jude's words,) "building ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost," may we "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life!"

## SERMON III.

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### WEALTH IN POVERTY.

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ACTS iii. 6.

“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.”

(*St. Peter's Day.*)

WHAT a remarkable combination have we here of *poverty* which can *give* nothing, with *power* which can *do* almost *any thing*! “Silver and gold have I *none*,” says the speaker. Then we are ready at once to class him with the men from whom no help of any kind is to be expected, with those who hang upon others, instead of having any thing of their own to spare, with children, with beggars, with homeless vagabonds, with the wretches who have spent their all, and then begun to prey upon mankind. The speech however does not end there. There are words of another sound immediately suc-

ceeding these. "Rise up and walk," says the penniless man; and he to whom the command was addressed was one who had never walked yet, a cripple, lame from his birth. Why, Pilate who was the great man at Jerusalem, or Cæsar who was yet greater at Rome, would never have dared to utter any thing so bold. They might have provided all sorts of conveniences for the poor mendicant; in a fit of caprice, if they so willed it, they might have conveyed him to his own home in a car of triumph, or with a wise benevolence might have provided some asylum, such as we find in Christian lands, for the brother whom Providence had made helpless; but to put strength into the withered limb, to pronounce some spell over blind or sick or lame, in the name of their gods, which should work an instant cure, *this* they well knew belonged not to them, nor to any like them. Success could not follow such an attempt, and they were too prudent to hazard the disgrace of failure. Peter however ventured in Christ's name, and the result was perfect soundness given immediately by the great Author of life, who has made our frames so curiously and can repair them so easily, so that the man, who had sat for weary months and years at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, to ask alms of them who flocked up thither for worship, now, to his own wonder and the won-

der of many who knew him in his former miserable condition, began to "walk and leap and praise God."

Thus one of the predicted signs of Messiah's coming was exhibited on the most public stage. God had chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which were mighty; and so the mighty were beginning to quake, and the weak to triumph. St. Peter walked through the streets of Jerusalem on that memorable morning, an unobserved and undistinguished man. Many passed him by, probably, who had upon them the trappings of worldly wealth, or were swelling with the pride of office; and if they looked the obscure Galilæan in the face, would have taken him for one of the many thousand drudges who filled the streets of Jerusalem. To the poor man's cry for charity he was compelled to answer, "Nought have I for myself of this world's goods; and nought therefore can I spare for thee;" yet was there a hidden power *within*, which made him really greater than the world's rulers, so that he could say without any thing of arrogance, and with a full confidence of having his words heard and ratified in heaven, "Rise up, thou captive one, and be free henceforth as thy brethren."

And the contrast was equally striking, between the utterly defenceless condition of Peter and John and the boldness with which they

bore their simple emphatic testimony as witnesses for Christ. A stir was made when the miracle was noised abroad; the people ran together in Solomon's porch; the lame man stood by the side of the Apostle, sound as the soundest among them. Eager to disclaim merit or skill for himself, as though by any inherent "power or holiness" this deed was done, yet eager also to proclaim his message, and glorify his Lord, Peter stood up and addressed his *second* sermon to his unbelieving countrymen. And now mark his words. How direct they are! how expressive of undoubting faith, and unfaltering courage! The simple facts of the case are rehearsed, and their fatal mistake, involving such appalling guilt, is stated in words that must have sounded terrible on that spot from their naked simplicity: "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong whom ye see and know."

Precisely of the same character was the Apostle's defence of the next day before the council. The enquiry there was narrowed to a single point, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Annas and Caiaphas were there, and many more, probably, who sat



in judgment when the Lord of life stood an uncomplaining and unresisting prisoner before a human tribunal. And when every eye was fixed upon the two Apostles, completely defenceless as they were against their persecutors, without eloquence to dress up a case, or power to resist a wrongful verdict, Peter again gave this noble answer,—“If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead,” (what terse, pregnant words! what a grand antithesis! yet nothing but the bare fact stated in the shortest possible compass!) “even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.”

We will not dwell farther upon this part of the story, except to observe that the history of mankind shews nothing grander than these two appearances of the first preacher of the Gospel before two such different audiences. Confessors have done well in after times. Most thrilling and animating is many a page on which are inscribed the names of men who were faithful even unto death, and whose few plain, truthful words, in the face of hostile tribunals, or in the midst of sympathizing multitudes, have been

echoed and re-echoed till they became a watchword and a rallying cry for thousands and tens of thousands elsewhere. But none ever spake better, assuredly none ever spake to better purpose, than he who was surnamed the "Rock," and who stood like a rock in those days of peril, with the wild, tempestuous waves raging all around him. We will not dwell on this part of the story, for the picture, as it is drawn by the Evangelist, may be left to produce its own effect; and words carefully culled to display it might rather weaken than deepen the impression; but I wish you to notice that in the words which I have selected for my text we have not only a plain historical account of something said and done by *one* eminent saint, whose praise is in the Churches of Christendom at this hour, but a symbolical account, if I may call it so, of the Church's work in many ages.

It was specially true of the Apostles, considering the place they filled, the work they wrought, the testimony they bore, the blessings they dispensed, that being "poor," they "made many rich;" but numbers, like-minded with them, have trod in their steps, and have earned their praise. The Church which they founded has often been poor as they were. Sometimes cumbered and corrupted with wealth, at other times she has fled like an outcast into the wilderness, has lived upon charity, has hid herself

in caves, has had wealth and power banded against her, as in Jerusalem at the time we speak of. Yet at those very times, more emphatically and more surely than in her more prosperous days, she has said to many a crippled soul, "Rise up and serve thy God." Just when she had nothing to bribe men with, when her life would have been destroyed, if it had not been "hidden with Christ in God," when the men who dwelt in palaces and mansions denounced her as troubling their repose, or interfering with their pleasures, or corrupting their menials, *then*, she has been strengthened with might by Him whose servant and witness she is, and her tones have been louder than before, her port loftier, her message clearer, her triumphs more blessed. She has gone abroad from city to city, or from village to village, proclaiming aloud, "'Silver and gold have I none.' Let the men who covet either go elsewhere and seek them. I bring them not in my hand; I do not teach the art of finding them. I tell you, if you will hear me, that they are often baits to snare men's souls, seldom helps to advance them heavenward. But I carry with me better treasures. I teach the man of halting pace and crippled limb to run in the ways of righteousness. I help the man whom Satan hath bound to come forth and be Christ's freeman. I tell those whom fear has bowed down to the earth,

and who dare not look up for dread of meeting Him who is as a consuming fire, that peace is made by the blood of the Cross, and that the returning penitent is no longer a banished alien, but a forgiven child."

Thus, often, has the Church prophesied in sackcloth, and while many have called her traitress because she would not bow down to images of gold, and some have branded her with the mark of heresy, because her message squared not with the creeds that were most in favour at court, others have come thronging from their homes to give her their greeting and blessing. "Rise up," she has said, to one and another of the crowd who thronged about her, "rise up and be men; rise up, and look from earth to heaven; rise up, and listen no longer to lying fables; rise up, and work for God; rise up, and fight against the Evil One;" and, lo! as she marched on, there hath been a shaking of the dry bones, and a mustering of the Lord's host, and soon an army has been gathered before which ancient superstitions have fallen down, like the walls of Jericho.

Such, I say, has often been the course of the Church's history from the day that the Apostles began to preach Jesus and the Resurrection to the present hour. But particular ages have witnessed the very counterpart of what was seen in the Temple on the day when the lame

man was healed, and particular individuals have been found, as weak as the Apostles in one sense and almost as mighty in another. Look, for instance, at the sixteenth century, and the man who did more than any other to distinguish it from the ages of black darkness which went before it. Who was it that said to prostrate Europe, "Rise up, and walk?" Who preached the doctrine which made her rulers quake, and her bondsmen leap for joy? Who dared to say to the Pope, when his yoke was upon Christendom, and had become a burden too heavy to be borne, "Thou art a false usurper, and in Christ's name I charge thee to let his servants go?" Who brought the Bible out of its hiding-places, and said to enquiring men, not, "Bow down your necks and hear the charm the priest shall read over you," but "Stand up on your feet, and study the message your God hath sent you?" Who was it that proclaimed aloud the almost forgotten truths of man's personal responsibility before God; of justification by means of our own faith; of grace given not to the pastor to be dispensed among the flock, but to every individual sinner to be used on his own behalf; of heaven as the home of all in every land who had on them the mark of Christ's Spirit; who, I say, proclaimed these blessed, soul-reviving truths till tens of thousands bound them to their hearts, and found

them like life from the dead? It was the son of a Saxon miner, born beneath a humble roof, growing up in privacy, singing Christmas carols at fourteen, that he might earn a few pence to supply the cravings of hunger, the companion of the poor till the fame of his deeds brought him to the company of princes. How truly could LUTHER say, in those days when Europe was hanging upon his lips and waiting for his next move forwards, "Silver and gold have I none!" How heartily did he say, "Such as I have give I you!" And what a treasure was it when it came! his fearless testimony, his never-ceasing prayers, his pen that wrote eternal truths as on a rock, his tongue that spoke such burning words of zeal and love, his heart at once so brave and so tender, his life offered freely as a gift to God and the Church!

There were mighty Princes in that day; one of them governing a larger portion of Europe, and swaying its destinies more absolutely, than any single potentate of our own time. He sat upon a lofty throne, and had armies at his command which could storm strong cities or spread ruin through peaceful countries. On one occasion the monk and the emperor met face to face; and who that reads the scene, without a blind upon his eyes, and a veil upon his heart, must not see that the man of power grew little by the side of the fearless, upright champion of

truth? It was Peter and the Jewish council over again. A full cycle of years had run, and the Gospel was starting for a new career, and as before, it had its faithful witnesses, and enemies who seemed able to stop it by a word's speaking. As before however the weak were made strong; the silver and the gold, the shew and the tinsel of life, went for nothing; faith and zeal and love, devotion to the Lord Jesus, and willingness to live and die for His sake, were the jewels that outweighed all the world's wealth; and we see now, whenever the record of either time is brought to our remembrance, and own it with glowing, thankful hearts, how generously Apostles and Reformers gave of what they had, and made the world their debtor for all that they said and did and suffered.

But we will come to humbler scenes and more every-day characters. We should deal very imperfectly with a text like this if we sent your thoughts far away to distant scenes, in which you have never played a part, and led you to think that men must be either Apostles or Reformers before they can use this language for their own.

Look at one of God's choice saints giving his last blessing to his household. He has lived a life of faith, and now his end is peace. In his humble way he has honoured God, served

the Church, blessed his generation. And now the day is come that he must depart hence. No inventory need be taken of his goods; half an hour will suffice to divide them among his surviving relatives. No will is wanted, to declare his wishes respecting his property after his body shall be laid in the dust. God has found him food and raiment, home and friends, nurse and medicine, while he lived; and all his care, in this last hour, is to commit his soul, by a fresh act of faith, to Christ his Redeemer. There is much of wisdom, often, in the last words of the faithful. What has been well said before is said yet better then. They speak with authority, like men who have almost seen what they describe. There is no reserve or false shame to make them draw a veil over their holiest feelings. They dread no man's face, and shrink from no man's sneer, now that they are so close upon eternity. So friends naturally gather round the beds of God's most faithful children, and treasure up their latest message, and will report often to the careless and unbelieving how words were given then, when their strength was almost spent, which seemed like the words of a prophet for truth and wisdom. Such an one might say, and perhaps does say sometimes, to his weeping children, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee." And who shall despise the



legacy? It is better than the miser's gold for his children and his children's children. They are not poor, but rich, who inherit his blessing and his prayers. Yes, rich, if you would but think so, is that dying man of God, and rich they who succeed to his name, and are blessed through life with the remembrance of his piety, compared with a pampered worldling who says to his heirs, "Silver and gold I have in plenty: God's Providence somehow made wealth flow in upon me, and what He gave I have husbanded with care. I have toiled hard to make it more; have made it my chief business to invest it prudently, have spent little upon myself and less upon others, have been upon my guard against tales of woe, knowing how easy it is to be deceived and how hard to dispense alms at once wisely and liberally; and now such as I have give I you to spend and enjoy. Take it, and thank me for my pains and caution." I have said, the good man's heirs are rich; and how often is it seen that the portion of the covetous turns to poverty! It looks like a spreading tree rich in foliage and fruit; but a worm is at the root, and lo! one branch withers, and then another, till at last nothing but a bare trunk is left.

But we need not limit our text so much as to speak only of the dying; we may see it

sometimes beautifully illustrated in the living too. Look at the lone woman, whose week's pittance just buys her week's bread, and no more, giving, not money, but kind looks, pleasant words, spare half-hours, to some ailing or afflicted friend. Look at the little child, who never had a sixpence perhaps of its own, dutiful at home, gentle and patient abroad, running on errands for the sick, brightening with its innocent look and cheerful prattle some desolate fireside where infant voices were once heard, but are now heard no more. Look at some aged man of God, who finds it hard to make his weakened limbs hold out from Sunday to Sunday, and who is compelled, when little comforts are more welcome than ever, to forego some which he could command in his stronger days, ministering to the sick, offering a word in season to the reckless, pointing the dying sinner to the Lamb of God, comforting many a tried and tempted brother with cordials from the blessed storehouse of God's promises. Do not all these say in turn, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee?" Is it not a blessed work, that of ministering out of our little to those who have less? Do you not find, those of you who have tried, that most emphatically this kind of charity is *twice blessed*? Is not your scanty fare the sweeter when you come

home from making some dark chambers more bright, and some heavy hearts more hopeful? When you thank God for all His blessings, do you not put this down as one for which you are specially thankful, that you have the means of doing what your Saviour did, of enriching the poor and healing the broken-hearted, not out of the fulness of a worldly store, but out of the depths of a loving heart?

Very precious are alms like these, worth a hundred times more than the money gifts of the wealthy, ranking higher in God's account, bestowed at greater cost, more blessed proofs of the power of faith. Oh! if the poor, one and all, were a brotherhood of living, loving Christians, they might almost do without help from others, help *from* each other *to* each other would be dispensed so wisely and so seasonably, and large-hearted generosity would find such a response in warm-hearted gratitude. God forbid however that we should excuse ourselves from offerings which are more needful for ourselves than for them! God forbid that because *they* might befriend their equals *more*, *we* should befriend any of them *less*! God forbid that the miserably stinted measure of all our charities should descend to a yet lower standard! If there is much that is animating for the poor in a subject like ours of to-day, there is much that is shaming to those who are

placed above the poor in station and acquirements and worldly possessions.

Many have leisure. God has placed them in circumstances which leave a large portion of their time at their own disposal. How many hours in a month are given by many to any public object? What is the world the better, what are their neighbours the better, for their not being compelled to toil at some allotted task? What account have they to give of many years in every one of which some department might have been found wherein to serve God and their country? For what do they think they are placed where they are? and who, if not men like them, should devote themselves, in a free country like ours, to public services of which the pay is neither silver nor gold, but the honest approval of the labourer's own conscience, and the thanks of many whom he has served, not for hire, but for love?

We might pursue the subject, and speak of knowledge, worldly influence, talents of any special kind. "Whose are they? Who gave them?" We may say to a worldly man who does not even profess to call Christ Master, "Whose are *you*? Who redeemed you and told you that you were not your own?" We may say to every man who lives at a higher rate, and means to take the Gospel rule for his own,

“Where are the signs of your Christianity if your life be one of habitual self-pleasing; if you are careful to meddle with none, for evil or for good; if responsibility of every kind be hated and avoided, and evils which you might help to remove are patiently endured so long as they do not touch yourselves? What marks of discipleship can you shew, if this be your way of life, so long as that text remains unblotted from your Bibles, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ?’” That “law of Christ,” interpreted by His life and sealed with His blood, is a far-reaching, heart-searching law. The man who has felt his own debt to God for the “unspeakable gift” knows that he is a debtor to every brother. The man who remembers how freely he has been saved will impart to others freely of what God has given him. The man to whom the Gospel has become the power of God unto salvation will hate the thought of being close-handed and narrow-hearted. The man who has tasted of Christ’s love and grace will hear a voice pursuing him into every place, and every engagement, and saying of one possession and another, “That is mine, because *thou* art mine;” and instead of fretting under the yoke, he will answer, “Lord, make me feel more and more that I am Thine, and

help me to consecrate myself, and all Thy gifts, to Thy service.”

And if we speak of what man may do for his brother-man, our prayers, surely, must not be forgotten. Who can say to a burdened neighbour, to a godless relative, to baptized infidels at home, and to unbaptized infidels abroad, “What I have give I thee,” if he be not one who remembers them all in turn, when he pleads for his own mercies before the throne of grace? Herein we fail, all of us. Herein we prove that our hearts are cold, and that our faith is weak. We should find more time to think over what the world wants; and we should believe that effectual fervent prayers may do much to bring in the day of universal Jubilee. Much, we thank God, is doing. The Church is not asleep now-a-days, but has shaken herself from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments, and has sent forth many faithful sons to be evangelists in distant lands. Christian men, some of them in high places, some of them poor almost as St. Peter, are searching out the hiding-places of misery and crime among ourselves, and precious seed is sown in many a heart that has been darkened by ignorance and sin, and fruit is gathered, the fruit of righteousness and peace, where all was waste, till lately, as the howling wilder-

ness. If we sit at home while more enterprising men go abroad, if we are busy for ourselves, while active and stirring brethren find time for public objects, and are spent in the Lord's service, we should pray, at any rate, while they work. They want our help, and the world wants it too; for sin is rampant, and Satan is busy, and the conflict waxes hot, in this age of ours, between the hosts of light and darkness.

May we take our stand boldly on the Lord's side! May we have the active, working faith, and the far-seeing, busy-handed charity of men alive to God, and looking on sufferers every where, as brethren to whom they are bound for Christ's sake! May we plead with God often on our own behalf, and plead with God oftener than we have done for others, making our private litanies more comprehensive in their aim and scope, and looking abroad sometimes that we may present new names and new objects before the Mercy-seat! Our own blessings will not be the fewer, nor our other prayers more stinted; but rather all shall be better done, rather God will be more bountiful to ourselves, when, in this sense of giving what we have, we are open-handed towards our brethren.

# SERMON IV.<sup>1</sup>

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EARLY FAITH AND EARLY LOVE.

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ACTS iv. 33.

“With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and great grace was upon them all.”

*(Trinity Sunday.)*

HERE, in a single sentence, we have an epitome of the Church's history immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the blessed ingathering of disciples which followed St. Peter's first Sermon. Chronologically, nothing can be more appropriate as a text for to-day's sermon ; and the subject, surely, is one of surpassing interest to every thoughtful Christian. If the narrative had been lost, or the story were told less in detail, which of us would not be painfully curious on points like *these* ? What came next, when thousands already confessed the name of Christ ? What attitude did the leaders

<sup>1</sup> Preached Sunday evening, May 26, 1861, at Westminster Abbey.



assume towards the ruling authorities, and how did they fare among Jewish bigots and idolaters from Rome? What was the style of their earliest discourses? What audience did they gather, and with what results? Above all, what of the common Christians of that day? Were there proofs such as the adversary could not gainsay, a new Life corresponding to the new Faith? Did men see that the followers of the Crucified One had the mark of the Cross upon them, and, amid the evil generation which filled Jerusalem, were they conspicuously a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works?

We find these questions answered, in the opening chapters of this book; a marvellous record, truly, for the importance of the events described, the nobleness of the qualities displayed by the principal actors, and (let me add) for the grand simplicity with which the story is told. I pass by the events of the day of Pentecost, and its immediate consequences, and take up the narrative at the commencement of the third chapter. You remember the scene at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, the cripple's petition so strangely answered, the instant cure, the crowd looking on in wonder while the man, whom they knew so well in his helpless condition, was "walking and leaping and praising God," and, then, St. Peter's bold

address charging the people's guilt home upon their consciences in words so direct, so awfully plain and true, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;" "Ye killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead." The Church grew, *that day*, from three to five thousand souls; but the Church saw, *that same day*, her earliest Confessors carried to prison; and the *next* was memorable in those weeks of trial; for "rulers and elders and scribes" came together, and Annas the High Priest was there, and Caiaphas, a notable name among those who fought against the Truth; and there, before a Council perplexed and frightened by what they heard, the same testimony was repeated in terms equally explicit, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole."

Men who could speak thus must be answered or silenced; so the command was given them never more to "speak or teach in the name of Jesus." *That*, of course, could not be: knowing what they knew, they must proclaim it; silence would be insupportable; and therefore the reply was given which exactly befitted that occasion and that presence, breathing no defiance, making

no attempt at concealment, but announcing a brave, unconquerable resolution from which they never swerved, living or dying, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

After this sort, my brethren, "with great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the dead." We are their debtors because they did so. Through scenes like these, against the powers of this world, and the powers of darkness, they fought their way; and we in this distant age, we in our quiet homes, all share the spoil. Our quiet homes, I say; but the war is not really ended. Make sure, every one of you, that deliberately you must take your side, as they did. It is not right for you to "hearken unto men more than unto God;" and therefore with all plainness, knowing how many do so, I will ask you to-night to judge yourselves in this matter. You are all Christians by profession, gathered from your scattered homes in this "holy and beautiful House," so rich in memories which stir English hearts, linking our worship of to-day with the traditions of bygone centuries. We have just completed the round of our Ecclesiastical year, and, after rehearsing in order the great facts of the Evangelical History, have

bowed before the Divine Majesty, "acknowledging," with all reverence and thankfulness, "the glory of the Eternal Trinity." But is it true allegiance that you give to the Father of your spirits? Are you faithful servants of the Lord who bought you? Is the Spirit of Truth in very deed your Guide and Comforter? Do you live habitually by the Christian rule? Do you "exercise yourselves," like the great Apostle, "to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men?" Do you know what it is to watch closely against temptation in the haunts of common life? and for patience and humility, and godly zeal, and self-denying charity, do you keep the one perfect pattern before your eyes? Do you not know that there is a counterfeit Christianity in the world, and a true one; a Gospel which Christ and His Apostles preached, and another which men make for themselves to satisfy their consciences, offering easier terms and lighter service? *Which is yours?* Have you ever enquired diligently, anxiously, prayerfully, to make sure that you are not cheating yourselves with a name, and putting up with something widely different from the soul-saving, heart-cleansing, self-renouncing doctrine of the Cross?

What of your Faith? How does that stand? We have heard some plain-speaking, far-reaching

texts to-night, such as these, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life<sup>2</sup>;" "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself;" "Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our Faith." Others may be added which speak in the same strain as to the Christian's inner life. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." These, you know, and others like them, are the true sayings of God; and they all point to the truth, that men are naturally in bondage to evil, at ease and at home in a revolted world, estranged from God and holiness; and that Christ's true followers, His redeemed ones, the holy family, the brotherhood of the saints, are partakers not only of a good hope, but of a new life, serving God in the bonds of the Gospel, as adopted children, glorying in the Cross as a place of shelter, and a meeting-place for all who love the Lord. The world is a new world to them since they learnt to look upon it as Christ's, and to mourn for the disloyalty of their fellow-men, even as good subjects feel indignant when the

<sup>2</sup> 1 John v. (The Second Lesson.)

throne is assailed, and treason begins to gather strength in a peaceful land. Life has another aspect since the Holy Spirit taught them that they are not their own, and that, being debtors already for "the unspeakable gift," they are bound over, with all their possessions, to a service which is not hard bondage, but happy freedom. To "fight the good fight of faith," to "put on the whole armour of God," to "run with patience the race that is set before them," to "stand against the wiles of the devil," to "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset them," they find is not easy work, but a work calling for daily effort, daily watchfulness, daily succour from Him Whose strength is made perfect in weakness: and thus persuaded they march on, with heaven in prospect, "having their loins girt about with Truth," and "their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace," armed, moreover, with sword and shield: their shield, "the shield of Faith;" their sword, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Now when we speak in this strain, are we not talking parables to many of you? Is not this description like a picture to gaze at, instead of a living reality, reflecting even faintly your own experience? Is it not the case that many of you are living contentedly, avowedly, systematically, at a lower rate, and justifying yourselves in what you do? Have you not excuses

ready to defend your present position? and when called to repentance by preachers or godly friends, do you not argue that a man may be a good Christian without being a saint, may die happy, (as the phrase is,) without saying many prayers, or living strictly up to the Bible; may turn to God quickly at last, and be safe for heaven, if he has done no great sin, and means to be sorry for his little ones? Who told you this? Does it sound like what you hear at Church? Does it seem enough to give to God, Who gave His Son, His only-begotten, to die for you? Have you good warrant for saying that you may live *in* the world, and live *like* the world, talk its language, love its pleasures, adopt its code of morality, think no more of working out your salvation, and getting ready for heaven, and yet be in no peril of sinking into Hell? Who told you this, I say? Not the word of God, most surely. Not any one of your friends whom you have learnt to respect as men of God; no prophet, or trustworthy messenger, living or dead, I know. The world has told it you. The crowd live thus, and talk thus; and what ten thousand say openly, or whisper secretly, comes to your ears echoed and re-echoed from all sides, till the lie of Satan's forging looks like Truth, and the broad road passes for the way of life.

Nay, my brethren, but "whether it be right," or safe, "to hearken unto men," be they ten

times ten thousand, when they contradict what God has spoken, "judge ye;" whether much that you hear in your common haunts, much that is said about the Bible, and the Devil, and the punishment of the wicked, and the doings of the godly, by loose-living men, and bold, glib talkers who think to shew their wit, have a Christian or unchristian sound, "judge ye;" whether self-justifying men, like the Pharisees of old, who pray formal prayers, but have no tenderness of conscience, no yearnings after holiness, can be safe guides to heaven, "judge ye."

What of your faith? I said just now; and *that*, I am sure, many of you know is not the Christian Faith, as tested by the Scriptures I have quoted. And next, What of your practice? Is it a low morality that you are contented with? If you are not profane, not licentious, not dishonest, not violating the decencies and proprieties of life, does *that* satisfy you? Are you one of the ten thousand who "measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves," and when they see some worse, and crowds no better, make sure that all is well? Do you understand the greatness of humility, and think patience under wrong better than resentment, and honour the man who is contented where he is, instead of seeking advancement by



doubtful or crooked means, and deem "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" better than all the trappings of wealth, and prize as a ministering angel, in this self-loving, strife-divided world, the charity which "seeketh not her own," and "is not easily provoked," and "thinketh no evil?" Do you long to have your own life thus beautified, your own faults corrected, your own characters moulded, by habitually referring yourself to the Christian rule which embraces these virtues, and others of a like kind? Or is another sort of character that which you like better, pushing, self-confident, harmonizing with the prevailing temper of mankind, the reverse of that which is described in the Beatitudes? Is it not so with many of you, if the truth be spoken? Are not the bolder spirits those which you most admire? And have you not in your own minds a list of virtues which make up a man *good enough*, without his being "poor in spirit," or "meek" or "merciful," or a lover of peace, or "pure in heart," or even "hungering after righteousness?" *God* says nothing about such goodness. The *Bible* never tells us that men, curtailed of these proportions, are approved of Christ, or heirs of His kingdom. Oh, again we say, in this matter of human character, as in the great matters of faith, "whether it be right" to hearken to human

guides, to make the Sermon on the Mount nothing worth, to uphold the morality which does not touch the springs of action, which lets a man pride himself in his fancied virtues, which looks up to no Divine Exemplar, which puts Hero-Worship in the place of Christian Faith,—“judge ye.”

We pass from the Apostles to their converts. “Great grace was upon them all,” our text says. The followers were not unworthy of their leaders, and it is with the followers that we compare ourselves. The founders of the Church had a place, a rank, an elevation, of their own. In our humility, we aspire not so high, but sink to a lower level. What sort of men then were the five thousand meaner disciples? How did their Christianity come out? How did the men live, by what signs were they known, who toiled and suffered in secluded homes, who had no public work assigned them, who spoke of Christ among a few chosen friends, or prayed to Him by stealth, it may be, in houses where His name was a name of scorn? Read the chapter to the end, and you have a picture of the Christian family, the counterpart of which is not found in all that history has recorded of ancient or modern life: “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:

neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

We need not say that this practice arose out of a pressing necessity, and was meant to relieve the urgent wants of numbers who were made poor for Christ's sake. The dispute between the Hebrews and the Grecians, recorded in the sixth chapter of this book, shews that *even then* the Church had outgrown this custom; and we are sure that, as human nature is, it could not last without corrupting and enervating mankind. "If any man will not work, neither let him eat," was the Apostle's rule: industry in our lawful callings, we are sure, is a Christian virtue; and idleness, if all men might claim something from a common stock, would be a wrong to the working part of the community, and utterly demoralizing to the drones who should live upon the spoil.

But let us not think that the Christian brotherhood has died out because this particular custom has ceased. The world is sadly

selfish, we know; few are found to make any serious effort, or any costly sacrifice, for another's gain: and even the generous part of mankind are often fettered by reserve, and enslaved by custom, in their deeds of kindness. But the best givers make no parade of their charities, and much precious fruit is ripened on Christian soil, to which the busy multitude give no heed, like the sweet violet scenting the air with its fragrance in some shady nook apart from the throng of travellers. Let me hand on to you a tale of events quite recent, which made me feel, when I read it, that some, as loving as the early Christians, live unknown amongst us. I will not mutilate or abridge the narrative; but will give you the very words, coming from the pen of one who has won a high place in our modern Christian literature, the authoress of "English Hearts and English Hands."

"Not very long ago a valued friend requested me to visit a young woman, lodging in an alley in Holborn, who was dying of the most painful of all diseases. The small room was delicately clean and neat; and on the little table stood a jar adorned with a few country flowers, the offering of an early friend. By the bedside stood a pale young woman, with a gentle and sympathizing countenance, smoothing the sufferer's pillow. It was scarcely

whiter than her face; the mouth and chin of which were covered by a cambric handkerchief, to veil the ravages which her terrible disease had made. After a few enquiries of the nurse, I spoke a little to the sufferer; and then remembering that it must seem so easy for one in comparative health to speak to her of the goodness of God, but how much harder it must be for her to believe it, lying there, hour after hour, in anguish, which suffered her scarcely to sleep by night or by day, increasing during the thirteen months past, and leaving no hope of alleviation in the future but by death, I thought it best to tell her all that was passing in my mind. And then I added, 'If you can believe that the blessed Saviour, who, when He was on earth, healed all manner of disease with a touch or a word, and who has the same healing power now, yet withholds it from you, does so from some infinitely wise and loving reason, it would do me good to know it. If it be so, will you just lift up your finger in assent?' She raised her pale, transparent hand, and waved it over her head with an expression in her sunken eyes which almost glorified her face.

"I could not help saying to her, when I could command my voice enough to speak, 'I believe that one wave of your hand gives more honour to your Saviour in the sight of all the

angels of heaven, than whole years of any little services which He might permit me to render Him, in comparative health and ease; because your faith is so much more severely tried.' It seemed a new and delightful thought to her, that patience having its perfect work, would glorify her Saviour. She had just meekly borne, because it was His will. The tears gathered in her eyes, and she made sign for her slate, and wrote upon it, 'This makes me so happy. How wonderful and how kind, if He will make glory for Himself out of such a poor creature as me!' Soon after she added, 'He has taught me to say of Him, My Beloved is mine, and I am His. He has forgiven all my sins. He loves me freely. He fills me with peace and joy in believing.'

"When her companion came down stairs, I asked her if she tried to go out for a little fresh air sometimes, and had any one to relieve her occasionally of the nursing by night. She said, 'I take a turn in the alley to get a little fresh air now and then; but I should not like to leave her for many minutes, nor to be sleeping much, while she is suffering.' 'Is she your sister?' I enquired. 'No, ma'am, we are no relations,' was her answer; 'we were fellow-servants together at an hotel in the West End. And once, when I was ill, she nursed me very kindly; so when this terrible illness came on

her, I could not let her leave her place alone to go among strangers,—for she's an orphan; so I left with her.'

“‘And may I venture to ask, how are you both supported?’

“‘She had saved a good bit, which lasted some time; and now I have still some left of my own savings whilst I was a housemaid.’

“‘A housemaid! a *Queen!*’ I thought to myself, and could have laid down my hand for her to walk over, and felt it honoured by her touch. That woman of a royal heart sent me through London that day feeling the whole world better, because I had met with such an instance of disinterested, self-sacrificing love. One word revealed its inner secret. ‘We are as good as sisters,’ she said; ‘we both know that our Saviour loves us, and we love Him, and want to love Him better.’”

I have ventured upon a long story, because it seems to me a decisive answer to much that lurks in men's minds when we talk of primitive Christianity, of Apostolic zeal, of the family feeling which pervaded the Church before love waxed cold, of the binding tie of brotherhood when the world, all round, hemmed in the saints, and made them stand close together, hand in hand, like men ready for the sacrifice. The fact is, men talk of these things having died out to excuse themselves in their indolence, to

make their selfishness look less guilty, to escape from demands, in the way of mutual kindness, which must last while the world lasts. Never think that the Gospel, in its purity and power, was for one age, and that, now it is eighteen centuries old, Christians may repeat the Creeds, and rejoice in its civilizing and purifying influences, and pass for good servants of Christ, while the inner life of faith is wanting, and the large heart of love. The men who talk so, or who vaguely think so, do not know the world they live in. They know their own little corner of it; they know the hollowness and crookedness of many who have fair words on their lips; they know how conventional are the moralities of the men and women who rule society,—charities and all,—measured on a scale, coupled with popular names and loud pretensions, blazoned forth on platforms and in subscription-lists. But much that the Lord owns, much that angels see, much that lights up dark places, and beautifies many a lonely chamber, and “lifts the beggar from the dunghill,” according to Hannah’s noble song, “to set him among princes,” this they never see, and perforce only can be persuaded of. A rushing stream of traffickers passed daily along Holborn at the time we speak of; and not one among them knew of the ministries of love in the neighbouring alley. They might have heard this chapter



read out at church, and thought what wonders were wrought in ancient days, how Christians loved one another when Apostles were alive, and in what a strangely different time their lot was cast amid men too busy, or too selfish, to do deeds of heroic charity. Yet there was the self-same spirit at work which laid the wealth of the richer sort at the Apostles' feet, and made the poor disciple feel that he had come into a new world where men loved not their own too well, and loyalty to Christ implied compassion to every brother. That wave of the hand, in token of acquiescence in the divine will, that love of sisters between fellow-servants, that debt of kindness paid back twentyfold, that sharing with another of the store laid by for a day of scarcity, were all streamlets from the fountain of Christ's Love which never ran dry yet, and never will run dry, till the gates of Hell have prevailed against His Church.

Because the scene is a homely scene, my brethren, I quote it and dwell upon it. You and I, too, may "feel the whole world better" when we hear of such wayside incidents gathered up by one who has the heart to seek them, and the wisdom to record them. It does one good to think there are ten thousand such, hidden out of sight; works of faith and labours of love, done in obscure corners, not registered in the world's chronicles, unrewarded with human

praise, shall come out in shining ranks on the great testing-day to the astonishment of many who despised the poor, or thought too meanly of human virtue. Alas! we weigh each other in scales with false weights, and come to wrong conclusions for evil and for good. But never think that the old traditions have died out, and that "faith worketh by love" no longer. Rather believe that "great grace," even now, may be upon all who seek it, all who hunger after it, all who pray for it as the gift of gifts. Remember that now, as in the Apostolic age, believers are to "give witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus," by living in His life, by hallowing their common works with faith, by letting men see that His Spirit dwelleth with them as a Spirit of light and love; and be sure that your efforts will be fruitless, your prayers will be wasted, your hopes will end in ruinous disappointment, if you think to serve God or aim at self-improvement apart from Him who carrieth on His interceding work in Heaven, and His sanctifying work on earth, both together. Whatever you do, be content with nothing short of Bible religion; and if you seem to find few who live according to that rule, few who aim high enough and walk straight enough through a world that is full of evil, remember (it is a lesson we all need to learn) that God "knoweth them that are His;"

and we all know our fellow-men imperfectly. At any rate, be they few or many, to his own Master each man standeth or falleth ; and happy they who, judging themselves truly, and judging their neighbours charitably, tread their allotted path, living here as strangers and pilgrims, and “ looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto Eternal Life.”

## SERMON V.

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### THE HYPOCRITE'S DOOM.

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ACTS v. 1, 2.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.”

(*January 19, 1862.*)

THE sad story with which this chapter opens follows immediately on a narrative of almost unequalled interest and beauty. The Apostles had been confronted with the powers of this world. St. Peter and St. John had witnessed a good confession before the Jewish Council, and had returned to their own friends more like conquerors than acquitted prisoners. Then they prayed together,—for what? not for safety,—*that* could hardly be had, unless it were purchased by silence; not for the confusion of their enemies,—*that* would come in the Lord's time, if they continued in unbelief; but their

petition was for courage to persevere in the path which led certainly to danger, possibly or probably to death: "Now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy word." And then the place where they met was shaken, and "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost," and henceforth, as this chapter testifies, they *did* speak boldly for God and His Truth, and compelled men to hear and wonder.

This, however, is not all; there is another picture, not easily forgotten, presented to us in that memorable fourth chapter. *The leaders* were brave, as captains of the Lord's host should ever be; but what of *the people*? There was an army of believers by this time; what proofs of discipleship did they give? What had the Gospel and the grace of God done for them? No little, surely, when "the multitude of them that believed,"—not a select few, but the many,—compacted into a brotherhood of saints, "were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

There was the Infant Church in its fairest

guise. A blessed sight in a world which has the blight of sin all over it! one little corner planted with trees of righteousness, and the bitter root of selfishness, which poisons the air beyond it, plucked up and cast away!

So runs the tale for a little week, perhaps; and then comes the reverse picture:—hypocrisy within the guarded enclosure; covetousness wearing the mask of piety; man and wife in a plot to act a lie for a sordid purpose; Christ beginning to winnow His Church with visible judgments; an Apostle turning aside from his great work to speak the words of doom! Alas! for the bright day so speedily overcast! Alas! for the foul blot on so early a page of our Christian records! Alas! for the sin that intrudes every where, taints all human conditions and relations, outfaces with its bold front the messengers of good tidings, and forces suspicion upon those who long to trust all men if they dared!

Let us look at the narrative which I have taken this evening, and turn it to some practical account.

Ananias and Sapphira, it seems, having cast in their lot with the Church at Jerusalem, yielded to the prevailing custom as to mutual helpfulness. There was no law of partition; each man was free to keep his goods, and deal out a dole in the way of charity; but there was a general willingness to make a common stock;

the Apostles, who were trusted by all alike, presiding over the distribution, there was no imputation of unfairness for a time, and the poor were helped, while the rich were gainers, in a higher sense, by their own bountifulness. The couple, whose names are so familiar to us, were among the wealthier portion; like the others, they sold some property of value; but unlike the others, they did not pay the whole proceeds into the treasury. Part (what portion we know not) was reserved for their own use; the rest, which they meant the Apostles to look upon as the whole, was their contribution for the relief of poor brethren. The husband, it seems, simply paid the money over, without giving utterance to any words which were positively untrue; the wife, when challenged by St. Peter, protected herself by the spoken lie! Both, however, were parties to a fraud, and both were visited with the summary punishment of death. St. Peter, so to speak, was the executioner: and the whole Church heard how by divine prompting he had first detected the sin, and then announced the sentence of condemnation. The morning found the offenders taking their part in life like their neighbours; before night came they were buried in one grave: no wonder that "great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things."

“But why this apparent severity?” some will say, perhaps; “God does not usually punish so quickly. The money was their own after the sale, as house or land was their own before it; and when they made a gift to the Church, smaller in amount than the value received, the sin was disingenuousness, not fraud. They coveted the praise of liberality too much, or were unwilling to trust themselves for the future to the good faith of the Church. The falseness in the first instance, was that of concealment, no more; and considering how guilty men are spared, and how, in every trading city in the world, God lets men thrive by actual cheating, one marvels to see this pair struck down so awfully, and made monuments of unsparing justice to the end of time.”

Be it so, my brethren; we may marvel sometimes. Our measuring-line is not God's. We are poor calculators, at the best, of the degrees of heinousness belonging to particular transgressions. We get beyond our depth when we say “God's ways are not equal;” for a thousand things which are hidden from us are all known to Him, and He worketh towards mighty ends which our puny minds cannot grasp. Be it so: we may marvel innocently, so long as we ponder reverently, instead of listening to the profane cavils of ungodly men. His judgments



are a great deep, and clouds and darkness are round about His throne. Blessed be His name, mercies and loving-kindnesses unnumbered are written plainly where the peasant and the child may read them!

Remember, too, that all wonderings about temporal judgments, following close upon sins of any kind, proceed upon the assumption that man has a right to life. God's patience spoils us, if I may say so; and because heinous transgressors are often respited for a long time together, it is assumed that forbearance, in the same measure, or in yet larger measure, should be dealt out to all. Sinners of giant stature, doubtless, live on to be the world's plague and curse. The Earth has often groaned, for a long time together, under oppressors whom it were an easy thing for God suddenly to cast down, like Herod and Belshazzar, in the days of their pride. Wretched old blasphemers, sometimes, are the last survivors of a generation, and men whose breath is infection, who live to corrupt and destroy, have a long day often, before God calls them to their awful reckoning. These things are a part of our common experience; we have grown familiar with the world in which sinners defy God for half a century, and then are buried with pomp, and have flattering epitaphs inscribed upon their tombs; and therefore when death seems to strike, not at random,

but like a messenger of wrath armed with a Divine commission to seize and punish, short-sighted men stand aghast, and question whether the victim be well chosen, whether a longer probation-time were not his due, whether the sin, that was fresh upon him, had really some special heinousness about it, making summary punishment a warning and a lesson to all beholders. Away with such speculations! they become us not; men tread on Mercy-ground at every step; we are spared beyond our deserts; our brethren all around us, by tens of thousands, receive daily blessings in return for daily shortcomings: where He pleases God smites; but no blow falls any where either too heavily or too soon. Life is God's gift to be used for the Giver; prolonged life is a fresh boon binding us to fresh service; the time and manner of other men's departure out of life we may no more cavil at, than we may usurp God's throne, and frame laws for the universe.

Still, general observations of this sort hardly apply to the case in hand, or, at any rate, meet only some of the apparent difficulties. Ananias and his wife not only died in one day, immediately after they had endeavoured to deceive the Apostles, but sentence was passed upon them by one evidently prompted by God. Peter, by Divine inspiration, detected the subterfuge. Peter, as a heaven-taught Prophet,

foretold the death of Sapphira, and doubtless foreknew, when he arraigned the other offender so solemnly, what would follow immediately upon his censure. It is no matter of doubtful conjecture, therefore, whether the acting of the lie, and the sudden extinction of life, are connected together as sin and punishment. The narrative as evidently implies this as if we read at the head of it, "Hear how a man and woman at Jerusalem proved to be hollow-hearted disciples, and died under a curse." I think we must presume, in their case, that there was special wickedness, or some special mischief to the Church's interest and Christ's honour. What can we find of this sort? What are the circumstances which lift this transaction, occupying so conspicuous a place in the Christian story, out of the crowd of common frauds, and prove the persons, thus marked out for infamy, to have been sinners of a deeper dye than common? Let us see how St. Peter describes the offence. To one of them he says, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" and again, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." To the other he says, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" It was not a common lie therefore. There was profaneness about it as well as deceit. The Church was just set up. Men,

taught by the Holy Ghost, and armed with miraculous powers to attest their mission, ruled it in Christ's name. Among other things, in this time of necessity, they were the almoners of the household of faith, and uprightness and fair dealing were due from every brother to help them in the work of distribution. To play false at such a season, to break the family compact for private gain, to covet the reputation of unstinted liberality, and keep back cunningly what might minister to self-indulgence, was a sin against the Divine economy, and implied forgetfulness of that searching Eye which watched the new-born Church at every step of her perilous course.

For passages of this sort, Calvin is the prince of commentators; and when he leaves the fourth chapter and turns to the fifth, we find these fine remarks: "The narrative of St. Luke, up to this point, brings before us that company of persons, who were banded together under the name of Christ, more in the guise of angels than of men. For they had attained to that remarkable height of virtue, which led the wealthy among them, of their own accord, to dispossess themselves of farms, besides contributing their money, to supply the wants of the poor. *Now* the Evangelist describes the fraud contrived by Satan for gaining an entrance into the bosom of that

company, using the semblance of this same liberality. For hypocrisy can wind itself into a hundred shapes to effect its purpose; and, with the aid of the deceiver, the enemy invades the Church of God, when he can do nothing by direct assault. But the thing specially to be noted here is the purpose of the Holy Spirit in perpetuating this story. He designs it for a standing proof of the account in which God holds sincerity of motive, and of the utter hatefulness of all pretensions and disguise: and also to shew how He values purity in the administration of Church affairs. The main subject, of course, is the punishment inflicted by God's own hand on Ananias and his wife; its suddenness and severity struck terror into all who witnessed it; and for us there is the solemn warning that all falseness in religion, all feigned sanctity when the reality is wanting, is abominable in God's sight. For if, putting aside all details, we look for the pith and moral of the history, we find that the fault denounced by St. Luke was nothing more or less than that of attempting to impose on God and His Church by a pretended offering. Mark then how much of evil lies hidden in this fraud. There is contempt of God, whose detecting Eye he does not fear; there is a theft which is really a sacrilege, because he keeps for his own a portion of the dedicated property; there is a

lurking ambition and craving after human praise, while God's judgment is despised; there is unbelief and distrust of God in thus unlawfully providing for the future; and, lastly, the handling by foul hands of a blessed and holy institution. The mere acting of such a part was a grievous sin, and it was aggravated by the bold and obstinate lying which was called into play."

To this judgment, I think, no exception can be taken; and one other consideration, implied in this comment of the great Reformer, we find well stated by a more familiar authority, Dr. Alford. "We may remember," he says, "that this was the first attempt made by Satan to obtain by hypocrisy, a footing among Christ's flock; and that however, for wise reasons, this may since have been permitted, it was absolutely necessary, in the infancy of the Church, that such attempt should at once, and with severity, be defeated."

We see, then, how completely we shall miss the lesson of this particular chapter if we go away with the notion that Ananias and Sapphira lied that day, and God struck them with death, and forget what was special in the sin and the punishment. "A lying tongue," we know indeed, is among the things which "the Lord hates." There it stands in

Solomon's list between "the proud look" and "the hands that shed innocent blood;" and one most fearful subject of contemplation, whenever we review man's moral history, and look on to the awful future, is the falseness that taints every department of human life, the almost infinite multitude of small deviations from truth, or ingenious attempts at fraud, coupled with the certainty that God heareth every spoken lie, and seeth every dissembling heart, and will confront the offenders one day with the enduring record. But we speak just now to men who would scorn a lie in its naked ugliness, who frame their speech according to the received rules of uprightness and fair dealing; and to them we say, Depart not without your warning. The child's lesson, in connexion with this well-known story, is not your lesson. The tragedy has a moral of deeper significance; and they whose names are branded with infamy are represented now-a-days, not by men who cheat for gain, not by the vulgar crowd of story-tellers, whose faults of laziness or carelessness are concealed by the denial which comes as readily to practised lips as the honest truth, but by the fair-seeming pretenders who deal falsely with God, by men and women who more or less consciously are living down to a low worldly standard, while in outward demeanour, or in sober company at

least, they affect the current phrases and usages of men of piety ; by numbers in this bustling age whose zeal is rather the zeal of partisanship than zeal for God, and whose gifts for religious objects, unconsecrated by faith and prayer, quite out of proportion possibly to their domestic charities, become a sort of passport to the places where better men congregate for worship or mutual counsel. And without assuming any peculiar character, or standing out from the crowd of common worshippers, who knoweth not that, when Religion is in good repute, we are sorely tempted to mix up base and earthly motives with our offering to God, sorely tempted to have an eye to our fellow-men in determining the measure and character of our devotions, sorely tempted to adopt the form and fashion of godliness which shall win us credit without imposing any acts of rigorous self-denial, sorely tempted to be particular in the observances which cannot be omitted without discredit, while there is conscious failure in private duties, and our old sins perpetually assail and wound us, because the inner fortress is unguarded ?

Here, then, among ourselves the sin of Ananias is repeated from month to month. There is no selling of farms, just now, to feed the poor ; and times are changed since Apostles ruled the Church, and had among other gifts



that discernment of spirits which helped them to detect and punish men's hidden sins. But the Arch-Deceiver, who filled the heart of that wretched man when he lied unto God, has been busy ever since, *is* busy now, *will be* busy till the Angel with "the great chain in his hand," and "the key of the bottomless pit," shall seize and bind him. And among his favourite arts is *this*, tempting men to go a certain way with the saints while the heart cleaves to its idols, to pay tribute to God with a reserve of disloyalty, blinding half-hearted worshippers by a shew of godliness, or by certain measured services bearing a close resemblance to much that is done by strictly religious persons, and so keeping them back from real loving fellowship with Christ, and the consecration of heart and life to His service. It is a crafty device, and fearfully successful. It lures the dissemblers to their ruin; it brings reproach upon the Church, as if her worthy sons were no purer than these detected impostors; it puts a weapon into the hands of the mockers and scoffers, who, instead of distinguishing between the reality and the pretence, make Religion itself a counterfeit, and pride themselves on the sincerity which speaks out its honest mind, and has no dealings and no sympathy with the suspected parties.

My dear brethren, judge yourselves in this

matter. The name of hypocrisy, I know, has a hateful sound ; and when we talk of men who consciously dissemble with God, and wear a Sunday cloak for gain or credit, who are self-convicted on their knees, and therefore for shame have well-nigh ceased to pray, who will talk as the godly talk one hour, and cheat over the counter the next, who are loud in their censures of other men's frailties, and hug their own darling sin in secret, we seem to you to describe some monster of wickedness from whom you would flee as from a deadly plague, or a raging wild beast. But there is dissembling, remember, not of the grosser sort, which may taint our offering, and keep God's blessing out of our hearts. Double motives are our bane ; and a single eye is a gift beyond all price. Oh, let us shun the crowd sometimes, and get alone with God. Let men's praises go for what they are worth, and the Lord's judgment upon us be the thing we desire to know. Human eyes we cannot escape ; the esteem and good-will of neighbours we may covet within lawful bounds ; a hermit life is far from being a Christian life, and the man, who boasts of caring nothing for his fellow-men, is commonly one to whom little is due from them for services of any kind. But let us try to live in independence of them, and work under God's Eye, weighing good and evil in the righteous balance,

and forsaking other guides that we may follow Him whose words are all Truth, and whose life was all Purity and Love.

Access to God through Christ, faith in Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, vital union with Christ through the Spirit, humble walking with Christ as our ever-present and sympathizing Friend, these together make the believer's highest privilege, and surest safeguard. *From the Cross* he can look up to God, and search himself, not dreading to know the truth, but longing to probe the sore to the very bottom. *At the Cross* he can review his course stage by stage, and when some hitherto undetected sin comes out to view, or some neglected duty assumes a new importance, can confess the fault without misgivings as to a pardon, and gird himself up for action with a good hope. The well-taught Christian can afford, if we may say so, to be sincere with God. Being clothed with goodly raiment of the Lord's providing, he does not need to go begging to the world's schools of morality for garments, tattered and unsightly at the best. Our sins need not be covered up. Our frequent failures may be frankly confessed; our highest aspirations may remain unchecked; "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" may be what we aim at continually, and yet when our efforts teach us more and more of our weakness and nothing-

ness, we need not have a desponding thought. This, we know, is the real practical working of the Gospel when it is heartily embraced, and obeyed, and loved; but alas! in all we do and say, how prone are we to forget God too much, and to let earthly motives mingle with our nobler feelings! Human eyes, and ears, and tongues,—alas! my brethren, who can forget them, though we say again and again, with the Apostle, “He that judgeth me is the Lord,” and though we know how blindly and capriciously both praise and censure are awarded by human tribunals? Oh, let us beware of treacherous guides, and false lights, and flatteries that sound like music in our ears. Let us take counsel with our own consciences, and with wise friends, and try to live near to the Fountain-head of Truth! May we dissemble neither with men who know us not, nor with God who knoweth all things; but let all we do and say have the stamp of sincerity upon it. Open-hearted, day-light Christians are they who go on their way rejoicing, and help to build up the Church, and bring abundant honour to Christ their Lord.

## SERMON VI.

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### THE FIRST MARTYR.

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ACTS vii. 55, 56.

“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

*(St. Stephen's Day.)*

“I CAME not to send peace on earth, but a sword,” said the Lord concerning Himself; and yet we know that He was the Prince of Peace. “The time cometh,” He said to His disciples before He left them, “that whoso killeth you will think that he doeth God service;” and yet these men were not public enemies, but the world's noblest benefactors. Threats have been reported already in some of the preceding chapters; but now we see the “sword” unsheathed. Warned the Apostles

had been by men in authority that they must not teach or preach in the name of Jesus; but they had a higher command from One to whom obedience was due *yet more*; and so a necessity was laid upon them, and they did not dare to hold their peace. Issue, therefore, is speedily joined. The men who preached Christ are brought into collision with the men who crucified Him, and what threatenings and warnings could not do to silence and scatter them it is speedily resolved to do by violence. Stephen, one of the seven newly appointed to dispense the alms of the Church, was a marked man among the company of believers, and had attracted considerable attention both by his preaching, and by miracles wrought in attestation of his message. He is seized, therefore, and the council summoned, and witnesses are readily forthcoming, either to invent false charges, or to report invidiously, and with something of exaggeration and perversion, certain things which he had said about the Law and the Gospel. The mustering of the parties for conflict is described at the end of the last chapter; this is taken up with Stephen's defence and martyrdom. Why he spent so much time in referring to the older Jewish History may not be very plain to us; we should have expected less about Moses, and more about Christ; but he spoke, doubtless, what was

given him to speak, and in his concluding sentences directly challenged the Judges, in God's name, as betrayers and murderers of his Lord. We do not read of any sentence formally pronounced; the mind of the court could not be doubtful, and the excited passions of the populace made some among them ready executioners; so in a tumultuous manner, it would seem, the prisoner was hurried beyond the walls of the city, and there stoned as a blasphemer.

And how did the first martyr meet his end? That is an interesting enquiry to every Christian. We know well how patiently and bravely vast numbers have gone through the fiery ordeal in later days. Noble testimonies have been borne for Christ and the Gospel, in our own land and in other lands, when weakness has been confronted with power, and men and women, innocent of crime, but loyal to truth and the God of truth, have gone to death cheerfully as to a bridal feast, though one word of retractation would have given them back their freedom. The leader of that "noble army" was advanced to double honour, and the passage which records his death-struggle must ever rank with the most interesting portions in the whole range of Scripture narratives. There is unreasoning bigotry at work, and malignant cruelty, contrasted with moral grandeur which makes one feel that the

world is not poor and bankrupt while God's Spirit thus stirs the hearts of the faithful ; one party maddened to fury, and jealous for their Law, while they shed innocent blood without scruple,—the other, composed and full of charity, animated by his Master's presence, and almost echoing some of his Master's dying words, the world reaping a barren triumph for the moment, the Church reading to enemies and friends a noble lesson for all times : such is one of our Morning Lessons, and a few plain remarks upon it may help to fix it on our memories, and supply some matter for instructive meditation.

Observe, first of all, that *Stephen is alone*. Throughout the narrative we read of none that stood near him to offer sympathy or counsel. We have no reason to think that the Apostles proved faithless, or played the coward as they had once done to their shame before. The whole business might be so hastily concluded, possibly, that there was no time for his friends to rally round him ; or prudence of the highest sort might prompt the leaders in a noble cause not to expose their lives till God should call them to the battle-field. At any rate it was so ordered by the providence of God that no friend was by, none to second his message or vindicate his character. In that moment of extremest peril, at this crisis of the Church's



history, one standard-bearer stood up, and faced the enemy, and found strength equal to his day. Human aid and support there was none; within the council-chamber, while he pleaded more like a prophet than a prisoner, and without the city, where the murderous work was completed, his eye rested on no friendly countenance, and to the lookers on he would seem like a friendless and deserted man. In this respect he was like his Lord; and as ages have rolled on, and new confessors have had to do their part in evil times, this sight has been repeated a hundred times.

Not a man among us knows, or can guess, what that solitude is, till he has tried. Companionship in danger not only helps a man's resolution, but mightily confirms his faith. We can understand how Satan will ply the lonely one with his subtlest temptations, how, just when life looks most precious, and a death by violence seems frightful beyond description, there will be whispered solicitations and remonstrances, as from a generous friend careful for his safety,—whispered suggestions, too, that the sacrifice is needless, and the cherished opinion may prove a mistake after all. "Alone, and so many against thee! Art thou so wise, then, and is the whole world gone astray? Is thy mind quite settled? or if thou dost take time for thought, may not more light be given

thee, so that thou wilt retrace thy steps, and seek some safer path? Thou dost sell life cheap, surely, if thou hast shame for thy portion, too, and can find none to own the cause for which thou dost stand up so manfully. Spare thyself for a while, and if numbers come about thee, brave as thou art, thou wilt have a better chance to propagate thy faith hereafter ;” thoughts like these, we are sure, have tried many a lonely man’s faith, and made him cry out, in agony, to God for needful strength and courage.

Stephen’s, indeed, was not the sharp trial of those who know not whether a brother be found any where, or a handful of brethren, to reflect their own minds on some vital points. Scattered through Jerusalem, by this time, there was an army of faithful men who held with him that Jesus was the Christ, and gloried in His name and Cross. But, at any rate, he seems to have been alone in his condemnation, and alone in his martyrdom. Can we wonder that, under such circumstances, special support and consolation were vouchsafed to him, support and consolation more entirely sustaining and satisfying than if a bright-winged angel had stood by his side, and said, “Fear not, thou man of God, for thy soul’s life is in safe keeping, and, if thou dost sow in tears, thou shalt reap in joy?” His eyes were unsealed for a moment,

and he saw what common saints only hear of by report. There is something very grand in the description of the prisoner having before him, at the same time, a hateful picture of man's wickedness, and a vision of God, and the blessed Saviour, in the far-off world above him. The very judges, it seems, who should have been calm and unimpassioned, lost all self-control, and "gnashed upon him with their teeth;" *they* were full in view, and the prisoner must have felt that all hope was gone; but in the sky, full in view also, was that form of unearthly beauty which Stephen, "full of the Holy Ghost," recognized at once as the form of the Son of Man. Openly to the Court he proclaimed the fact. They might believe it, if they would, or they might deem him yet more than ever a dangerous fanatic; but, at any rate, their malice was impotent henceforth, for by no possibility could the man thus favoured fear death, or shrink from pain, or suppose the poor body worth saving at the price of a moment's disloyalty. *He* was ready for the sacrifice; and *they* thought delay was sinful or dangerous; so "stopping their ears," as persecutors do in every age, they hurried him violently to death.

Shall we pause a moment, before we follow them, just to say the vision was a real one, and what Stephen saw when the heavens were lifted like a curtain you and I might see to-

day, and every day, if God did not choose that we should walk by faith, and not by sight? We have our allotted place on earth; and as we tread the beaten path of common life, what a spectacle have we of moral disorder, and prevalent unbelief! How few are they who witness faithfully, and live bravely up to their profession, and really desire to have the Christian rule in all its length and breadth written on their hearts! How often is the earnest, zealous, single-hearted believer, like a confessor of other days, alone amidst a multitude! and while he speaks only that which their Scriptures declare, and which they are pledged to, if they be honest men, how strange do his words appear to those whose current language comes from the world's markets, and the world's pleasure-gardens, and the world's scenes of rivalry and ambition! Let any man who communes with God daily, and who must traffic with his fellows daily, only mingle with them familiarly, and hear what is not whispered, but talked aloud, of their hopes and plans, of their past successes and dreaded failures, their boastings, or their murmurings, and how often is the thought forced upon him, "Alas! God is forgotten here; men seem to take no account of His presence, but scheme and speculate as if He had left the world to itself."

And yet it is not so, we are sure. He is a

God Who hideth Himself, indeed, from the unbelieving and proud-hearted; but Who is very near His people at their praying times, and working times. There are scales upon our eyes; the spiritual sight is clouded by the veil of flesh; or angels, doubtless, might be seen about our path, and the glory of the Lord of angels might stream down upon us, making our faces to shine like that of Moses on the mount, or of Stephen in the council-chamber. We look for no special favours like those; but let us have more of what is within our reach. We are to endure as "seeing Him who is invisible." We are to "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." Let the thoughts and hopes of our best times be deeper, closer, more earnest, more realizing. Let there be meditation and Bible-reading and watching unto prayer, more of them all, and better, purposely that we may go through the day with the thought that Christ is near us, and that in the hour of temptation we may, in very deed, feel His sustaining arm, and hear His loving tones.

Our trial, in a sense, is the martyr's trial. Oh, let ours be the martyr's faith! We may not wander to the desert, or bury ourselves in dark cells where the world's glare, and the world's hubbub, shall not reach us. We have

to face the men who love not Christ ; but *from them* we may turn, when we will, to the world where "Christ is all and in all." That world is as near ours as ever. The way to the Holiest is always open. God's blessing cometh surely on the thirsty soul, as His showers on the parched harvest-fields. The heavens are never really shut, for faith can pierce the veil, though sense cannot. Let our hearts look up ; let us close our eyes when men look as ugly to us as the sinners who "gnashed with their teeth" against the man of God, and then think of "the general assembly and Church of the first-born," whose names are written in heaven, with "the innumerable company of angels," and "Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant," and "God, the Judge of all." The world will be, not dearer to us, but only brighter, as God's world and our appointed home, when we can escape from it oftener, and come back rejoicing that for ever the Son of Man, in Whom is all our hope, standeth at the right hand of God.

We pass on to the open air scene, to the place of concourse where justice was to be done upon a blasphemer, as the men of Jerusalem thought in their madness ; to the public stage, as all Christendom says and knows, where Christ's soldier fought a good fight, and won a noble triumph. Martyrology in later days, we know, has been the scandal of the Church.

Lying fables by the thousand have been written to exalt the virtues of favourite saints ; and the inventors of them, as if they were writing for children, generally thought they could not stuff too many miracles into their tale ; so that single chapters in the books which fed the superstitions of the Middle Ages, have more wonders in them than are told us altogether as being wrought by Christ's Apostles for the establishment of the faith. What a contrast to narratives of this sort, stamped as they are with the authority of the Church of Rome, and believed like Bible stories by the devout among her people ; what a contrast, I say, are the last two verses of this precious chapter ; "They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

What a simple, heart-touching story ! Unmurmuring submission, victorious faith, forgiveness for cruel wrongs, pity for men's blindness, prayer for their safety, all crowded into the last few minutes of life ! Truly the Spirit of Holiness had marked that man, and put a crown upon his head, before the last struggle was over, and the Martyr's palm was given ! Many a brave soldier of the Cross, called out in his day to "resist unto blood, striving against sin,"

has witnessed a good confession; but none better and worthier than this. We know not whether any hard hearts were melted by it; whether some who had gone forth to murder went home to pray; whether Saul, who heard it all, had his prejudices shaken, or his curiosity quickened for the moment: but something, we cannot doubt, was gained that day towards the world's conversion; and assuredly the Church's sons were stronger and braver from that hour to fight the hardest battles, and bear the heaviest burdens, assured that none could really harm them while they were followers of that which was good. The thing was not done in a corner. Jerusalem rang with the story before nightfall. Thousands of disciples mingled thoughts of Stephen, and thanksgivings for his blessed end, with their evening prayer; and presently we find the Gospel, which had hitherto not wandered beyond the walls of the Holy City, taking a new start, as disciples, not frightened, but scattered by the short-sighted enemy, "went every where preaching the word."

And we, in this distant age, rejoice to read the record, and feel our hearts warmed and gladdened whenever it comes under review. Oh, let us learn Charity where Stephen learnt it, *at the Cross!* Let us be ashamed to make much of our little wrongs, after we have heard our Lord's prayer for His murderers, and have



seen it reproduced by his dying servant, like the echo of some sweet strain coming back to us from the mountain side, and repeated, note for note. If we live in peace, not knowing what danger means, fenced round by the strong barriers of law and custom, and, better still, guarded by Providence, because God hath planted our nation as a choice vine on a very fruitful hill, and lets us be, in some sense, His almoners and messengers of good tidings to other lands, oh, let us not abuse His gifts, or forget our stewardship! We are Christ's soldiers notwithstanding, and may not live at ease, forgetting our vows, and the world's wants. Again and again we must pray, "Lord, lay not this sin of unbelief to their charge;" "Lord, spare and pity these men who have despised Thy Gospel, and been proof against warnings and mercies without end;" "Lord, yet visit them in mercy, and let the slaves of sin learn to rejoice in the holy liberty of Thy redeemed children."

And, for ourselves, my dear brethren, let us be ready, when our turn comes, to commit our souls to the Saviour's keeping in words as few, and with a faith as simple and fervent as Stephen's, when, amid that storm of rough blows, and that crowd of infuriated enemies, he "fell asleep." More peaceful, probably, will be our departure. If our course be not suddenly

interrupted (as, never let us forget, it may be to-morrow or to-night), there will be kind looks about us, and the voice of soothing kindness, and ministering hands to do what love and skill can do to make our burden lighter. But the accidents of our departure out of life are insignificant, compared with the realities of the soul's migration into an unknown world, and the soul's trembling, when the mortal tabernacle is almost shaken down, on the threshold of eternity. Without any aggravations, in the shape of violence, though the scene of the last conflict be a chamber of guarded quietness, and our resting-place a bed smooth as down, there will be mighty combatants there, so to speak, and a stake more precious than the kingdoms for which men have been fighting ever since arms were forged, and an issue, almost decided, immeasurably glorious or unspeakably disastrous. "*Where, to-morrow? how, to-morrow? what, to-morrow?*"—are questions not very often asked in terror, perhaps, only because Death steals upon such numbers unawares, and full consciousness is gone before danger looks close at hand; and, also because Conscience is bribed and silenced by the thousand arts which Satan teaches, and men learn to their undoing. But these questions might be asked often with terrible propriety and emphasis, if men knew

themselves as they are, and felt that God is awful in His Justice and His Holiness, though, through Christ, His Mercy reaches down through all the ages of time to penitents of every name.

Wherefore, let us be watchful against all decays of faith, and careful, like prudent men, not only for our soul's safety, but for our soul's comfort in that trying hour. To a really awakened man, surprised and taken off his guard, with many recent shortcomings lying heavy on his conscience, years of agony, we might almost say, may be forced into a few hours of suspense. That is a beautiful prayer which the Apostle prayed for the Christian Church, "The God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost;" but remember, if we ask blessings like these for ourselves, we must be true men, not covering up little sins, not making frequent compromises with duty, not content with a reputation for godliness among men of the stricter sort, but walking in the light, watching against vain thoughts and unholy tempers, trying to get the flesh subdued to the spirit, and living like men whose treasure is in heaven. Be sure it is a blessed thing to be calm and undisturbed in the hour of Nature's weakness, to be able to speak words of comfort to listen-

ing friends instead of having to look abroad for comfort ourselves; to commit our souls humbly, thankfully, hopefully, to One, long known and loved and served, and then to fall asleep, like a tired traveller, not sorry to leave a world where there is so much of sorrow and confusion, for the land of peace and rest to which the spirits of the just shall be gathered till the resurrection day shall come.

Another sermon might be preached to those whose faith is yet to seek, whose repentance is not begun, who are laying up no treasure in heaven, who are not standing with the Church against the world, but unmistakeably with the world against Christ. To them we must say this much at least: "Remember, my brethren, it is not martyrs only who have to confess Christ manfully, but His true people everywhere, and at all times. Remember, you may do the work of Satan without ever warring actively against the saints. Remember our Lord's own terms of discipleship, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'" We cannot draw the parting-line now-a-days as when persecution sifted the Church; but God sees it as plainly as ever. If our souls be not quickened to life, grafted into Christ, like the branch into the vine, nourished with heavenly food, and training for a home of purity under

the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, then our Christian profession is a vain thing, and our next step may be into perdition. Oh, turn to the stronghold while yet you may! Let your religion be, not a dreamy thing, without life or power; not a customary thing, merely, teaching you to talk and live like the sober part of your neighbours; not a thing of times and seasons, put on, and put off, like a Sunday dress; but real, earnest, decided, a life-long struggle, a heaven-seeking pilgrimage. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," remembering ever that "it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Days of persecution sift men's Faith and Love; but smooth times like ours are testing times too. "Work while it is called to-day, before the night cometh when no man can work." Work for God and eternity; work, and watch, and pray, with Christ's name on your foreheads, and Christ's love in your hearts. *Thus far* all true Christians resemble Stephen. We may not hope, indeed, to see the Lord in heaven, as he did, before the grave is past; but He is as certainly near to help us in our need, if we lean on His Almighty arm; and with the same trusting faith, when our time shall come, we may utter for our last words on earth, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

## SERMON VII.

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### THE CHRISTIAN ELOQUENT IN DEATH.

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ACTS vii. 59; viii. 1.

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit . . . . And Saul was consenting unto his death.”

*(St Stephen's Day.)*

THE meeting here described was a memorable event in the Church's History. What were the feelings of Saul, as he looked on, and beheld the martyr die, we cannot tell. In what temper he mused upon the scene, and thought over its details, when the time of solitude and reflection came, it is vain for us to conjecture. His conversion did not follow immediately, and his temper, so far as we know, was unaltered till the memorable day when he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus; but his witnessing of that deed of violence had its share, whatever it might be, in the

formation of his character; and therefore we pause upon it, and will try to draw from it some useful lessons.

I. Do not let us think there are any chance meetings in this strange world of ours.

It was no accident, depend upon it, that Saul, afterwards called Paul, was by, when St. Stephen won his martyr's crown. We see the importance of that encounter between the saint, whose course was finished, and the man, chosen to be an Apostle, whose career was not yet begun; and can readily grant, therefore, that all was divinely appointed; that Saul was drawn to that point by an invisible hand, and that the martyr, so to speak, was delivering God's message to Saul, though he died, and never knew his brother-disciple by name or sight.

This is admitted respecting a meeting like that; but never let us think that saints and martyrs live under one form of Providential government, and that common men like ourselves live under another. Never let us fancy, in our ignorance and unbelief, that the Almighty shaped and ruled *their* world, and that He is banished from *ours*. Never let us wish or try to escape into a dim and shadowy region, where Chance is seated on the throne of Empire, and men wander where they will,

unobserved and uncontrolled by any higher Intelligence. Impiety will sometimes wear the cloak of Humility, and talk of worms like ourselves being too insignificant to be watched at every step by the Eye that never sleeps. It will expound to willing listeners its own theory of human life, admitting that God may interpose when great interests are at stake, but asserting that little men strike into some beaten or unfrequented path at pleasure, and that the hand of Omnipotence is not required to touch the springs and wheels on which their fortunes turn.

In such reasoning as this there is surely a twofold fallacy. First, what is little, and what is great? Take into account the wide domain which stretches from God's central throne to the farthest limits of creation, and what is our world? and what are the men who move to and fro upon its surface, the proudest and the grandest of them? and what are wars and revolutions, and plagues and famines, and floods and earthquakes? all insignificant beyond description. But take into account, on the other hand, responsibility and an immortal nature, and the relation of dependence on an Heavenly Parent, with all that is involved in the rewards of loyalty and the perils of disobedience; take into account the great Redemption, and the universal Promise



and the inspiriting thought that *here* God's purposes are being worked out, while conflicts and triumphs, dimly perceived and half credited by us, are watched by archangels with the deepest interest, and afford matter for joyous exultation in heavenly places, and *then* what about us is mean? which of us all, if bought with precious blood, can be overlooked and forgotten? *where*, though every hair of every head be numbered, is the wonder equal to the *first* wonder that God did not give a rebel world to destruction, but humbled and impoverished His own Son to save it?

And, secondly, even if some pass for great, and some are reckoned mean, in this strangely varied scene; if the higher department, so to speak, be handed over to the immediate superintendence of heaven, while much is done of a homely kind that hardly needs special guidance or interposition; still the two worlds intermingle at a thousand points. Something that looks little becomes the parent of an evil of portentous magnitude; or a deed, small at first as the mustard-seed, dropped into the ground at a venture, grows into a harvest of blessing by which a nation is enriched. The first link in a chain of events shall be a word spoken at hazard, a journey taken without a motive, a child's whim, a fool's false reckoning, but the last shall be a city consumed by

conflagration, a kingdom convulsed by civil strife, a generation wasted and half devoured by the aggressions of war; yet the first link and the last were as certainly bound together as if an hour's interval only had elapsed between the original movement and its final consequences.

The subject is a wide and a deep one; we do but touch upon it in connexion with the certain fact that Saul and Stephen came together that day for good. And as God guided *their* steps, so God guides *ours*. You can tell of meetings, some of you, which have coloured your whole life, meetings which you never planned, meetings, it may be, with one unknown to you before, as the Apostle was to the Martyr, yet never forgotten, because step by step you can trace the occurrences which have grown out of that single interview, and which have done more, perhaps, to influence your condition or your character than all that you have deliberately planned for your own good through half a life. What has followed in the way of blessing, you are sure has been God's giving; and no less certain is it that He led you in His own way at first, and brought you where He would have you to be, and sent the friend to meet you at the proper time and place, just as He sends His bright-winged angels hither and thither, and they do His will

far and near, and then return rejoicing to His presence.

These thoughts are good for us, because the more we own God every where, and look on the common working world as His world, shaped by His wisdom, and brightened by His presence, the more diligently and cheerfully shall we do His will. But all must be done in faith. These are no thoughts for us, they will not cheer us in our lonely times, or put spirit into our active labours, if our prayers are as formal as those of half our fellow-worshippers, our hearts as cold, and our lives as worldly. We may share God's providential gifts, in that case, like our godly neighbours; nay, they may be showered down upon us in rich abundance; our homes may seem like citadels for strength and security, and like gardens of the Lord for plenty; but these gifts are no tokens of God's peculiar favour, the comprehensive, heart-cheering promise about "all things working together for good" is not ours, unless we be living in God's house as children of the kingdom, as Christ's redeemed ones, confessing our Master's Name like Stephen, reflecting some portion of His loving spirit like Stephen, committing our souls, our poor, burdened, struggling souls to Him, like the dying martyr, not once only, but for each day's duties and each day's temptations.

II. And now we come to a second inference. We must not think that good teaching, or good example is like wasted seed, because the fruit is not at once apparent.

Stephen died, and little thought who saw him die. His dying scene was like the conqueror's march of triumph; but even then his spirit would have been gladdened, and room would have been found for one emphatic burst of thankfulness,—“Glory be to God who can make the wrath of man to praise Him,”—if it had been revealed to him that one, who stood within his view, would soon rank with St. Peter and St. John as the Champion of the Cross, and a master-builder of Christ's Church, in the generation that was coming. He did not reap the harvest, nor see it reaped; yet was he sowing for it when he lived and died so well. St. Paul was included in his prayer, when he said, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;” the prayer may have been answered in the case of many more; we know it was answered in *one* case, and that, as both loved and served the same Lord, so they have been admitted long ago to the same glorious kingdom.

We cannot in reason, I think, disconnect St. Paul's subsequent history with the day of Stephen's martyrdom. And then comes the encouraging lesson I want to draw from the

brief meeting and sudden parting of these holy men. We may do good in the world that we never live to see. God's ways are wonderful, and just as seed buried in the earth, if it lie beyond the influence of the upper air, will neither germinate nor wholly die, and, when the upturned clod shall bring it back to the region of light and warmth, though twenty harvests shall have been gathered in meanwhile, will sprout and grow and become a full ripe ear at last, so is the seed of the kingdom; so is the preaching of God's faithful servants; so is the warning spoken to-day by some godly man to his godless neighbour; so is the mother's earliest lesson in Christianity to the child at her knee, and the father's last testimony for God from a dying bed. Many summers and winters may go by, and bring with them no spiritual harvest; there may be grief and sorrow of heart because admonition seems spent in vain, and the field that has been tilled and sown in faith looks like a barren waste; some who have lived very near the light, and seen it shine brightly and purely before their eyes for many years, may darken their souls by sin, and at last make a boast of their impiety; but they are not lost men yet; there may be misgivings and relentings inwardly while those who sit by their side suppose them hardened into insensibility. The

slumbers of conscience are not unbroken. The days of simple childhood will often look bright as compared with those of guilty manhood. Solemn texts learnt long ago, and never forgotten, pursue and haunt them as if they were written in characters of fire on their chamber-walls; or whisperings of God's Spirit, like the soft showers of spring on the thirsty soil, may carry home to their hearts the blessed tidings that none have sinned past forgiveness; and all that they knew so well *once* about "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world" shall come back upon them almost as a discovery, and the lesson shall be learnt anew, learnt with the heart now, and never forgotten more.

These are no dreams or fancy pictures, you know, my brethren, but realities going on in the living world around us. What is well done for God we ought to think is never wholly lost; and half of what we fancy to be wasted may ripen and bear fruit when our course is ended. "In the morning," then, "sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand." "The husbandman," as St. James reminds us, "waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it;" and if we wait and work and pray, and God hears our prayers and blesses our work, a thousand times more precious is the fruit that we shall gather in.

We try to comfort others thus; and surely we, of all men, need encouragement such as this, that our hands may not hang down in very weariness, and our task become a burden too heavy for us to bear. Does the teaching of a whole year seem visibly to bring out a handful of souls, to serve God openly and actively in a spirit at all like that of men who have felt the power of the Gospel, and have bound its holy, searching, spiritual law upon their consciences? How few are they on whom we can reckon to take in hand any work that is specially Christian, to give out their sympathies freely when something is attempted expressly for the cause and name of the Redeemer, to thank us if we speak very plainly about duties avowedly neglected, and talents running sinfully and fatally to waste! We long to see more souls manifestly alive to God, more depth and earnestness of feeling, more standing out from the frivolous, pleasure-loving crowd, more enquiry after the safe path and the thousand details of Christian duty, more independence of thought and action, as if men had been taught of God, and really felt their individual responsibility to Him, instead of the wretched slavery to custom which fetters their limbs, and seals their lips, and deadens their consciences.

The end, however, blessed be God, is not yet. We will hope that the leaven is silently work-

ing in many hearts, that numbers are uneasy and dissatisfied who wear a smooth brow, and walk contentedly at present in the world's highway ; that young disciples, whom we know not, or scarcely know, are remembering their spoken vows, and choosing the good part quietly and resolvedly, though as yet, in a community like ours, their testimony is scarcely heard, and their influence on others is unperceived ; that what has been feebly spoken, if God's truth was in the message, and conscience owned it at the time, shall be not wholly buried and lost, but watered and quickened into life hereafter, aye, though half a life may intervene between the sowing-time and the reaping-time.

III. One more reflection is suggested by the text, and *that*, I think, no unprofitable one. Let us remember that watchful eyes are upon us at all times, and we may be doing good, or doing harm, unconsciously, to some whom we know not now, and never shall know.

St. Stephen thought, perhaps, that the men before him were all alike. He did not know that one in that crowd looked on with more eager interest and with deeper feeling than the rest. The dying man did nothing for shew. All was spoken in manly sympathy, as by one on the threshold of eternity. Nothing was aimed at Saul; for to St. Stephen he was



but one of a hundred spectators, probably all strange to him alike; but every word was heard and remembered; and to a thoughtful, enquiring mind, an end that looked so holy must have seemed a wonder, if the dying man were indeed a profane blasphemer.

Surely, my Christian brethren, a lesson like that ought not to be lost upon us. If God has taught us by His Spirit, and we know something of the world's vanity, something of the blessedness of serving Christ in a spirit of thankfulness, something of the hope that is full of immortality, then, without going out of our way, or setting ourselves up to be preachers to all we meet, we may wonderfully help the ignorant and ungodly to understand what living Christianity is. We may expound to them what can hardly be learnt from books, by the persuasive eloquence of a holy consistent example. We may recommend the *temper* of the Gospel to some who are shrinking from it as too strict, or who have seen wretched pretenders to godliness discredit all they have said by conduct on which the world cried shame. In the occupations and engagements of common life we may be testifying for God and preaching Christ, as St. Stephen was, when he died a death of martyrdom, if only we act the faithful, Christian part all through, shewing that our treasure is in heaven, and that we have a fountain of charity

in our hearts ready to go forth in words and deeds of kindness.

I am not talking, just now, of what is done of set purpose for the improvement of others. I am talking of the silent influence of example when some are seen to be men of God, and their words and deeds are stamped with an elevation and purity which belong not to the citizens of this world. Sometimes an observant and thoughtful person will set himself to watch one in good repute for piety, and will mark whether the private life seems to correspond with the public profession. It is very sad if, at such times, we speak unadvisedly what he will remember not only against us, but against our Lord. It is a blessed service rendered to the cause of truth and righteousness if we stand the test, and because God helped us to act faithfully, and speak wisely, the man shall trust us more henceforth, and receive our message more willingly.

At other times, without jealousy or suspicion on either side, we may sit among the gay and merry-hearted, and hear the talk that is current among them, and find them confessing with their own lips that they are making this world their all, and sailing with the current whithersoever it shall carry them. *Then* it may be that we shall speak a word in season, without sternly reproving or rashly censuring, which

would be unseemly for the place and company. *Then*, if we are only real, if we speak modestly and truly what is in our hearts; if feeling that we are to be Christians, and act like Christians *every where*, we just do what becomes us, and are as bold on our side as the scoffers are on theirs, grave words fitly uttered may be as barbed arrows cleaving to the conscience of some among them, and *we* may be remembered in coming days as Stephen was remembered by Saul.

On the other hand, fearful mischief will ensue, if the life contradict the lips. Parents, remember this, if you be trying to bring up your children for God. Masters, remember this, if you take the Christian course of assembling your households for worship, and say that you desire to see those whom you employ God's servants, as well as yours. Remember this, all of you who become teachers of others in any sense, or, from some forwardness in religious duties, are quoted by friends and companions as making pretensions to godliness. Numbers, who are dull-sighted in other things, are sharp-sighted to detect the flaw when there is manifest inconsistency between words and deeds; and it is not too much to say that the evil deeds of those who pass for saints, and the infirmities of many who are really saints, are the favourite weapons of those who fight

against the truth, and are wielded with fearful power.

My dear brethren, remember it was not to the *first* disciples only, but to faithful Christians of all times that the charge was given, "Let your light *so* shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It is not the loudest talker who will do the best, but the meekest Christian; not he who blames rashly, but he who pities deeply; not one who is for ever setting the world to rights, but his neighbour who lives near to God, and keeps his heart with all diligence, and tries to beautify his life with every Christian grace. May this be our aim and purpose, my brethren, while we tread our pilgrim's path, and bless God for the labours and triumphs of those who have lived and died in the faith. Undistinguished our lives will be as compared with St. Paul's. Uneventful our departure out of life is almost sure to be, as compared with St. Stephen's; but, if we are faithful unto death, He, who taught and guided and blessed them, will teach and guide and bless us, and ours, too, will be the "crown of glory which fadeth not away."

## SERMON VIII.

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### THE GENTILE CONVERT.

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ACTS viii. 35—38.

“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.”

SUCH is the conclusion of a brief but very interesting episode in this eventful story. In the first five chapters of this book we find Peter the foremost actor. For a little while Stephen is brought upon the stage; his career, one of singular activity and usefulness, is presently run, and closed with that martyr's death which fills the first page of a glorious history. St. Paul

presently succeeds, and occupies a very large portion of the remaining chapters ; but the interval between Stephen's departure out of life, and Saul's conversion to the faith, is partly filled up with a narrative which assigns some importance to a man of whom we never hear afterwards but once, yet evidently one who was greatly honoured of God, and permitted to do a great work in the Church when she first began to testify for her Lord. This is Philip, lately chosen with Stephen and five others to dispense the alms of the Church, and described in a later chapter as "*Philip the Evangelist.*" Already his preaching had made a great stir in Samaria. Evil spirits had been cast out ; lame and palsied men had been restored to soundness ; the Gospel had been joyfully received by numbers ; a noted man, who had practised sorceries and bewitched many, came under its convicting power and was baptized ; and a good work was begun which was presently reported at Jerusalem, and brought down Peter and John to help and direct it.

Our portion of to-day describes another transaction in which the same man, Philip, bore a part ; but, in the second case, he had to do with a single person instead of many. "The angel of the Lord," we read, "spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza ; 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."

Now of this man we never heard before, and never hear again. We know only what this passage tells. In all probability, he was a Gentile proselyte; but how taught in the Jews' religion, how guided up to this point, this history does not inform us, nor any other. His work at Jerusalem is finished; his face is towards his distant home; he travels in a style suited to the rank which he held in the household of royalty, and had no thought, when that stage of his journey commenced, that any thing new or strange would happen to him before he reached the end of it. He had leisure, probably, during his days of travel, for quiet reading and holy meditation, such as came but seldom in his home; and there he sat, with a portion of the Old Testament Scriptures in his hand, reading what he very imperfectly understood, yet glad to read what he knew to be a portion of God's own Word, the written record of His unchangeable will.

This man's equipage and attendants, no doubt, marked him out as a person of some consequence; all about him had a foreign air;

Philip would naturally look on with something of curiosity; but before he had time to speculate or make any enquiries, he was prompted by a voice which he felt to come from the Spirit of God, and which said to him, not audibly, but still plainly and intelligibly, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." The two men, therefore, are providentially brought together, one to teach, and the other to learn. The mode of guidance was different in the two cases; but who shall doubt that it was equally God's doing in both? Twice over, Philip's course is determined by a power sensibly beyond himself. An angel had said, "Arise and go thither;" the Spirit who works in the hearts of men, as He pleases, at all times, had said, "Speak to this man, for therefore art thou brought to this place." The eunuch had felt no constraint put upon him. He chose his own time for travelling, and his own road, and his own pace; but we are as sure as if an angel, in radiant form, had guided the chariot on its way, that God brought him to that spot because a messenger was there, charged with tidings which would make that day the most memorable day in his whole life.

Read the lesson, my brethren, and remember it. We do not wander at random through this strange, bewildering world. Our steps are guided, our doings are ordered, our life is por-



tioned out into stages not of our own choosing : though we feel free at every step, and are conscious of no force that masters our will, and sends us hither and thither. In the plain, forcible language of one of the Wise Man's wise sayings, "A man's heart deviseth his way, but God directeth his steps." Wonder as we may, cavil as we may, if our foolish hearts are disposed to rebel against Him who ruleth all things after the counsel of His own will, or, if like men who are wise to their own undoing, we resolve to hold nothing as an article of Faith which seems to involve some moral difficulties, so it is. We depose God from His throne, if we will not have it so ; and ten thousand voices proclaim to the listening ear and the wakeful heart, that in very deed a mighty hand toucheth the springs of human action, and in very deed a wise, overruling Power shapeth events according to some predetermined plan which no human power can really obstruct and hinder, though the meanest and the feeblest may aid in its accomplishment.

We would not have it otherwise, surely. Shall the world be a chaos again, a million conflicting wills, and no law of harmony pervading the whole ? Or do men seem wise and good enough to have the conduct of themselves ? Alas ! rather let the nursery bear rule in a house, rather let lunatics be promoted to

high office in the state, than surrender this fair earth, and all its hopes and prospects, to the dominion of mortal men like those who have risen to power and dominion in successive generations. One other course is open to us, if Heaven shall not have its own; and that is *to be ruled from hell*. Terrible thought! and the more terrible because it is partially true. "The Prince of the Power of the air" is "the God of this world;" but by permission only, for a time only, blessed be God, he walketh abroad upon the earth, and speaketh proud, boastful things to those who make themselves his slaves; and he walks in fetters all the while, and goes not a step beyond the prescribed boundary-line. God does rule, therefore, we say, not only in the armies of heaven, but among the inhabitants of the earth; and because He rules, in spite of the ravages of sin, and the limited empire of the wicked one, it is not all a wilderness. Flowers of Paradise display their colours, and shed their perfume. Angels guard our steps, and walk by our side. Truth and goodness are not banished things. We have homes of purity, and hearts among us that are full of kindness. Law supersedes anarchy, and men learn to live in states, the freer because subject to control, instead of peopling the forest or the desert with countless generations of prowling savages.

In all that is just and right we see the symbols of God's sovereignty, the royal "image and superscription," so to speak, on the current coin of life. But let this be admitted practically for our own guidance and comfort, and not merely as a dogma, like gravitation, or the Copernican system, in the world of science. Individually, personally, let us know, and rejoice to know, that God rules. In our homes let us feel that it is so. In our daily walk let us be sure that nothing shall meet us that is not of His sending. Let us feel safe for the present because He is about our path and about our bed. Let us not load ourselves with cares about the future, because the days that are coming, like the days that are past, are all portioned out into hours of which every minute brings its allotted portion of good and evil.

And besides admitting the fact, let us watch, my brethren, and we shall prove the fact over again. Here is the difference between the devout Christian, and the man who lives really "without God in the world." The one looks out for the Divine Ruler; the other takes only what is given him, and misses the comfort of seeing a Friend by his side who is Wise and Good, and Mighty, moreover, to help all who trust Him. The eunuch never doubted to his dying day Who held the reins, so to speak, when his chariot crossed Philip's path, or Who

prompted the stranger whom he never saw before, and never saw again, to speak to him the words of eternal life. And so, if we pray for guidance, and have our eyes open, and try to live by rule, Christ's own rule, we shall find fifty meeting-points with friends and guides and benefactors up to which God led us, and where we found some good thing which came as certainly from heaven as if we had seen a bright-winged angel drop it on our path. Where duty calls, let us be found. As far as our light guides us, thither let us follow. What we know, how little soever it be, let us know for use and practice. If the truth be only half revealed to us, let us search for the rest in likely places. All this the eunuch did. He had been to Jerusalem to worship. He may have found the precious roll there on which were written better things than he could find in his own country, and may have given gold for it; or he may have brought it with him from his home; but, at any rate, he was well employed, was reading a portion of Holy Scripture carefully, and trying to find out the meaning, as his question proves; and lo! there standeth by his side a heaven-sent messenger who solves all his doubts, gives a blessed meaning to that which must have been a dark riddle to him without an interpreter, and sends him home a baptized and rejoicing Christian.

But we are anticipating the next stage in our story. He was reading out loud, it seems, as men do sometimes, when the sense is not quite plain, and they think the sound of the words shall somewhat help them. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" was the question with which Philip accosted him. "How can I," was the answer, "except some man should guide me?" A very favourite text with the Romanists. The Bible is worth nothing, they tell us, without the Church to interpret it; useless, or even mischievous, unless a priest stands by the reader's side, and says, "The words mean this; so you must understand them, and no otherwise." Now the cases do not seem quite parallel between a Bible-taught Christian, knowing in the letter the whole counsel of God, having for his own, word for word and letter for letter, precisely the same message from God as the Priest, or the Bishop, or the Pope, neither less nor more; and a half-taught Gentile in early days, who had got a scrap of the prophetic writings, and was trying to puzzle out their meaning without ever having heard of Him of whom the Prophet testified. We say with the eunuch that we understand not the sayings of Isaiah except some man should guide us. We know not, and cannot guess, to whom the wonderful things, spoken of in the fifty-third chapter, belong, till

another shall come and point us to the Lamb of God, rehearsing before us the trial-scene in Pilate's judgment-hall, and the death-scene at Calvary, and shewing how, point by point, the marvellous prediction was verified on the great Day of Atonement; and so the son of Amoz was proved to be a true Prophet, and Jesus was proved to be the true Messiah. Evangelists have come, and taught us this, and the record is not locked up in the Vatican, thank God! but is carried abroad under the wide heavens, and kings read it, and peasants, in their homes. We know what Philip taught the eunuch, and much more. The eunuch understood Philip's plain words; and we are no duller, with the light of the Gospel shining all around us; we understand St. Luke and St. John as well, and apprehend enough of St. Paul's writings besides, though there be in them "some things hard to be understood," to receive the substance of his doctrine, that "by grace we are saved through faith;" that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature," that "love is the fulfilling of the law;" and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Yet, while we say that the men, who quote these words so falsely, shall not rule our faith; while we hold to our Christian liberty, and say that God has given to no man, or set of men, spiritual insight apart from His own teaching;

and that the Holy Spirit, in His gifts of illumination and sanctification, is bestowed, out of His royal bounty, on devout worshippers of every name, we do not spurn human aids when they can be had. To the learned we will defer willingly and thankfully, when it is a question of criticism; but to unravel the text of Scripture, and choose the more certain out of doubtful meanings, a good Greek scholar is worth all the ignorant Popes who ever lived, and there have been a good many, first and last. We will listen to wiser Christians than ourselves, when some practical question does not seem to be authoritatively determined, and God's will has to be inferred from the spirit of many passages, instead of being announced in plain words like the letter of the ten commandments. We will gladly keep company with men of a devout spirit, and a blameless conversation, assured that they who are most watchful and patient and humble, and who live nearest to Christ, grow wise in the things of God, and have revelations, so to speak, of His inner counsels which men miss who are halting, lukewarm Christians all their days. In all these ways, what God gives us for guidance we will gratefully use. In spiritual things, as in the things of common life, the strong are to help the weak; and the weak stumble by their own choice, if they will not accept the hand that is held forth

in kindness. Men come together by God's providential appointment, just as the human frame is shaped and moulded by His wonder-working power. The eye directs the hand, and the head chooses the path in which the feet must carry us; and so in the Christian family both prudence and piety teach us to be useful to each other, to ask for help, and give it, both in turn; to teach willingly, if we know more than others, and to learn humbly if we know less. *Much* of what we read in the Holy Scriptures a very young child will understand. *More* we shall learn as our minds expand, and specially as we walk in the light of that which we have learnt already. *Most* will they know, who being well instructed, like Timothy, from an early age, "forsake not the guide of their youth," but "build themselves up on their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping themselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Now then for the continuation of the dialogue. The eunuch was on the look-out for helpers, and God sent him one to his heart's content. "Come up and sit with me," was the invitation; and then followed the statement of his difficulty. You remember that he was reading that touching passage in which the



Evangelical Prophet describes, as if he had been an eye-witness, the sufferings and the patience of our Lord; "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened He not His mouth." Of whom was the prophet speaking? How could he tell? What clue was there? Was he speaking historically? and if so, who had borne this heavy burden of woe, and borne it without a murmur? Thus we find devout men, who had the Scriptures and read them, were at fault before the Saviour came. Thus dark to them were pages in the word of life, which shine out to us as some of the most precious that God has given us. How rich in heavenly lore, rich beyond prophets and kings of the olden time, is the child who learns at the mother's knee how Jesus died, and has some understanding that He must indeed be a good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, and then takes in the simple thought that little ones are Christ's lambs, for whom He has a special love, and whom He will guide to Heaven, if they pray to Him with their lips and hearts, and love Him for His goodness, and try to please Him in their little ways!

A case like this brings the reality of our Christian privileges before us very strikingly. Here was a sincere man according to his light. He was no careless liver, no doter on this

world's pomp and wealth; he had enough of that; barbarous princes are generous enough to their ministers and favourites, and treasures to feed the lusting eye were all within his reach without travelling far to seek them. But Jerusalem was the holy city; and thither, at some cost of time and trouble, he had been journeying expressly to bow before the God of Israel. He may have known the law and the prophets, may have read or sung with holy joy the songs of Zion; but one thing he did not know, and that shews us how much he had to learn. He did not know whether Isaiah, when he penned a passage with which the children in our schools are quite familiar, was speaking of himself, or describing fearful woes that had come in his time on some other child of Adam.

Philip, of course, "opened his mouth and preached unto him Jesus." *For that* he came. God sent a messenger with a ready tongue; and God found for him a learner with a prepared heart; and so the word of truth was like seed dropped into the richest soil just moistened with the soft spring showers. It sprang up in a day. No birds to devour it, no thorns to choke it. The text was "Jesus;" we can guess what the sermon was; it was preached by lips that were eloquent with zeal and love; it may have lasted for hours; with many questions and answers interspersed; at

any rate it did its work, and the enquirer, who knew not till then that the Lamb of God had been offered up, and that the work of Redemption was accomplished, now proposed himself for Baptism, and witnessed a good confession. "I believe," he said, "that Jesus is the Son of God;" and that belief was not the formal assent to a doctrine, but the heart's offering of praise to the Divine Redeemer.

It was a brave resolve, under all circumstances, to go down from the chariot, and seize the opportunity of being enrolled in the Church, which might not speedily occur again. Then and there he "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Then and there he was baptized into Christ's death, and in that solemn rite pledged himself to "walk in newness of life," even as "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father." He "went on his way rejoicing," we are told. Philip was caught away, and he was left alone. But he had the treasure; none could rob him of *that*. Faith was rooted in his heart; he was a pardoned child; the crucified Saviour was his risen Lord, and for all time, and for all Eternity when Time should have run its course, he had a Heavenly Friend, from whom nothing could part him. What befell him in Ethiopia we know not. It may have cost him much to confess Christ in an idola-

trous court. He may have had enemies and persecutors like Daniel. He may have stood alone, while men marvelled at this new doctrine about Jesus and the Resurrection, or may have been a messenger of good things to some little handful of believers who gathered round him as the first-fruits of Africa unto God. Any how, we trust that the man who did not confer with flesh and blood, who had no parleyings with fear, who embraced Christ at the first hearing, and went home straightway to face all the difficulties of his new position, glad at heart because, come what might, God was on his side; this man, we hope and believe, fought a good fight, and in the great day of the Lord's appearing, shall be in the front rank of the Gentile army of saints, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands.

In that day we know many shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, while children of the patriarchs shall be cast out. In that day many that are last shall be first, and the first last. In that day some who, like Lydia and the Ethiopian eunuch, never once turned away their ears from the Gospel, shall be swift witnesses against the multitudes in our Christian churches

who have heard a thousand sermons in vain. In that day, heathen men, who groped their way out of darkness into light, and felt after God till they found Him, shall stand by the side of Prophets and Evangelists and Apostles, while men, who grew up under the shadow of the Temple, and saw the light of the Divine glory beaming from its gates, shall sink to the place of devils. In that day the faithful steward of a little shall be honoured before men and angels; and the man to whom God gave much, and who remained a thankless and prayerless man, shall be cast, with the slothful servant, into outer darkness. In that day woe be to the man whose baptism was a nullity through his own misdoings; whose Christianity was a lesson learnt out of a book, not a living power in the heart, drawing him to God as the fountain of life and happiness, and arming him against the temptations of the world and the flesh.

Judge yourselves, my dear brethren. Beware of growing familiar with the sound of the Gospel, while the heart is untouched, and the life only a poor reflection of the world's customs and opinions. Beware of lifeless prayers, of unblessed Sabbaths, of Scripture-reading that turns to task-work, of Communion-times which leave no solemn feelings behind them, of hearing often plain warnings

out of the Book of God, plain expositions of Christian doctrine, plain exhortations to holy living, and then, instead of striving to enter in at the strait gate, striving to prove, by shallow arguments and oft-repeated fallacies, that the world's broad open way is the path of life. Beware, I say, for they who fight that battle too long, win it to their own ruin. The Spirit of God will not strive with them beyond a certain point, and the very Gospel of salvation proves to them "a savour of death unto death."

# SERMON IX.

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## CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

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ACTS ix. 1, 2, and ver. 6.

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

*(January 26, 1862.)*

THE world has seen strange vicissitudes, and startling revolutions, in the course of many centuries,—disorders in states, thrones and dynasties overturned, the uprooting of old opinions, sudden changes leading to mighty results for good or evil. But of all the mental revolutions which have seriously affected the

destiny of mankind, perhaps the most wonderful, and most fruitful in good results, was that which is described in the first eight verses of the chapter which we read yesterday morning. See how Saul left Jerusalem, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." "He made havoc of the Church," we were told before, heading the persecuting parties who entered quiet Christian homes, and shutting up men and women in prison who were guilty of no crime but that of believing that Christ was the Son of God. And now he coveted a wider range of action. He will travel to distant cities; will hunt down believers wherever he can find them; will give no quarter to any, whether in Palestine or Syria, who bear the hated name. See, on the other hand, how he enters Damascus; led by the hand, because sight was gone, no longer heading his little band and pressing forward in eager haste to begin his cruel work, but humbled to dependence; bowed down in spirit, exciting the compassion of every beholder, probably, by his troubled look, and uncertain step, as he passed slowly on to his journey's end. And *in the interval*, we know, a yet greater change had passed on the inner man. Jesus of Nazareth was now his Lord. Every Christian man was now his brother. His *past* life was a mistake;



his *new* life was to be a thank-offering for mercies which his own pen has described in such glowing language, and which no human heart, perhaps, ever felt so deeply. There is no longer any thought of hurrying the saints to prison; he has been like an imprisoned man himself; and now the walls are falling down; the fetters are falling off; and he hopes soon to become a partaker of their liberty. In Damascus, before many days were past, he "confounded the Jews," "proving" that his new Master was "very Christ," the predicted Saviour, that is, in whom the prophecies all met. At Jerusalem, when he returned thither, he had nothing to report to his late employers; the bond between him and the enemies of the Gospel was for ever broken; his home was in the Church; his friends were to be the men who held that Christ, "having endured the Cross, had sat down at the right hand of the throne of God," and, accordingly, at once, having counted the cost, and made his irrevocable choice, he "assayed," says the history, "to join himself to the disciples."

Such was the revolution that we speak of; very remarkable *in itself*; but looked at in connexion with the Apostle's later history, and the fortunes of the early Church, and the ultimate triumph of the Gospel over all opposing powers of earth and hell, certainly the

most memorable event since the day of our Lord's Ascension from Mount Olivet.

Mark, then, the circumstances of the interview which made this new era in the Apostle's life. "As he journeyed," we are told, "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" We are not *told* that he saw any bright and glorious figure in the sky. The narrative is very short, and speaks merely of a *light*, described elsewhere as being "above the brightness of the sun," and a *Voice*, speaking evidently from above; but Saul's reply, "Who art thou, Lord?" makes it hardly doubtful that he then saw the glorified body of the Son of God, even as Stephen had done in his dying moments.

We know that St. Paul *did* see the Lord. In the 15th Chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, when enumerating the occasions on which the Saviour had appeared to the Eleven and others after his resurrection, he adds, "Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time;" and it seems most natural to refer that saying to this period, though we hear of another time at Jerusalem when the Apostle describes himself as praying in the temple, falling into a trance, seeing Christ, and being appointed in express

terms to carry the Gospel to Gentile nations. At any rate, whether or not the veil which hides the spiritual world from mortal view were drawn aside for a moment, no doubt was left on the mind of Saul that it was *Jesus*, (the Nazarene impostor, as he thought Him yesterday,) whose hand of power was on him, so that escape and evasion were alike impossible. But mark the never-to-be-forgotten words,—in the ears of Saul, we are sure, they rang for long months and years,—“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” We have many texts to shew that the union between Christ and His people is a very close one; “Abide in me, and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye, except ye abide in me;” “He is the Head of the Body, the Church,” and every member has its place and office; their strength is His strength; their life, His life; but I know not whether in the whole range of Scripture we have a more speaking text on this subject than those strangely-sounding words, in which the Lord speaks as One actually reached and wounded by the weapons directed against His servants. *Not* “I am Jesus, and thou shalt feel my power; thou hast blasphemed my name, and been among the fiercest opposers of the Truth; I will humble thee, and make thee ashamed of thy evil deeds; but I will spare

thee too, and make thee a brother to those whom thou hast hated without a cause;" we have no such assertions of kingly power, no words of rebuke, even, for the guilt incurred, and the violence intended; but one emphatic sentence which declares that the Lord of glory identifies Himself with the sufferings and wrongs of all His saints, and that when men aim at *their* life or peace, the arrows fly higher than they think.

Truly, if this be so, then a fearful reckoning must be in store for many whose power none could resist or challenge while they raged and raved against the Church. Think of the ten persecutions under the Roman Emperors; of the dark horrors, surpassing the worst cruelties of heathenism, which are found in the story of the Albigenses, a Pope being the prompter of a new Crusade against the best Christians in Christendom, and kings and nobles his willing allies; of the light actually put out in Spain and Italy, when it was kindled and spreading, by a policy sufficiently ruthless and exterminating to gain its end; of the dark chambers of the Inquisition and its countless victims; of our own army of martyrs, and the ten times larger host whose blood watered the soil of France in the 16th and 17th centuries. What a tale is here, if we look only at what history records! And then, concealed from public

view, following in the track of each separate troop of persecutors, there are cruelties and abominations, and life-consuming, heart-crushing sorrows without end, which make it necessary to multiply by a large figure all we *know* of this hideous form of guilt, before we can half reach the sum of what man has done wickedly against his brother man, when the ruling powers had decreed one form of faith and worship, and subjects pressed in conscience, and loving vital truth too dearly to sell it even for life, stood up bravely, like the first Christian Confessors, and said, "We must obey God rather than men." To Kings who sat securely on their thrones, who felt safer or easier when the hated sect was put down, who thought themselves nearer heaven, many of them, when fire and sword had turned fruitful lands into a desert, He who sitteth in the heavens *might* have said, as He said to Saul, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The *cause* was His, though He did not own it by a sign from heaven; the victims were His chosen ones, often dear to Him as the apple of His eye; their sufferings were noted in His Book; nay more, He yearned over them with a Friend's tenderness, and felt for them as with a Brother's heart, though the enemy rode on unchecked, and boasted of his triumph, when prisons were emptied, or his officers stayed

their hands for very weariness. The end is not yet, and judgment tarries, though it does not sleep; and with Him "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

But let us beware how we limit too much a text like this. When we think of those who have warred against the saints, and in so doing have struck at Christ, so to speak, we must not have our eye only on those conflicts which have been fought out on a public stage; on mock trials in open court; executions perpetrated in the face of day, when the crowd wondered that men, whom the Judges counted unfit to live, looked and prayed and died like saints; or decrees of banishment carried out under form of law, though the exiles perhaps were the best children of the state, the very salt of a demoralized community: we must call to mind homelier scenes, quietly enacted in less troublous times. Many are persecuted every where, persecuted in lands of freedom, where no deed of violence shall pass unpunished, for conscience sake. There are Sauls and Herods, not armed with swords, but bitter haters of godliness, in our towns and villages, and guarded homes; and often men and women, young persons especially, who merely long to serve God according to their light, and cannot help silently reproving the

self-seeking, pleasure-loving, God-forgetting world, by their earnestness and zeal, are wounded to the quick by the cold looks, and unkind suspicions, and harsh censures of some who dwell by their side, but refuse to become sharers of their hope. In this way home friends often become dangerous enemies; parents are the tempters of their own children; tender consciences are wounded, or weak judgments bewildered, while religious faithfulness seems to conflict with obedience to domestic rule; and many a man, who prides himself on his discretion, and thinks he has learnt to hold the balance quite even between profaneness and extravagance, is really putting a stumbling-block in his child's path, and wronging deeply and cruelly where he pretends to love. Such persons "kick against the pricks;" Christ's little ones He has a special care for; there is much of wicked unbelief, and very determined opposition to that which is just and holy; and the testing-day will bring out to view ten thousand victims of a spirit like that which has lighted up the fires of martyrdom, though the world never knew, and so never pitied, their wrongs.

Let us go on a step, however, and see how Saul, struck to the earth, and then addressed by the Lord Himself, spoke and acted. He was a

sincere man, though up to this time a grievously mistaken and prejudiced one. What he had done against the Church, he had done, he says, "ignorantly," and his assertion is conclusive wherever his own character and motives are involved. Facts, therefore, undoubted facts, which proved his mistake, did not provoke him to anger, and make him pledge himself yet deeper to the enemies of the Lord. The foundation of his system was gone; all on which he had rested most confidently was clean swept away; and another mode of faith had now to be constructed of which the primary truth should be that He who died upon the Cross was alive for evermore. He yielded frankly and without reserve; did not lie upon the ground wondering and debating with himself how one so well instructed, and meaning to serve God when he dealt with the saints as thieves and murderers, could have been so blinded and deceived. Still less did he pursue his journey, and try to forget what he had seen and heard, or to persuade himself that fancy had conjured up some unreal voice and vision which need not shake his purpose, or disturb his convictions. The sounds were too audible for that; the words too explicit; his own senses too certainly awake; his faculties too unclouded, to let him doubt. We read the man's whole heart, and see the epitome of his future life, almost, in the question



which followed, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Jesus, then, was his Lord. There was evidence to shew that He was the world's Owner and Master; for He claimed as much, and with the facts of His Resurrection and Ascension established, all that He had ever claimed was unquestionably His. But there was another power at work, beyond the force of evidence, to bend the will of the Pharisee, and turn the furious man into a penitent, and bring him to the Redeemer's feet as a willing captive, who will grudge no sacrifice, refuse no service, make no excuses or delays, but will walk henceforth in any path of his Lord's choosing. Mark that, my dear brethren, and direct your prayers to Christ as St. Paul did. Your case, indeed, is not his exactly. You grow up to your duties. You find them out by degrees. You are dependent for a time on the will of others. You will have no great work to do at any time, probably, but still, sooner or later, every Christian must come to a point, where personally, on his own behalf, he will commune with Christ as to his own hopes and his own life; and will ask to be guided towards heaven, not by books or sermons; not by men who stand in the crowd, and therefore cannot be right, unless the world has come round, and learnt to love the Gospel; nor by men who stand above the crowd, but are imperfect teachers at the best; but by a heavenly

Voice speaking to his heart and conscience, and witnessing to him, as none else can, of all that he most longs to know. "Strangers will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers," said the good Shepherd of all his sheep. "They hear my voice," He says again; "and I know them, and they follow me." Mark those words, I pray you, and be sure that you do not mistake the voice of strangers for Christ's voice. Numbers do, and know it not. The Christian rule, in their eyes, is the moral code in repute with their own friends and companions. They do not pretend to have gone deep into the matter; they have pretty well resolved not to do any thing of a religious kind which will make them particular: custom they do not fear to plead, in this disordered world, as a warrant for many doubtful things; and in the face of all the texts about the world's friendship, and the faithful few, and the need of watching against snares at every step, they will argue that it is unwise and unsafe to wander from the beaten track, or to affect a preciseness which most respectable people condemn. Why, Saul was a better Christian, before he rose from the dust that day, than these men after all their learning. They have never yet searched to the bottom of things, have never examined the foundation of their hopes, or their plan of life, Bible in hand, praying that they may not be

deceived where their all is at stake, and feeling at every step that spiritual things can be discerned only by the help of the Spirit of Truth and Holiness. Saul's first petition, in fact, as the expression of their honest feelings, and spoken from the depths of a longing, burdened heart, is as yet a strange petition to them, and therefore they may be Christians as all baptized men are, but they are not Christians as Christ's redeemed and faithful servants are.

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” Be sure it is a great thing to pray that prayer in sincerity. Saul did, we are sure, and therefore we do not wonder to find him presently taking the bold course of witnessing for Christ in the city to which he went, and the city from whence he came, when he was brought so suddenly out of darkness into light.

The men who were expecting him at Damascus did not receive his letters, the men who were waiting for him at Jerusalem did not get their prisoners, because his whole mind was changed; his old friends were forsaken; the men who had been slandered by the high priest in both places were God's own people, loved like the patriarchs with a special love, and proving that the name of Christ was a name of power to beat down sin, and make them free and happy as none of his own straitest sect had

ever been. He was one with them now, and soon became the first among them all ; the humblest, most patient, most self-devoted, most large-hearted, most successful, of the "glorious company of Apostles," because he laid the firmest hold of the great central truth so beautifully expounded by himself in that noble text, "I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

It is a great thing, I said, to pray that prayer in sincerity. It may seem hard to say of a Christian Congregation that many of them do not ; yet verily we must say that, or else believe that prayer has lost its virtue, and so deny the truth of God, and cast our own hopes to the winds. If the question be asked upon your knees, and ye seek to answer it out of your Bibles, you will find words like these ; "Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness ;" "Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for I say unto you many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able ;" "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed in the renewing of your minds ;" "Let your conversation be in Heaven ;" "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises ;" "Cleanse

yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God;" "Be ye followers of God as dear children;" "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." These, and others like them, are general exhortations which should strike upon the ears of the careless, and drive them to thoughtfulness and self-inspection. They ought to suggest a doubt to many, surely, whether all is right, whether they have been stirred from quietude and self-complacency as a man must be to start heavenward in a world that has departed from God, or to battle successfully with enemies powerful and subtle as the hosts of darkness. Let the world's din be silenced; escape from those who invite you to flowery paths, or would quench religious aspirations by flippant words, or who try to persuade you that godliness is less needful or less profitable because the godly are not perfect, and some who affect godliness have proved untrue; escape from them, I say, search your Bibles, and ask what these things mean, and whether a quiet, decorous, self-pleasing, world-pleasing life, with nothing shameful on the outside, but with nothing of earnestness, or solemn feeling, or trembling solicitude about the future, or inward longings after perfection, to give it worth and importance, can be the Christian life, the life of faith, the seed-time of a harvest of eter-

nal glory; and if you are only honest in the enquiry, the answer will be, "No; that must be something higher, something harder to flesh and blood, something more distinct and separate from the usages and practices of the multitude who assuredly have not yet the stamp of loyalty to Christ, the King of Saints."

That, remember, is to be your badge, if your profession be not belied, if your baptism be not a nullity, if the Gospel is not to prove to you at last "a savour of death." We are not talking, like heathen Philosophers who could do no better, about abstract virtues, or possible immortality. We are supposing that you, ransomed with precious blood, and pledged to a holy service, you as professed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who "died for your sins and rose again for your justification," and pours out His Spirit on the waiting Church, are enquiring of Him, as St. Paul once did, what you shall do to prove your Christianity; what, to get fresh helps for your great work; what, to win your way to some higher stage in the Christian life. And then it is well to forsake generalities, and to ask what is doing already that is distinctly of a Christian character; what, in your common, familiar habits, your every-day words and works and thoughts, that stands connected with the rules of the Gospel, with the motives which the Gospel implants, with the hopes which the

Gospel inspires? In your times of retirement what record do you find of hours usefully spent, of little unobtrusive acts of self-denial, of kind words and generous deeds done by the wayside, to spring up, and bear fruit, you know not where; of sharp rebukes from conscience for duties omitted or ill-done because pleasure beguiled you, or because you feared the reproach of singularity? What will neighbours say of your gentleness, your forwardness to please, your patience under provocation, your generous bearing towards those who thwart and injure you? In the great battle with evil which Christ's servants are waging in their several places, while angels and devils watch for the issue, have you any stake, any lively interest, any cordial sympathy, so that you are ever saddened by reverses, ever joyful in triumphs, as bad news, or good news, are brought from the varied scenes of conflict? More questions might be framed of the same kind; but these will suffice. I have indicated some of the things which the Lord would have you to do. Are they aimed at, or put aside? Is this sort of life something longed for, or something deliberately rejected? Up to this level are you pressing with shame and sorrow when your efforts fail, with hope and trust in the great Promiser and the mighty Helper? or are you resting contentedly in what involves little effort,

and no sacrifice, satisfied to be no worse Christians than half your fellow-worshippers, hoping that what is wanting for completeness shall be supplied when you are older, graver, less immersed in business, or more free from burdening cares?

Beware of this temper. While you yield to it, you are doing not what your best Friend, but what your great Enemy, would have you to do. Stand out of the crowd, and let the question be a personal one between you and your Lord. "What wilt *Thou*," who hast the Master's right in me; *Thou*, to whom I belong as I can belong to none else; Thou, who didst come from Heaven to save me; "What wilt Thou have *me* to do?"—*me*, whose salvation is my own concern; *me*, who must answer one day for myself; *me* to whom other men's practices, other men's excuses, are all nothing; "What wilt Thou have me to do, *now*, from this day forth? Other masters shall be renounced, if Thou wilt take me under Thy guidance, and lead me to Thy kingdom." Oh, say this from the heart, and be true to your word! Remember St. Paul's description of himself in the first month of his enlargement, when his soul was penetrated with wonder, love, and joy: "Immediately," he says, "I conferred not with flesh and blood." Oh, it is the conferring with flesh and blood, the vain endeavour to please Christ and



to please the world too; the care for our own reputation with some who pass for wise and prudent men, combined with a wish to be esteemed by others who rank as men of piety; the balancing of God's plain words against men's lax interpretation,—these are the things that keep numbers undecided for half a life, and make their prayers a nullity and a mockery. Beware, my dear brethren, how you thus provoke God, and rob yourselves, lest that doom be yours which sounds so awful when spoken by a loving Saviour: "The servant who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

And let the men who do serve God, and wish to serve Him better, remember that this question should be often on their lips, too; not once in a life, my dear brethren, but many times in a week, should you be looking up, and be ready equipped to do your Lord's bidding. "This is the will of God," you know, "even your sanctification," your complete sanctification in body, soul, and spirit; and in every stage of your journey, with reference to your special duties and engagements, in your round of common duties, as in the great epochs of your moral history, you must have your eye upon Christ's guiding hand, and your ear open to catch every intimation of His will. The pastor's exhortation, continually, must be like

that of the Apostle who first learnt his own obligations so well, and then taught others so faithfully out of the fulness of a loving heart, "I beseech you, brethren, as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more." Keep close to your rule and pattern. Beware of extravagance and untempered zeal. Mistake not your own fancies for your Lord's commands. From the rash decisions of eager partisans who magnify trifles into importance, and enact sweeping laws for the whole Church out of their own heads, do you appeal to the lively oracles and to the infallible Teacher. "One is your Master, even Christ," and beware how you put a yoke upon your necks by giving pledges to any other. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" If you are putting up this prayer in sincerity, and mean to go where the Lord shall send you, then—

1. Watch your hearts that you may know wherein you fail and come short.

2. Be familiar with God's word in all its length and breadth.

3. Try to be independent of your fellow-men, neither dreading their censure, nor courting their praise.

4. Pray without ceasing.

I might enlarge on each of these topics; but just now I must content myself with stating

them. If in very deed you long to know the will of God more perfectly, and will thus seek what you long for, be sure that He will not disappoint you. Not all at once shall you reach the stature of Christian manhood. Never, while you live, may we hope that you shall be as ripe and fruitful a Christian as St. Paul. But by little and little your knowledge will grow; by little and little your sins will give way; by little and little the world will loosen its hold upon you; by little and little your character will be formed on the Christian model. For "they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;" "They who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled;" "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

# SERMON X.

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## THE PRAYERFUL CONVERT.

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ACTS ix. 10—16.

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand upon him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and how he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon Thy name. 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; for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”

*(Conversion of St. Paul.)*

ALL that belongs to the history of St. Paul's conversion has a special interest in the eyes of

Christian men. Never, probably, while the world lasts, will any day be seen of such importance to the Church, or fraught with such mighty results to mankind at large, as that on which the great Apostle left Jerusalem for Damascus on his errand of persecution, and had the vision, before his journey ended, which changed the whole current of his thoughts and purposes and affections. What he was on the morning of that day we learn from the first two verses of this memorable Chapter: "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the Synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." What he was afterwards the remainder of this book teaches us very fully; and we have besides the marvellous portraiture of the man contained in the Epistles which bear his name. The interval between his old life and his new life is spent at Damascus; and it is to that period, the next stage after he had seen the Lord, and unlearnt his great error, that I wish to direct your attention this morning.

While he was deprived of sight, the neighbouring city was his natural resting-place, and thither he was led, humbled already from the

haughty, fiery mood, in which he had started on his journey. *There*, as in the solitude of a prison, with an impassable barrier between him and the outer world, he abode for "three days," we are told; "and did neither eat nor drink." A quiet time for busy, anxious, self-searching thoughts, for reflections on the past, for speculations on the future. We do not know when he began to hear of Christ, what enquiries he had made respecting the new doctrine, or how he came to be drawn into the front rank of those who were warring actively against the saints. The one fact which we learn respecting his previous history, in relation to the infant Church, is that supplied in the brief narrative of Stephen's martyrdom. Saul was present, when the holy man prayed for his murderers, committed his soul to the Lord Jesus, and then fell asleep; and though a silent, inactive spectator, he "was consenting unto his death." The time was not come for his own enlightenment. That scene, impressive as it was, did not shake his old convictions, or bring him to the Apostles as an enquirer. His ardent, impassioned nature, made it impossible for him to take any middle course, and looking on the Religion which began to make some noise in Jerusalem as a pestilent heresy, and the men who preached it as dangerous fanatics, he joined himself soon afterwards to the party of the

chief priests, and became their willing, devoted agent. Already he had "made havoc of the Church," invading Christian homes, and hurrying their peaceable inmates to prison. And now the sword was struck from the hand which was just ready to smite; the intended victims were under divine protection; he had been fighting against God when he was zealous, even to slaying, for Moses and the Law; and the Crucified One was risen indeed, for his eyes had beheld the radiant form; his ears had heard the Voice from heaven; and in that hour of seclusion his great mistake must have painfully occupied his thoughts.

This, however, was not all. His own character must have come under review. Passion had blinded his judgment. A bigoted devotion to inherited opinions had betrayed him into guilt. Now his old system of belief was shaken to pieces, and self-confidence was succeeded by self-humiliation. "As touching the righteousness which was by the Law," indeed, he said in after times that he was "blameless." His morals were pure—irreproachable; as a Pharisee of the strictest sect he went beyond other men in religious observances; but now we cannot doubt, in that crisis of his life, communing with God and his own thoughts, he was beginning to learn the lesson which afterwards he knew so well, that pride of heart was the abominable

thing that God hated, and a man, to human seeming clad in the very panoply of virtue, might be naked, as Adam in the garden, to the All-searching Eye.

In that hour what did he do? what *could* he do? We learn from the Lord's message to Ananias. The communication is a very remarkable one, coming in that form. "Go to a certain street, find out a certain house, enquire for a certain person, Saul by name; for, *Behold, he prayeth.*" The prayer that was thus noticed, thus recorded, I think, was no common prayer. The terms seem to me to bespeak a soul intent on praying-work, engrossed with it, wrapt up in it, as completely as mortal man can be while the flesh stands as a veil between the visible and the invisible world. "He is no longer hunting for the saints, no longer raving against my name and cause; his old occupation is gone; you need not fear to approach him; he is humbled to the dust. Go, for he seeks help; he wants a guiding hand; already he is asking for light in the inner man, and when he finds that you come to teach him you will be welcome as an angel from heaven."

Men not born to be Apostles, and men who were never persecutors or blasphemers, come to a point, often and often, which corresponds to this stage in St. Paul's experience. They see they have been building on a wrong foundation,



and they long to find a safer and a stronger. Traditional opinions have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Much that has been taken on trust from human teachers proves unsound when tested by the Word of God. Conscience is awake, too, and they begin to *judge themselves*, instead of taking the estimate of friends and flatterers. A fair outside, and a character good enough to pass muster with an easy-judging world, are quite consistent, they find, and feel, and confess now, with forgetfulness of God and the utter repudiation of high Christian motives, amounting to practical unbelief. Old habits must be put away, and the new life has to be moulded into shape. Old associates are unwelcome, with their trifling pursuits and worldly talk; and new ones, perhaps, both wise and kind, are not near at hand. The soul, struggling out of darkness into life, craves something which it cannot find, and a season of perplexity will often follow the first awakening, not unlike St. Paul's time of darkness and solitude, when he sat in the house of Judas, and he knew of none with whom to take counsel, none to whom he could unfold his hidden secrets.

Happy they who, thus pressed and burdened, find the resource which he found, and take refuge with God! Good books, good friends, good thoughts, good resolves won't

give them what they want. No human aid will be sufficient; no human hand can probe their wounds; no human wisdom can answer their doubts; no human love can meet the yearnings of their new-born affection. There must be direct, close, personal application to Him who giveth sight to the blind, strength to the weak, and healing to the sick at heart. *Real prayer*, the earnest, beseeching cry for help, like Peter's on the yielding wave; the oft-repeated petition, which tells, in brief, emphatic words, and broken sentences, it may be, of deep poverty, and remembered sins, and painful ignorance, and child-like feebleness; *this* must take the place of dull, cold common-places which have occupied the time of devotion formerly, and kept the conscience at ease because the customary duty was not neglected. "*Behold, he prayeth,*" may be said of a man thus humbling himself before God, thus reaching forth his hand to draw from the fountain of life, thus looking and longing for light from heaven that he may walk in the narrow path without stumbling. A million men pray every day in the human sense, of whom these words were never yet spoken in the divine sense; and therefore years go by and leave them no wiser in the things of God; therefore in their old age, as in their youth, the world is their home, and its folly is their wisdom, and its poor, beg-

garly form of godliness passes for soul-enlightening, soul-saving Religion ; therefore a veil is on their hearts when they read their Bibles, and hear sermons, and live near to some whom the Spirit of Truth is guiding heavenward ; therefore, on a dying bed, perhaps, they talk gently of their failings, and think more of their own sufferings than of Christ's, and have to be taught, like children, what the Gospel of salvation really is. "*Behold, he prayeth,*" said in the courts of heaven, or declaring the judgment of Him Who reads the heart, and knows the whispered or unwhispered thoughts of all who live, stamps a man as God's child ; and orphan-like he shall not be in his onward course, but guided homeward, trained in heavenly knowledge, fed with heavenly cordials, sustained through all the trials and conflicts of his earthly pilgrimage till he reaches his Father's House.

To Saul, we find, an earthly teacher was sent in his hour of need. Ananias, a devout man, dwelling at Damascus, was commissioned to go and heal him of his blindness first, and then baptize him as a disciple of the Lord. No wonder that he expressed surprise, and felt reluctance. Saul's reputation as an enemy to the Church had been noised abroad ; and his changed mind, consequent on the heavenly vision, was as yet a secret. The divine testi-

mony, however, is express ; whatever he had been, now, let all men know, he is preferred to great honour ; the grant runs in terms which put him at once in the same rank with the Apostles themselves : "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." The command was given and obeyed. If Saul in his solitude asked for a friend, and in his bewilderment longed for a guide, his prayers were heard, for *both* were given.

It may be so with us, my brethren. When we most want help ; just when we begin to understand what we owe to Christ, and what belongs to us as pledged soldiers of the Cross ; when the way seems long, and rough, and steep, and its earliest stages have been trodden with timid, uncertain steps ; when new duties seem to come upon us along with new temptations, and we wonder whether any true pilgrims were ever so pressed and burdened before us ; when we have light enough to discern our dangers, and yet want faith to believe the largest promises, God may let us have a friend or counsellor whose words prove refreshing to us as waters in the desert. He may come to us unbidden, may seek us we know not why, and find us we know not how, may have turned into our path without any special purpose, may find something which attracts him to our side,

while others, who were nearer to us once, have gone to a distance, or grown tired of our company; and what we learn from him perchance may teach us twenty times as much as books and sermons. His words may be wise and weighty words, because he has been under divine teaching for many a year, and so may be able to solve doubts and answer questions out of the treasure of a matured and enlightened Piety; but yet more, perhaps, his loving sympathy, his tenderness for a new-born child in his Father's house, his yearning for our spiritual advancement, his patience with our imperfect knowledge and weak endeavours because he sees on us the stamp of sincerity, may seem to us as a reflection of the mind of Christ, and so strengthen and encourage us more than all his lessons.

This may be one of God's special gifts to us, I say, my brethren, and if it be so, let us improve it to the utmost; or it may not. He is not tied to human helpers. He works His own ends in many ways. Only somehow, be sure, when we pray in earnest, He will help us; somewhere when we start heavenward, and want guidance, He will meet us with a blessing; by some of the ten thousand channels through which His bounty can flow, aye, though He should make windows in heaven, or rain down manna from the clouds, as in olden time, He

will give food to the hungry, and will make the dawning light grow clearer and brighter as we advance steadily in the path of life. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

Ananias became the messenger of good tidings to Saul, and then we hear of him no more. He does God's bidding, and disappears. His was the hand that opened the door of the Church to the great Apostle of the Gentiles; and nought else is told us respecting him in the sacred narrative. Twenty chapters of this book, nearly, record the fruits of Saul's conversion, his travels, and perils, and conflicts, and triumphs; but no sentence tells us of the man who first stood face to face with him as a Christian friend. So, many a time, we see disciples outstrip the master. So in many a chapter of the Church's history we find very humble men advanced to honour by being permitted to minister for a while to some who become famous captains in the army of the saints, evangelists, perhaps, to heathen tribes, or pillars of strength and beauty in the Church of Christ. So God chooses his instruments at pleasure, and lets us help our fellow-men according to our powers, yet reserves for Himself the prerogative of pouring out that Spirit of

illumination, in His several degrees of fulness and of power, Who alone makes men mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, or master-builders of the temple of living stones.

Mark, however, the terms in which the Apostolic office is conferred upon St. Paul. Mark what is the revelation to be made to him on the very day of his baptism. See what sort of rewards and honours are proposed to the man who is already marked for the noblest service ever taken in hand by mortal man, and about to enter on the duties of his calling: "I will shew him what great things he must suffer for My Name's sake."

Grace, we are sure, was poured into that chosen vessel to bear the revelation of coming trials; but if the half only was then laid open to the Apostle, if with something of distinctness he apprehended what was in store for him during the stormy years which followed, how great was the venture! how strong was the faith! What blessed fruit had come already of his silent meditations, and fervent prayers! What a leader was gained for the Christian host! How marvellously had He, who has the hearts of all men in His hand, taken possession of that generous soul, and braced up the selected champion for the high resolves and grand endeavours which ennobled his future life!

So much for the prophecy and its fulfilment. The words were not addressed to us; but the sound of them may remind us what our vocation is, and what our experience may be. It would be idle to compare ourselves with St. Paul either in doing or suffering. We bear not the weight of so great an office; we do not expect to be tried in so hot a furnace; we do not aspire to the dignity of so bright a crown. But cross-bearers we are, and must be, if we are true soldiers of Christ. We have to confess His Name openly, to fight the good fight of faith bravely, to do the work of God diligently; and meanwhile the world in which we live, and must live, lieth in the Wicked One, and friends and neighbours would draw us to a lower walk, and a cheaper service, and a more popular morality. We are doubtful Christians, at any rate, if we meet with no taunts, have a good word from all in turn, and find our course, through all its stages, like a summer voyage over rippling streams without gale or storm.

And what of the inward strife? What of the flesh struggling with our better nature? What of wills only half subdued, of wayward desires, and broken resolutions, and hindered prayers, and baffled endeavours after holiness? All these troubles we may escape, if we will. The men do escape them who shape their course



according to the approved pattern of worldly respectability, do homage to Religion by the payment of some customary observances, and persuade themselves that, living and dying thus, they may meet their Judge with a good hope. But in all this we see no resemblance to Apostolic Christianity, no symbols of true allegiance to Christ, the King of Saints, nothing of the earnestness and patience and self-discipline which assuredly belong to the life of faith. Let us beware how we dread suffering too much, and make religion too cheap a thing. "Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh," said the Apostle in his later days, "arm yourselves likewise with the same mind;" and *disciples of the Cross* we must be, in more senses than one, if we are Christians indeed. We must abide near the Cross for safety; we must lie under the Cross, that we may be weaned from our follies, and grow in patience and humility and deadness to this cheating world. Happy they in whom the sanctifying process is begun, and whose prayer is, not that their course may be all smooth, and their life one long holiday, but that, through all life's stages, whatever be its present aspect, be their bright days few or many, they may be advancing steadily under heavenly guidance, to their rest and crown!

We must go one step farther, and just

touch upon the meeting between the elder disciple and the strange new convert. "Brother Saul," so runs the salutation, "the Lord, even Jesus who appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

"Brother Saul!" How must those words have sounded coming from such a quarter! "Brother Saul!" and that from one whose friends, perhaps, he had persecuted already, who might himself have been a victim among those who were to be carried "bound to Jerusalem," if the journey to Damascus had not been interrupted. "Brother Saul!" was he then pardoned so soon, admitted to fellowship with the saints, made free of their privileges, to be blessed with their friendship, and edified by their counsel? "Brother Saul!" was it indeed true, then, that he was not a solitary outcast? If his new convictions must sever old alliances, and make him an alien from the sympathies of all he had ever known, were the doors of the household of Faith thrown open so freely, and might he enter at once, and sit down among men who owned and loved the Lord? Yes, verily, this was all true, and the day did not close without his knowing that it was true. Ananias's earliest instructions (for we can hardly doubt

that conversation followed, and questions of high import were asked and answered), Ananias's earliest instructions would be an expansion of that cheering announcement, and presently the wondering enquirer would learn what brotherhood in the Christian family implied, and how men who loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity, were bound in bonds such as the world had never known, and without the teaching of the Holy Ghost would never learn. But yesterday the name of Saul was a name of terror to Ananias and his friends; to-day he is proclaimed a believer by a voice from heaven; and the name of endearment is given to him as frankly as if he had worshipped among the Christians, and broken bread with them, for months or years.

Mark the lesson, my brethren, and apply it. There is wonderful uniting power in the Gospel when it touches men's hearts, and makes them partakers of a new life in Christ. Of rapid changes the world is always jealous. Men who have made themselves vile, or who have been bitter enemies of godliness, must go through a long probation, we are told, before they can be received into better company; and many, who never sorrowed for sin yet after a godly sort, will proscribe the honest penitent, and suspect him at every step, and magnify the failings of early discipleship as if they were

proofs of insincerity. Real Christians, men taught of God, men having in them some reflection of the mind of Christ, know better. They have faith in the power of God; they have genuine compassion for men struggling out of darkness into light; they regard a weak disciple, in the first stage of his Christian life, with the tenderness of an elder brother guiding the tottering steps of infancy; they know that, while conversions as rapid as Saul's are very rare, yet bad men do learn fast sometimes under divine teaching to hate their sins, and take refuge at the Cross, and to pray prayers, half ignorantly, sincere as those which were reported to Ananias as coming from the lips of Saul.

Let us aim to be not rash in our judgments of acquittal any more than in our judgments of condemnation; but let us aim at the Charity which "hopeth all things" in a Christian sense, and interprets kindly what we see and hear of men who have gone far astray from God, and seem to be coming to a better mind. While we avoid the follies of fanaticism, let us be sure that a cold, calculating, self-satisfied Pharisaism is utterly foreign to the spirit of the Gospel, and the moralist who insists on all men becoming religious by slow degrees, has to learn the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Above all, may we live near to Christ

ourselves, and know what it is to yearn over souls that are unfed as yet with the Bread of Life! And for our brethren far and near, may we feel more sensibly, and more deeply, the binding tie of a common Faith like that which made Ananias and Saul one in heart on their first day of meeting! May we judge each other kindly, bear with each other patiently, walk together in loving fellowship, learn from others what we may, impart to them what we can, and wait humbly and hopefully for our share in the common inheritance!

# SERMON XI.

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## THE INGATHERING OF THE GENTILES.

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ACTS x. 15—17.

“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what the vision which he had seen should mean, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate.”

It was a memorable day in the Church’s history when Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was baptized. The day of Pentecost had seen three thousand at once gathered into the fold of Christ, and within Jerusalem, and beyond it, many thousands more had been added to the Household of Faith in the weeks and months and years which followed. But these were all Jews. Beyond the favoured nation, God’s gifts had not yet been bestowed. Like the Apostles themselves, all who had

received the Apostolic testimony were descendants of the patriarchs; and up to this time, the expectation evidently was that the Gospel, like the Law, was for them, and them only. The men, who were chosen to be the world's teachers, were as yet untaught themselves in the great truth that Christ's Redemption was for the whole world, and that all its blessings were to be free to all comers,—Hebrews of the Hebrews, henceforth, not ranking above uncircumcised idolaters, when both bowed before the Cross, and looked to Him who died upon it as their common Saviour.

At last, however, all was made ready for the Church's onward march. Persecution had tried the faith of the disciples; and, instead of thinning their ranks, had only scattered them abroad, making the Evangelists, who published the glad tidings wherever they went, not a little company, but a mighty host. Another step was gained, moreover, towards the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. The man was already reckoned among the faithful whom God had chosen to be the Apostle of the Gentiles; so the fields were white for the harvest; the labourer was training for his work; nothing was wanting but the Lord's command to thrust in the sickle, that he might go and reap the first-fruits in twenty cities.

This precious chapter tells us how "the door of Faith was opened to the Gentiles;" precious to us as the Charter of our Freedom, so to speak, the record on which is inscribed the name of Britain, and a hundred other lands, once dark as the darkest, foul as the foulest, now purged from the abominations of heathenism, and penetrated from end to end with Christian light. Cornelius, as we read it, is not a mere dry name, like a thousand more which live in history, but have no special significance; but the Gentile Centurion stands as the representative of a whole army of fellow-disciples, the leader, not of a hundred Roman soldiers, but of many millions gathered out of all countries, whose enfranchisement dates from the day of his baptism; and we have our place among that motley host, because our forefathers were "aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, without hope and without God in the world," while we, through God's abounding mercy, are children, not aliens, and have a good hope in Christ, and are brought nearer to God than patriarchs and prophets were before us.

Now let us turn to the narrative, and notice how the Hand of God was seen in the opening of this new Chapter of the Book of Providence, and try to gather some instruction for ourselves from the several incidents of the story.



Mark the character of the man. He was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." Thus far he had got, before he ever heard of Christ. Who were his teachers then? How came an officer in the Roman army to fear God, instead of offering sacrifices to Mars and Jupiter? Had his residence in Judæa brought him into contact with some pious Jews, who taught him that an idol was nothing, and that the Father of all the families of the earth was the Almighty, All-merciful, unseen Jehovah, Who made the worlds, and ruled the seasons, and saved their fathers by miracle, and taught them by His servants the Prophets? Or in some happy moment had he obtained possession of the book of the law, and read in it truer history and a purer morality than were found in the fanciful mythology of Greece and Rome? We know not, my brethren. The story is very shortly told, and we hear nothing of the quarter from whence his knowledge was supplied. But there he was at Cæsarea, a worshipper of the God of Israel, known as a man of devout habits, who had taught his family what he knew himself of the divine will, and who was moreover, (probably a very rare thing for a Roman dwelling among Jews,) open-handed with his charities.

Thus far he had got, and farther, without some one to help him, he could not go. Among his petitions may have been some breathed in simple words, yet full of honest fervour, that God would teach him more of what he longed to know, would expound hard sayings, if portions of Holy Scripture were really among his treasures, or would turn his doubts and hopes into certainty, if he was living hitherto on vague traditions of an expected Saviour. The favour that was really in store for him he little anticipated; but to that undistinguished person, known only to his officers and a few friends besides, filling up the measure of his duties according to his light, it pleased God to send a heavenly messenger, purposely to tell him where to find a guide and instructor. An angel, one of the happy spirits who fly abroad to do God's bidding in any one of his ten thousand worlds, tells him that "his prayers and his alms are come up for a memorial before God," and describes both the town and the house in which Peter was then living. "Send men thither straightway," was the charge; "bring him to thy home, and do what he shall bid thee." Blessed tidings for a man on the look-out for spiritual guidance, carrying with them their own voucher, for the herald who brought them was clearly no son of earth, imposing no burdensome task, for Joppa

was easily reached from Cæsarea, giving promise, in the simplest and most positive language, of the very boon which the man craved of all others, and almost despaired, perhaps, of finding.

So it pleased God, long ago, to answer one faithful man's prayers. But the lesson is for us, and for all time to come. We need, as he did, to be taught of God, and if we be humble learners, praying as we know how, and practising obvious duties according to our ability, assuredly God will teach us. We are not so dependent on foreign help as this Roman was, because Christian instruction already has done a good deal for us, and Bibles in our homes and Churches are wise and faithful friends, and will be speaking friends, will give us words, that is, that shall reach our hearts and consciences, if in very deed we search them with an honest spirit. Still the human voice has its power. Friends, if they be really servants of Christ, and are some stages ahead of us in the journey heavenward, may be to us almost as angels of God when religion first becomes a reality to us. We crave help at such times, help from those who have a firmer footing than ourselves, and a clearer sight, and have tried the weapons which we do but begin to handle.

It may be that what we crave of this kind God will not give us, or that at any rate He will

quicken our prayers and our faith by keeping us for a while in His sole keeping ; but, very often, as many of His children can testify, He sends some one who can answer all our questions, warn us of our special dangers, see almost into our thoughts, and whose wise and loving counsel is laid up in our memories, for all time to come, as a treasure by itself. Often, we learn from our own experience of life, or from the biographies of good men who have become teachers of others in their turn, some strange concurrence of circumstances, some chance meeting, as it seemed, with one never seen before, yet never forgotten afterwards, a journey taken at a critical moment, or a journey hindered he knew not why, has brought some seeker after God to the right spot just at the right time ; and there, unbidden and unlooked for, the prophet stood, with his heart open, and his message ready, and told the pilgrim in plain words how the next stage might be passed in safety, and what helps were needed for his onward course. It need not be one of the heavenly host. Miracles have ceased in these latter days ; and they, who minister about the saints at God's bidding, minister unseen. But never let us doubt that special gifts of this sort, those best of all gifts which help to fix our choice, to silence painful doubts, to arm us against profane men's taunts and Satan's

subtlest temptations, are really of our Father's own sending, and come as straight from the Courts of Heaven as if we saw one of the "shining ones" by our side, and heard words as express as those which told the Gentile soldier of the Apostle dwelling in the tanner's house "by the sea-side" at Joppa.

Or if He, Who doeth all things well and wisely, leaves us to ourselves when our hearts are heavy, if the wise friend comes not, and doubts grow up faster than we can answer them, and the thought is forced upon us sometimes, as we survey the bustling crowd, each eager for his own, "Alas! among them all no man careth for my soul;" then let us remember how wonderfully God works in unlikely places, how faith can live on with very small supplies, how certainly He, the all-bounteous Parent, accepts what the weakest of all His true-hearted children have, instead of requiring what they have not. *Cornelius at Cæsarea*, serving under the emperor, bound by the rules of Roman discipline, yet looking heavenward, proving himself even then a blessing to the needy, offering many prayers to God in his quiet home, though heathen men and heathen customs were all around him,—this man, who condemns the undevout baptized man utterly, may encourage the timid, shrinking Christian greatly. But have we not a better Covenant?

and a store of better promises? God sendeth friends, helpers, counsellors, to many; but "God giveth His Holy Spirit" now to all "who ask Him." The Good Shepherd knows every weakling in all His flock. Let the man who wants sympathy above every thing in his first hard struggles with temptation, think of the High Priest in the Heavenly Temple, of Whom the wonderful words are spoken, that even there He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Remember of Whom it was said that He "breaketh not the bruised reed nor quencheth the smoking flax," and never think that thy trembling hopes shall die, or thy fainting spirit have its life crushed out, if, in very deed, thou art looking to Him for help, coming daily to the Fountain of cleansing, and desiring, as a redeemed man who art not thine own, to yield thyself fairly to His guidance.

Cornelius acts promptly on his instructions. "Two household servants," and "a devout soldier," are straightway despatched to Joppa to search out Peter. Peter meanwhile has no direct warning of their intended visit, but is prepared, before they reach him, to give the right counsel, and to take the course which marked a completely new era in the Church. "On the morrow," (the day after the departure of the messengers from Cæsarea, that is, that place being

more than a day's journey from Joppa,) "on the morrow Peter went up upon the housetop to pray." *Prayer* again, you see. A praying Gentile in one place, a praying Apostle in another, God hearing and guiding both; the two men, who could never have found each other out, brought together by this invisible chain which linked the pair to the throne of God! What were Peter's thoughts and prayers? He may have had musings in his solitude about the Church's destiny, dim longings for a yet brighter day, when the triumphs of the Gospel should extend to other races in distant lands; questionings, perchance, whether all that had been done in Judæa and Samaria, and among his own brethren in some of the Syrian cities, realized the glowing pictures of ancient Prophecy, or seemed to satisfy the requirements of that well-remembered sentence, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Among his prayers, at any rate, we cannot doubt, was the oft-repeated petition that he might be ready for every service, and, in following up the great work already begun, might walk ever in God's path, instead of blindly or sinfully choosing his own. He became "very hungry," and "fell into a trance," and saw a vision. A fasting man, we know, when the appetite is craving, will dream of food; and so what Peter saw took a certain

shape from the bodily sensations of the moment; but in his case, as in many others that we read of in the Word of God, the things presented to him, unlike the pictures which dance before our eyes at slumbering times, had a special significance, and conveyed a seasonable lesson.

It may seem strange, possibly, that such high matters as are revealed to us in this chapter should be transacted through visions of the night or of the day. We may wonder, if Cornelius was to be baptized, and Gentiles henceforth were to be as Jews,—converts from the holy nation and from twenty others being incorporated into one family,—why the new law was not proclaimed at Jerusalem or some other place, and why the Apostles were not solemnly convened to hear what was at once so unspeakably important, and so strange to Jewish ears. God, however, taketh His own way of imparting great truths and principles to the souls of His prophets. The Lord Himself may call to us by name as He called to Saul. Or Gabriel may come from his place near the Eternal Throne, and speak words of blessed import, like those which he addressed to one favoured woman in Nazareth. Or dreams like Pharaoh's, or handwriting on the wall, as in Belshazzar's case, may have a mystic meaning which some divinely gifted seer shall interpret, so that heathen men shall confess that God has spoken.



Or wondrous visions, dimly shadowing forth the world's history, or the Church's, in future ages, may pass before some selected person, like Daniel, or St. John, who shall write it down upon the sacred roll, but leave wise men, centuries afterwards, to unfold the hidden meaning, if God shall give them the spirit of discernment. Or, lastly, He may so shape unreal things as to wake up the very thoughts which He desires to implant in hearts of His own choosing, stamping the vision, as it were, with a heavenly mark, and forcing His wakeful servants to connect what flitted before them in dream or trance with something to be settled or done in actual life.

Thus it was with Peter. You remember what he saw : living creatures, in part, at least, unclean, let down in a sheet from heaven. A hungry man might long for them, but many of them a devout Jew might not touch. You remember what he heard. A voice from heaven said, "Rise and eat," and the same voice answered the Apostle's scruples by saying, or seeming to say, that there was no uncleanness here, for God, the universal Lord, had made him free of all alike. You remember what he did. When the servants of Cornelius had declared their mission, the Spirit said, "Go with them," and he went. Arrived at Joppa, he found friends assembled in the Centurion's

house, and at once, without doubt or misgiving, gave them the right hand of fellowship. The journey, embracing part of two days, had been a time, we are sure, of deep and prayerful meditation. The prejudices of a life were scattered; the born Jew apprehended now the fulness of his Christian liberty, and the largeness of his Master's kingdom. Already the conclusion was reached that God's mercy must not be narrowed to the dimensions of one small country under heaven, that sinful men everywhere were to hear of Him who died to save them, and that the blessing of adoption henceforth was to go, not by inheritance to one selected people, but by the grant of faith to men of the Hebrew race and to sinners among the Gentiles, without preference or exclusion. "God hath shewed me," was his noble greeting as soon as he entered the house of the stranger, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean;" and then Christ was preached as the Saviour of the world, the Judge of quick and dead, the Prophet mighty in word and deed, whom the speaker heard, and saw, and loved; and lo! when the sermon was ended, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." None were bold enough to forbid the waters of baptism to men thus marked by God; and that

night the sun went down upon a Church made up of Jews and Gentiles.

Gladly we hear the saying, and thankfully we receive the blessing. Oh, that *our* baptism may be the baptism of the Holy Ghost! Oh, that we may have prepared hearts when we meet in this House of Prayer, like Cornelius and his friends when they listened to the Apostles, and the message of salvation proved as welcome as showers after a time of drought! Oh, that the Word of the living God, precious sometimes in its scarceness, may not become cheap in our eyes through its exceeding plenty! Oh, that we may never presume on our privileges as the children of Abraham did in ancient days, and put our National Christianity in the place of their circumcision, and so perish under a double curse!

On the day we have been speaking of, the Gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles. It has been preached among them ever since. Eighteen centuries gone, and the work still unfinished! Eighteen centuries gone, and Christ's name not named among more than half of the world's population! Eighteen centuries gone, and idol-temples not only confronting Christian men in lands which they have ruled for generations, but the empire of darkness unassailed in other places, preachers not sent, not

in training, not purposing to go! Eighteen centuries of mingled truth and error in the Church, of bitter feuds and endless squabbling about words and ceremonies, of liberty withheld at one time and liberty abused at another, of arrogant Church claims compacted into a system, engendering foul corruptions and quenching spiritual life, then manfully withstood, then successfully re-asserted, lasting into an age like this, when the Word of God has been travelling abroad for four centuries, while, time after time, piety revives and then decays, and zeal often spends itself on trifles, and charity, at the best, looks like a faint reflection of that which St. Paul wrote about, and intellect, God's noble gift, makes vast numbers proud and sceptical, instead of laying all its stores in deep humility and adoring thankfulness at the Redeemer's feet. Eighteen centuries gone! Alas! what is the world still? and what might it have been? Look at the Holy Book and see what Christianity is in its purity and power. Look at Christendom in its length and breadth, and see how heaven's light is darkened, how the Bride, the Lamb's wife, hath put off her beautiful garments, how faintly the image of our Lord is traceable, even in the most favoured lands, among those who call upon His name.

Let us look to ourselves, for we share this deep disgrace. Let us not call common or

unclean what God hath cleansed. In name and by profession we are all His servants. We have Christ's mark upon our foreheads. By the act of those who loved us wisely our souls have been dedicated to God, and the man is not here who has cancelled these vows, and claimed himself back again, as belonging in no sense to Christ. Shall we not be true men? Shall we say at church we long to be delivered from bondage, and hug our chains all the week through? Shall we pray here that we may be clothed with the "armour of light," with truth, and love, and purity, and saint-like patience and humility, and zeal, kindled at the Cross, which seeks God's glory along with our soul's perfection and our brethren's highest good, and then, to-morrow, in the busy, tempting world, shall we be one in speech, and one in heart with men who hold cheap every Christian grace, and care only for the morality which keeps the world at peace, and makes their treasure safe? Many are thus hypocritical or double-minded, devout and careless by turns, praying holy words, but never dreaming that they are to be holy in thought and purpose, holy in word and deed, holy as soldiers of Christ and witnesses for Christ, in all places and all companies.

Let us not call *this sacred place* common or unclean. God cleansed it long ago, set it

apart, that is, in His Providence, for His special use and service. Let us not profane it by irreverence. Let us not buy and sell here, like the money-changers in the temple, letting the bargains of yesterday lodge in our thoughts unchecked and unrebuked, so as to spoil the freedom of worship, and make our sacrifice a polluted thing. Do not dream away minutes that are precious. If the world have its engrossing cares on other days, and lays a heavy burden on your souls, so that in the morning prime, perhaps, your prayers are hurried because business calls are urgent, and in the still evening hour, perhaps, your prayers are dull, because the spirit is jaded; yet make much of these brief sowing-times, and drive away the distracting thoughts which are like the fowls of the air, hungry and importunate, and pray, as for your lives, that the honest and good heart may be given, lest texts and sermons should witness against you at the Day of Judgment.

Sundays are not common days, for God hath made them holy for ever. *Your Bibles* are not common books, for on them are written the words of eternal life. *The bread*, which some of us shall taste to-day, is not common food, for Christ hath chosen it to be the symbol of His bruised body, and the spiritual food which the true disciples of the cross receive at His hands

when they are faint and hungering. Oh, let us use them all like men who stand in awe of the Divine Presence, and fear to handle rudely any of the King's treasures!

Let us pray that we may have Faith to see God every where, and to serve Christ in every thing. Then *the world*, full as it is of evil, will not be unclean to us, but like a school swept and garnished for our use, where we may learn fresh lessons of wisdom and righteousness every day. *Life*, trifling as it is in many aspects, and wearisome in others; life, with its heavy woes and its little crosses, its monsters of crime towering above the crowd, and its army of offenders filling every street, will be rightly understood and appreciated. We shall esteem it not as something to flee away from, like the hermit, or to pour contempt upon, like the cynic, or to make a plaything of, merely, and a pleasure-garden, like the sensualist; but as a *solemn mystery*, rather, which God will partly interpret now, and interpret more fully hereafter,—as a *sacred deposit* which must be guarded diligently, and improved faithfully,—as a *precious seed-plot* on which the humblest may labour for God, assured that common duties and weak endeavours, if sanctified by Faith, shall yield a rich harvest in Eternity. Yes, my brethren, let every thing be holy in our eyes on which Christ has set His mark,—and the wise-hearted

Christian sees it in many places where the crowd will pass it by. "Life and death" are His, "things present and things to come." Blessed be His name, if we be among His friends, they are all ours too.



## SERMON XII.

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A WORLD-EMBRACING FAITH.

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ACTS xi. 18.

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

(*December 11, 1859.*)

How strangely these words sound to us! What a distant age does it seem, how widely parted from ourselves and our own experience, in which good men wonder that Gentiles, men not born of the seed of Abraham, should receive the Gospel! And the men who wonder are born Jews, dwelling at Jerusalem, belonging to the nation who pass with us for the unbelieving nation, haters, through long centuries, of Christ and His Church, and too often hated, and more than hated, by Christians in return. Yet so it was in early days, we know. For a while every disciple was a son or daughter of Israel. The Law was their schoolmaster to bring them to

Christ. They believed their own Prophets, and therefore received Him of whom they all testified. Then came a transition era. Suddenly the barrier was broken down. By divine prompting Gentiles were baptized, and visible proofs of sonship, in the shape of miraculous gifts, were bestowed on the new converts, a son Apostles and Evangelists. The two streams, which had flowed through separate channels from the world's infancy almost, began to intermingle, and for a time there were jealousies and rival factions, badges of the circumcised and uncircumcised, questions about relaxing the strictness of the Mosaic rule on one side, and about imposing the yoke of ceremonies on the other. Gradually, however, the work of amalgamation went on. There was one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one rule of life, one blessed, soul-purifying, soul-elevating hope; and men, taught by the Spirit of Holiness to walk in the same narrow path to heaven, joined company as fellow-pilgrims, or joined hands as brethren, who for conscience and charity sake must be helpful to each other while the toilsome journey lasted. Some learnt the lesson faster than others; some were hard to be persuaded, years after Peter's journey to Cæsarea, that the Gentiles were fellow-heirs of Christian privileges to the full extent; some kept alive social distinctions after religious equality was

established; but, in course of time, divisions died out, and the Christian army presented an unbroken front in its onward march, till new questions arose, and heresies began to disturb the Church's peace.

The chapter before us marks the period when the news of this strange innovation on established customs was quite fresh. From Cæsarea the tidings had travelled to Jerusalem. With no less of surprise possibly than we should feel if the Sultan set up the Cross in the mosques of Constantinople, or the Pope was to abolish the mass, and forbid prayers to the Virgin, saying the Word of God, not the Church's traditions, must henceforth rule the consciences of Christian men, "the Apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard," one day, "that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God." Peter had acted on his own responsibility. Coupling the message of an angel to Cornelius with his own vision on the housetop; marking the reverent demeanour of Cornelius and his household, and their eager anxiety to receive the good news of which he was the bearer; doubly assured too that in the parable of the clean beasts and the unclean he was to read his lesson for that particular occasion, when the Holy Ghost fell on his hearers as they sat in mute attention, and drank in the words of peace, he had admitted them to the

fold of Christ, and had tarried for some days among the new disciples ; happy, fruitful days, we are sure, for the speaker and hearers. But now this strange thing being done, it had to be accounted for ; and the second and third verses of this chapter tell us how the doer of them was received by his brother-Apostles when his mission was ended. “When Peter was come up to Jerusalem they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.”

Now mark these words, and remember the place which St. Peter occupies in the Creeds of Christendom wherever Popery prevails. Mark those words, and put it down as among the strangest marvels in the history of human perverseness, that men of cultivated intellect, thoroughly conversant with the sacred story, should maintain, as the fundamental dogma of their faith, that from the moment our Lord ascended to heaven St. Peter ruled the Church singly in his Master’s name ; that, by virtue of special grant, he was Christ’s Vicegerent upon earth ; that he had authority over Apostles as over meaner men ; and that through him, because he stood above them all, and had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, one man in each generation may claim dominion over all bishops and all churches to the end of time.

They "contended with him." Did Apostles, then, not know their place? Were St. John and St. James, St. Andrew too, his own brother, at fault in this matter? Was it a secret up to this time that his Lord had given him so much? Were they all under a delusion, and, like blinded heretics of a later day, did they misinterpret what they had heard spoken about the Rock and the gates of hell, giving the words some lower meaning, and needing now to be taught what they really conveyed?

But did St. Peter himself teach them? Were they silenced by authority? It was a great occasion; the Church had never seen a greater; nothing so momentous as the admission of the Gentile world to equal privileges with the chosen people has ever been debated in Council, or settled by Canon ever since. Did the Vicegerent, then, rule the matter, and tell them he had done so because it was for *him*, not *them*, to open and shut the door of faith as he pleased? We hear of no such claim; the grand opportunity was lost; no decree went forth with high-sounding phrases about the Primacy, and powers delegated to one above the rest, like many of a later day. Listen to the fourth verse, and observe the contrast: "But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." Then follows a simple narrative of facts; and

when the last is told, he addresses an appeal to their reason, makes them judges in the matter equally with himself, asks for their verdict upon the whole matter as candid men, called like himself to accept this new revelation of God's purposes, and to carry them out in their future proceedings: "Forasmuch then' as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God?"

What indeed? thou man of God, thou chosen witness for the truth that God is no respecter of persons, and that all men, every where, however blinded by ignorance, however sunk in sin, are heirs of the common Redemption. *What indeed?* We thank thee, in our distant isle, for what thou didst in the house of Cornelius, and what thou didst say in that gathering-room at Jerusalem; and we thank God who taught thee, and made thee a minister of good things to many, that the blessed news travelled from country to country till it reached our shores, and our fathers, who were Gentiles according to the flesh, became obedient to the faith, and fellow-heirs with thee and thy brethren of the heavenly kingdom.

The story being finished, Peter's vindication was complete. The hearers contended with him no longer. Their hearts warmed to fellow-disciples of another name. The new light that

dawned upon them gladdened their very souls ; “ When they heard these things they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” There is a lesson, surely, in the method of this conference and its happy results, which may be read with advantage by private Christians. Let men wait and hear the whole truth, when things are reported respecting friends or colleagues which sound strangely at first. Let those who desire to be at peace confer frankly together, instead of talking and guessing apart, and often in the dark, about the matter at issue. Let questions in which men’s characters are involved be discussed openly, when the thing is possible, instead of being whispered about secretly. Half the quarrels which divide mankind, souring their spirits, crippling their energies, and breaking up society into factions, aye, *much more* than half, would be settled before suspicion has grown up to dislike, and dislike gone on to bitter hostility, if the disputants would take pains to learn the exact truth at first. But evil reports are trusted, misunderstanding ensues, angry words are spoken which can never be recalled ; the wrong-doer, if there be one, stands at once upon his pride, and will yield nothing ; or the injured party, if he have done nothing amiss, feels aggrieved by the rash judgment of

one who was once his friend ; zealous allies on either side often pour oil upon the flame ; and resentment is kindled which consumes the peace of one party, or both, for many a month. Alas ! peace in the Church, peace in communities, peace in our homes, is sacrificed, often, to caprices and humours which a little management, and a larger charity, would keep within bounds ; and far too little do most of us estimate the importance of dealing frankly with a suspected or offending brother, and bringing out to open daylight the little feud which may soon grow to size and importance in the dark !

Another lesson, surely, may be drawn from the narrative which we are considering. Looking at the past history of the Jewish nation, remembering how God's special mercies had been limited hitherto, and how every descendant of the patriarchs believed men of Gentile origin to be a lower race, cut off, not for a season, but for all time to come, from the Covenant of promise, we must say that this ready acceptance of Peter's message by the whole company of Apostles, and by many brethren besides, was a striking evidence of candour on their part, and proved how the blessed Spirit, who is Love as well as Truth, was already preparing them for the next stage in their onward march. Brethren from among the heathen, a Roman centurion and his household admitted



into the *Christian family*, a door opened through which polished Greeks and Romans, and rude barbarians, might come rushing in to claim fellowship with the men who saw the Lord, who received His parting benediction, on whom the Spirit was poured according to His promise, marking them out for their great work, *how could this be?* It was a strange revolution in the world's history. The traditions of centuries were to go for nothing. Good men were to unlearn what they had been taught from infancy. The barrier was not impassable which divided idolaters, worshippers in heathen temples, where images were enshrined having the likeness of "birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things," from men who adored the One True God, and observed the customs which Moses had commanded. This was a staggering doctrine at first. Devout men would require strong confirmation of a message which thus shocked their prejudices, and almost bewildered them with its startling novelty. But strong confirmation they got, and the old doctrine was renounced, that none but the circumcised could be the children of the kingdom.

My dear brethren, Christians of a later day might have learnt much from the example of these men. Very slow have they been to admit any form of opinion into the Church which wore a new guise, or did not accord

exactly with inherited notions as to Church discipline or religious observances. Very apt are we to rebuild the barriers which are broken down, and to draw fresh lines of separation between ourselves and some whose errors we magnify, and whose virtues we refuse to see. Very prevalent has been the habit of practically excommunicating all who are not of our Church; and grievously have Christian men, up to our own day, been sinning against Charity, because the Apostolic test has been completely lost sight of, "God gave unto them the like gift as He did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ." Men have been proscribed who were taught by the Spirit of Holiness, guided into all saving truth, enriched with many excellent gifts, made fruitful in good works, because in matters of Church Order, which are very slightly touched upon in Holy Scripture, they felt free to depart from established usage, and found what seemed to them a more excellent way of presenting their offerings to God. A strange spectacle is presented, even now, though we think ourselves less bigoted than our fathers, in the divided host of really Christian men, with their separate badges and watchwords, their party-fights, and mutual reproaches, when we think how much they believe in common, how large a portion of their religious

teaching sounds in the same strain, how gladly they can drink refreshment and instruction not only from the Fountain-head of Truth, but from the human channels which it feeds and purifies, much of our Christian literature being common ground where the choicest spirits meet together, and thank God for the rich heritage received from their fathers.

Surely, if the first Christians learnt so soon that one Church might hold the circumcised and uncircumcised, later Christians might learn, as they have not yet learnt, to love all "who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." But (strange to say), in many cases, though we seem to live in open daylight, and men might learn easily, if they would, what their neighbours are, and what their neighbours think, many live so much in one set, read so little of a religious kind beyond what is written by their own friends, and come out so sparingly from their own little world of thought and feeling to some larger place of conference, where deputies meet, as it were, from many cities and Churches, and look each other in the face, that they grow up almost as ignorant of their fellow-countrymen as of some distant race, respecting whom they know only what is written in books of travel.

I met, a few months ago, a Presbyterian Minister, brought up in Scotland, a man of

cultivated mind, and with a heart so warm as to make one's own heart glow as we talked together; one of many of God's saints of whom I have had a glimpse at Bible meetings, from which Church and Dissent quarrels are banished; and he told me, before we parted, that he came to England hardly believing that piety could be found among the ministers of a Church, ruled by Bishops, and cumbered with State patronage, where free prayer was a forbidden thing in the congregation, and Cathedrals with their choirs and anthems towered proudly in our cities, like relics of a half-regretted Popery; "and the first thing," he said, "which opened my eyes was acquaintance, which grew up to friendship, with a Clergyman hard by my residence, whose zeal and devotedness and Christian consistency utterly shamed me. In my wretched ignorance, and narrow-hearted bigotry," (for he did not spare himself,) "I had fancied that a man, situated as he was, must be a formalist, preaching a dry doctrine such as he found stereotyped for him in the Creeds, and a stranger to the power of godliness; and here I found him a Christian of no common stamp, a pastor after God's own heart, overflowing with kindness to the poor, and with a brother's heart for good men of every name. I confess

my mistake with shame, and thank God for teaching me what I learnt too late."

My brethren, mistakes are not all on one side. Discoveries of the same kind come upon Churchmen sometimes by surprise. It is good for all of us to hear of full-grown saints beyond the boundaries of our own Communion, men who live above the world's level, fairly "Epistles of Christ, known and read" by neighbours as well as friends. Such examples teach us something more than mere toleration of what we may think errors in judgment; they help to correct our theology, and make us value yet more the great things of Salvation, and seek more of spiritual-mindedness for ourselves, when we see what men may grow to under Divine teaching, who want some of our helps, and are left, as we may think, to imperfect guidance.

Let us return to the Apostles, and to the memorable day when they rejoiced over the first-fruits of the Gentile world. What a field of vision must have been opened to them! How rapidly would their thoughts travel over the land of darkness, and dwell on the glad-some prospect of light soon breaking over them from the East! God's children were free henceforth, and might carry the treasure of the

Gospel where they pleased. Their lips were unsealed, and far and wide they might declare that there was "none other name," but One, "given among men whereby they might be saved." Would the countries which bordered upon Judæa be won speedily? Would not an army of Evangelists be scattered through the populous cities of Asia? Would great Rome be reached, and should the world's Empress become the handmaid of the Lord, laying all her trophies at His feet, and as she had trodden the nations under foot hitherto, now requite them twentyfold by making her power and wealth to minister to their highest good? The gift of tongues was bestowed already. Was not that a sign that mercy was in store for men who were parted from them by seas and mountains, but who yet might be reached by the heralds of the Prince of Peace? Three thousand converted in a day in the city of Jerusalem! What a harvest of souls might be hoped for when preachers should be widely scattered, and a hundred sermons like that of Pentecost should be preached at once in a hundred cities!

Such thoughts we cannot doubt there were in that company when Peter's tale was ended, and the truth flashed upon them that a new chapter in the Church's History was opening. Partly these visions were embodied in realities.

Already, we read in this very chapter, the leavening process was going on. Some, who were scattered by the persecution in which Stephen had perished, travelled to their homes in Cyprus and Crete, "preaching the word to none but to the Jews only." Then, we suppose, came the news of the calling of the Gentiles, and these same men travel to Antioch, and there, having Grecians for their hearers, they "preached the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." Soon, too, we hear of St. Paul's far-reaching travels through the cities of Asia Minor, and of Churches gathered from those who had been worshippers hitherto, some in Jewish synagogues, and some in heathen temples. The united family wanted a name; and at Antioch, we read, they found one. "The disciples" there first "were called Christians."

My dear brethren, that is a suggestive sentence, if we had time to dwell upon it: a name *well chosen*, we all feel; a name, alas! how often disgraced; a name which ought to be a pledge of loyalty to the King of Saints, and of disloyalty to the world and the world's master; a name given long ago to the foremost nations in the world, and alas! by their unfaithfulness still held back from millions of wretched wanderers from light and happiness.

The Apostles, on the day we speak of, looked doubtless for a far speedier ingathering to the fold of Christ. Strange alternations have there been since ; sad reverses for the Christian host, fatal disorders in the camp, companies broken up into rival factions, captains disputing for the leadership, Crusades directed, often, not against the alien, but against the saints ! Shall we wonder that the march of conquest was soon checked, that Satan rallied his forces, and still has fortresses and strongholds in the dark places of the earth ? It is a sad tale, and full of mystery, when we think what the Gospel is and what is its mission in this fallen world. But leaving just now the history of the Church's partial triumphs and many failures, let us look to ourselves, our own name and all that it involves. Let us be sure that it is a great thing to be a Christian ; and let us aim to be *Christians indeed*. *Baptized men* we may be, and yet not "cleansed from filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit." *Churchmen* we may be, and yet aliens from the Household of Faith. *Protestants* we may be, and yet have the taint of the natural man's Popery in our hearts, by reason of our dependence on human teaching, and wretched bargaining with God, and hopes of a peaceful end after a life of ungodliness. But *Christians indeed* we cannot be without the Humility



which lies low before the Cross, without the Faith which lays fast hold on Christ, without the dedication of heart and life to God's service without fellowship with the saints as the partners of our trials, and the helpers of our joy, without the hope which aims as high as heaven, and can be satisfied only with an eternal inheritance in the presence of our Lord. Where are men of this stamp? and *how many* are they? We ask it sorrowfully on Communion-days, wondering whether the numbers who make light of Christ's gracious invitation, and have no appetite for the heavenly feast, know what the Gospel meaneth, or are living, even imperfectly, beneath its rule, or have any taste of its blessings. My brethren, we cannot tell; God knoweth. Gladly would we see a much larger number of *fellow-guests*, and then we should have a better hope of their being *fellow-Christians*.

# SERMON XIII.<sup>1</sup>

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ST. PETER IN PRISON.

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ACTS xii. 5.

“Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.”

*(St. Peter's Day.)*

WE remember our Lord's warning to His disciples, that they should be brought before rulers and magistrates for His name's sake. Yea, “the time cometh,” He had said, “that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service.” That time had come, and much of this book is taken up with describing how the Apostles met it. They were forewarned, so it did not take them by surprise; they were forearmed, too; for now the armour of God was upon them. Their “loins” were “girt about with truth;” they had on “the breastplate of righteousness;”

<sup>1</sup> Preached Sunday Evening, Feb. 9, 1862.

“the hope of salvation” was their “helmet,” the good, clear, assured hope that their souls were safe in their Lord’s keeping, and that neither man nor devil could rob them of their prize.

No Christian man can read that story without thrilling interest. How they stood and fought and conquered, is worth all that history tells us of wars of patriotism put together; for the world’s hopes were bound up with their successes. *Their* cause is *ours*; their weapons are *ours*; and (blessed be His name) their Lord is *ours*. Every man who goes through the world, having his “feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace,” all who are truly on Christ’s side, and battling with evil in its many forms around them, and within them, have a personal interest in all these narratives. One of them I have selected for our evening portion, and a few plain remarks upon the whole chapter may prove at once instructive and encouraging.

Herod, we are told, (not the murderer of John the Baptist, but another, who was now governor of Judæa,) “about that time,” that is, *after* Saul had taken his place by the side of the Apostles, *after* Samaria had been leavened with the new doctrine, *after* Cornelius, and others with him, had been welcomed into the fold of Christ,—this Herod, when things had got

thus far, and the sect of the Nazarenes could no longer be despised, "stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." A *third* name is suggested when we hear of these two Apostles, a name so often associated with *theirs* in the Gospel history, that of *St. John*. How was it that *all three* were not now partners in suffering? Where was the disciple whom Jesus loved? We need not suppose that he was less forward, or less brave, than those on whom the hand of power fell. He earned martyrdom as fairly, we may conclude, as the most devoted among his brethren. But it pleased God, who giveth to every mortal man an appointed time upon the earth, to let him minister to a second generation, and a third; though for half a century we know of nothing that he did, besides taking charge of our Lord's mother, and cherishing her like a son. To whom he preached, and with what success, in which of the surrounding countries men were privileged to hear what he could tell of his Lord's private and public discourses, what cities were summoned to repentance by the voice which had surely a tenderness of its own when it spoke of the garden scene and the Last Supper, *all this* is hidden from us, so far as the

Scripture narrative is concerned, and no positive information is supplied from other sources. See, then, how little *tradition*, of which some people make so much, does for us when we really long to have some gap supplied. See how sparing the Evangelists have been on some points, as compared with the writers of a later age who have heaped up stories of little worth respecting meaner saints. Let us take thankfully what God has given, and make the best of it for our own use and guidance. St. John's Epistles tell us what he was *at last*; some short notices in the Gospels, especially the wish to have some Samaritans destroyed by fire who had put a slight upon his Lord, teach us that an impetuous and somewhat ambitious spirit had been subdued and chastened in the interval; and whatever was the discipline by which God trained this favoured man, his graces were all the gift of that blessed Spirit who will strengthen and brighten *ours*, if in deed and in truth we desire to be made holy after the same pattern. We read that his brother James ran a shorter race, and soon followed Stephen to his heavenly home. Then the persecutor, made bolder by success, and finding that the Christians had no formidable party on their side, laid hands on the foremost man among them all, and shut up Peter in prison. On the very next day he was to be

brought forth for trial. The court and the populace were both against him. Friends among his judges he could hardly find; and innocence he could not plead when the faith, in which he gloried, was, in fact, the imputed crime. *One* thing the saints could do, and *one* only, in this time of their extremity. "Prayer," we are told, "was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." In the house of a faithful woman of their company many were assembled together at the quiet midnight hour, and there, like a family of brothers, were entreating Him who had delivered Daniel from the lions' den, to find some way of escape for His faithful servant.

*Here*, then, as seen in early days, when the Church was weakest, and the sword of persecution was unsheathed which has slain its ten thousand victims since, here were "the faith and patience of the saints." *Here*, at Jerusalem, was witnessed the very scene which has been repeated so often in later centuries, when in some secluded dwelling of the crowded city, or in the deep forest, or on the bare hill-side, the noblest men of their generation have met for mutual counsel or for united prayer, and, after seeking God with strong crying and tears, have found their love stronger than before, and earth has been held far cheaper, and heaven and all its glories seemed to them

hardly out of sight. Memorable *weeping-times* have there been in the Church's history, and blessed *growing-times*, when hope struggled against despair, and won the victory; when the promises were like a storehouse of untold treasures laid up for use; when the glory of the Lord almost shone into the darkened chamber, or made the suddenly-peopled solitude seem like an outer court of the heavenly temple; when quarrels died away of themselves, and the pledge of brotherhood was renewed without a word's speaking, and "Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," (strong to do or suffer as His will might appoint,) was written on the forehead of every saint among them, as they gave to each other the parting benediction, or sang their hymn of praise in company. Need we say that fruit came of prayers like those? Whatever might be the event as to the thing asked for, they had an answer in the best sense, surely, when they had no wish but that God should rule in His own world, no undue hankering after life or safety, no repining thought of friends who were in peril of their lives, no passing apprehension that the gates of hell should prove stronger than the Church's battlements, but rather a calm, unfaltering conviction that, however the great ones of the earth might boast themselves, and however the weak and despised ones might be

trampled on and crushed, the cause must live and triumph, and the Sun of Righteousness shine out bright and warm after a night of storms.

Sometimes, very often indeed, the saints have had the temporal blessing that they prayed for, deliverance almost beyond hope, resurrection from the borders of the grave, providential interpositions, which were as evidently God's doing as the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, or the preservation of the three noble Hebrews in the furnace seven times heated. Sometimes, in the early days of the Church, these things were effected by the agency of heavenly messengers; and so it proved on the night we speak of. While Peter's friends are praying on his behalf, look at the prison scene. He was "sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison." The enemy had made all sure, as they thought. Let the gaolers only be true men, and surprise from without, escape from within, seemed alike impossible. Herod did not doubt that his victim was safe, and felt as certain about the next day's spectacle as about the next day's sunrising. But Peter was not so helpless as he looked. That praying company was stronger than the king, for they had power to prevail with God. Oh! what poor, helpless creatures are tyrants, and their mi-



nisters and helpers, when God ties their hands, or thwarts their purposes! The doors were fast, yet the Angel found his way to the inner prison. A light shone round him, as he was one of the sons of light, yet the soldiers slumbered on. The prisoner's chains fell off; the outer gate of iron opened and shut, and the sentinels knew it not. Peter never meditated escape, and thought when he said his evening prayer that his last day on earth was already closed; yet, presently, he was abroad in the open street, a living man, with his limbs unshackled, and assured, after a brief interval of bewilderment, that what seemed to him at first like a vision of the night was a blessed reality.

*Now* miracles are out of date. We do not look for them. I do not say there is no longer any necessity for them; for they were never *necessary* to Him who can work by any instruments, common or uncommon, and shape them exactly to His own purposes, under all the varying circumstances and conditions of human life. But, as a matter of fact, it pleased Him, when the Church had all the powers of this world against her, to shew signs and wonders on her behalf; and it pleaseth Him, now that she hath kings and queens for her nursing-parents, to let the stream of events flow on in one unbroken course. If Angels minister, as we are sure they do, to the heirs of salvation,

they minister *unseen*. If God rules in this world, and not chance, as we know He does, He rules silently, so to speak, making His common laws to work out His special purposes. But it is our privilege, remember, if we are Christians indeed, to realize His presence here among ourselves, and to recognize His hand in all the events of our time, great and little, as surely as if Angels now visibly destroyed armies in a night, or brought forth from their prisons men who have witnessed for the Gospel's sake. Remember *that*, and do not let prayer, united prayer, fervent prayer, prayer *without ceasing* for our own safety, for our country's happiness, for the Church's enlargement, for the world's conversion, be counted as a thing out of date, at any time. It is no business of ours to speculate how God will do what we ask for. It is wretched folly to heap up difficulties, and say, "Without a miracle *this* thing cannot be done, or *that*." The meanest man alive can be made an Angel for God's purposes at any time, that is, he can have strength and wisdom given him which shall make him a wonder and a blessing to mankind; and monarchs, who stand on the loftiest pinnacle of earthly greatness, can be suddenly cast down, without having their doom first written on their palace-walls, like Belshazzar. Wherefore, solemn gathering-times, when God's hand is heavy upon us, whatever the mockers

may say, let us be sure, are most suitable for Christian men. And it is well for us, when our own homes are darkened with sorrow, or we tremble lest some heavy calamity should fall upon us, to ask sympathizing friends to add *their* supplications to *ours*. Unexpectedly, often, to our surprise and bewilderment, almost, if we be really men of prayer, really waiting on Providence, really hoping for the best, because all things are possible with God, yet calmly awaiting the very worst, because God is not tied to our measures, and will take His own way to train us for His kingdom, beyond all expectation, I say, God will sometimes come to our rescue, and make us wonder at our own success.

For look once more to what was done at Jerusalem. Turn your eyes not to the prison which Peter had left behind him, but to the street wherein dwelt a female disciple, bearing the common name of Mary, and known as the mother of the Evangelist St. Mark. To her house the Apostle repairs. He knew, or conjectured, that *there* he should find some of his friends assembled. They were entreating God on his behalf; knowing that prayer was their only weapon, they plied it, while others slept. Believing in God firmly, and loving their brother dearly, even *then*, within a few hours of the expected execution, they did what they

could, and pleaded hard for that precious life. It was granted them. While they prayed, Peter stood knocking at the door. Yet when the maid, who heard his voice, ran in hastily to tell them the news, it seemed too good to be true; and the girl was mad, they said; or it was his Angel, and not himself: any thing is to be believed for the moment but the simple fact that what they sought in faith God had granted in mercy.

And this is just the common story of all times; God is better to us than our deserts; better than our fears; better than our hopes; and what are His children doing, many a time, while the blessing is at the door? Why, not daring to trust Him, running away from Him, and seeking other comforters when He comes to their rescue; at their wits' end when earthly supplies fail, and earthly props are withdrawn, and slow to believe that the Lord's arm is not yet shortened, so that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear; and then, presently, they are humbled and confounded because the blessing comes which is literally *heaven-sent*, on which they see their *Father's name* written, as it were, something which an Angel might have brought, but which He has thought fit to send to them by some other messenger.

Very slowly are we weaned from folly like

this. Very frequent are the prayers which are offered with so faint a heart that God is dishonoured by them even while we kneel before the Mercy-seat. We trust our *friends*, when they have been proved and tried, the generous and unsuspecting among us, even *before* they have been thoroughly tested; if they promise largely, and not foolishly and beyond their power, we should think it unmannerly to say, "No; you mean not this: I shall never claim what I know you do not intend to give." But again and again, we act thus towards God. We fear to open our mouths too wide, to expect too much; and hardly believe in the possibility of much ground being gained, much grace given, sins fairly mastered, and strong enemies routed in a few weeks or months.

And yet wonders like that wrought in Peter's prison have been seen, many a time, in the moral and spiritual world. *Suddenly* light from heaven, light not of man's kindling, has shone into the darkened understanding of some ungodly man; suddenly he has been wakened up to see, what he never knew before, that he is shut in by dungeon-walls instead of being the child of freedom he thought himself but yesterday: suddenly, though he was doubly fettered, a slave to his own lusts, and bound by the ties of guilty companionship to friends who would have held him fast if they could, his

chains have fallen off, so that he could walk where he pleased; and lo! presently when his face was set towards heaven, he found some faithful friend who was to him as an Angel of God in the first stage of his heavenward journey; and then, like Peter, he desired to be admitted to converse with the saints, and said in his heart that praying men, whom he fled from once, should be his friends henceforth.

*Suddenly*, I say, these things are done, *when* God pleases; aye, though wise men say it cannot be, and that religion, if it be genuine, must be of slow growth; their own experience tells them so; and their own reason besides. And much more rapid, depend upon it, would be the growth of God's children, in their later stages, if they asked for more, hoped for more, made sure of more, from day to day, and from hour to hour; if in their common petitions they prayed for new supplies of grace continually, even as the newly-awakened soul begs for life and peace.

You remember, my dear brethren, the Apostle's emphatic words, when he is talking about the types which, in the time of Israel's wanderings, shadowed forth the spiritual blessings of a later age; "*that Rock*," he says, "*was Christ*;" and you remember what was the stream that issued from it, full, and fresh, and clear, satisfying a million thirsty travellers at once, and

then following them in their onward course, so that *stop* where they would, *travel* where they might, the running water, ample for all their wants, was ever by their side. That Rock was Christ. Need we ask who the pilgrims are, or why they are athirst so often, or what should hinder us from being livelier and stronger for all our journeyings between our prison and our home?

Our chapter is not quite finished, and the last incident is too striking to be omitted. Herod, the Church's enemy, the cruel, persecuting man who had slain one Apostle, and from whose grasp another was delivered by miracle, shortly afterwards "sat upon his throne arrayed in royal apparel," and when he made an oration, full, doubtless, of great swelling words of vanity, some flatterers said, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Then came another Angel, not seen by the crowd probably, and smote him to death because he "gave not God the glory." Peter, therefore, who was doomed to death, outlived by many years the man who thirsted for his blood. Peter had an Angel for his guide, and Herod had an Angel for his punisher. "The word of God," says the very next verse, "grew and multiplied;" the man who set himself against God was "eaten of worms."

Oh! let us dread every thing less than the wrath of heaven, which is provoked by arro-

gance and self-dependence. "Be not high-minded, but fear." "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." And pray remember many a man is proud, proud as God's most stubborn enemies, proud as Nebuchadnezzar in his worst days, and as Herod in his last days, who never sat so high, or had courtiers to please him with the sweet incense of their fulsome praises. In our little homes we may have hearts swollen with arrogance. Clad in mean garments, we may go about the world, and have a foolish and wicked conceit of our sense and goodness. We can flatter *ourselves*, if other flatterers be wanting; and to be as gods, self-sufficient and self-dependent, is the wish of those whom Satan blinds now, even as he tempted his first victims on that side, and then left them to rue their folly.

Rank, learning, wealth, credit, and reputation with the world, all feed this hateful feeling; and therefore men lifted above the crowd should watch themselves closely, and judge themselves strictly. For, depend upon it, this charge of not giving *God the glory* is a very comprehensive one. The words might serve for a text, and suggest a long sermon by themselves. In some form or other men are robbing God of His due; in some form or other they are guilty of the treason of self-glorification; in some form or other idolatry is their



prevailing sin, even as among heathen men, who make the gods they worship; till man's natural pride is expelled by evangelical humility; till despairing of ourselves we trust in Christ; till confessing with the Apostle that "in us," that is, in our flesh, "dwelleth no good thing," we can also make our boast, like him, in the Saviour and His Cross. Self-sufficiency (who does not know it that ever began to look at himself in the glass of the Gospel?) is a sin which lives long, and dies hard. To be "*clothed with humility*" (who does not know it that ever tried fairly to follow Christ?) is among the higher lessons of the full-grown saint. The doctrine which is according to godliness, the doctrine which proclaims *Christ, our Righteousness*, and *Christ, our pattern*, not learnt merely, but embraced with the whole heart, is the only thing to kill that sin, and teach that lesson effectually. While our hope is *in* ourselves, and we think that something to be given to God, or done for God, is in some measure a set-off against known defects, of course we try to enhance the value to ourselves of what we do or give, to make the most of the price that is in our hand, to gloss over our sins, and magnify our virtues. Happy they whom the Spirit of God has brought off from all such vain hopes and vain endeavours! Happy they who are content to take salvation on God's terms,

“without money and without price!” Happy they who, lying low in the dust to confess their sins frankly and without reserve, rise up in the strength of God, to “fight the good fight of faith,” seeking now, not merely to outstrip some in the race where all are laggard, but to grow up to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ!” Be this your aim, and mine, my brethren; and oh, may God in His mercy keep us from the proud look, the proud word, and the proud thought!

## SERMON XIV.

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“THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION.”

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ACTS xiv. 21, 22.

“And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

(*July, 1861.*)

THERE is something very touching, yet very grand, too, in that part of St. Paul's memorable parting address to the elders of Ephesus: “And now behold I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me.” And yet how calm his bearing, how unfaltering his resolution, how steady his onward march in the face of this storm of per-

secution! And another thing is quite as remarkable as his courage and patience. Often he seems to be forgetting himself, while he opens the storehouse of consolation to weaker brethren whose burden was far lighter than his own. At Lystra, at Antioch, at Iconium, he confirms the souls of the disciples; and what were Lystra and Antioch and Iconium to him? Places from which, just before, he had barely escaped with life. There, amidst the enemy, were some dear to him for the sake of their common Lord; and most emphatically, after what they had lately seen, he might exhort them in a strain like this: “Lay it to heart, and remember, that we must enter into the kingdom of God through the gate of tribulation. My experience bears out this truth already, and yours will bear it out if you continue faithful. Make your reckoning accordingly. Let not the world’s enmity take you by surprise. Be valiant for the Truth, like men to whom a great trust is committed, and bear up, and press on, assured of present troubles, and final victory.”

And what is this whole book, my brethren, this most precious and instructive portion of God’s Word, but a narrative made up of incidents like these? Where else shall we see men’s evil passions exhibited in more hateful forms? or where shall we find a livelier record of the

faith and patience of the saints? Again and again the tale is repeated; man hunting his brother-man; magistrates perverting justice; mobs mad upon their idols; some, whose plea was zeal for God, staining their hands with innocent blood; truth's bravest champions, meanwhile, and the world's noblest benefactors, traduced, imprisoned, scourged, condemned as the vilest of the vile; men of large hearts and overflowing charity, in fact, longing to do good where they can, but thrust out as troublers of the world's peace; and society strangely guarding and arming itself, not against the plunderers of mankind, but against men of heroic and self-denying virtue. And as a set-off against all that is painful in the narrative, like a strain of sweet music after a confusion of jarring discords, how simply told, yet how full of moral beauty and grandeur are the brief statements as to the bearing of the saints! Stephen's dying testimony we all remember. We learn, too, that Peter on one occasion was marked for execution on the morrow, and slept quietly at midnight bound with two chains. Paul and Silas we hear of afterwards thrust into the prison, with their feet made fast in the stocks, yet making their prison-walls to ring with God's praises, so that their fellow-prisoners marvelled to hear such strange sounds in that place of darkness, and had thoughts,

perhaps, of their days of innocence to mingle with their dreams. In another book we find Paul's own catalogue of his griefs and burdens ; all quoted, not to win praise from the vulgar, or pity from his brethren, but as the seal of his Apostleship, the Lord's own mark put upon him, the last and least of the Apostles, yet counted worthy to suffer at any rate, and honoured with badges and prizes in that warfare beyond his brethren.

Truly we must say of men like these, “the world was not worthy of them.” It cast out their names as evil, and at the same time was erecting statues to the Cæsars in Rome and throughout the empire, likening to the immortal God men whose vices were hideous, and selling its praises and flatteries in turn to generals who had the luck or the courage to win the legions to their side. See we not, then, the preacher may well ask, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God?” See we not that truth and goodness are not dear, for their own sakes, to men who rank highest in knowledge and civilization? See we not that the heavenly life must have a heavenly source, and that, as God's Spirit moved upon the face of the waters to bring order out of chaos, so the dove-like spirit of peace and charity must come and dwell in these hearts of ours, and tame, and humble, and transform them, or sel-

fishness and malignity will still break out in many ugly forms?

And then comes an objector, perhaps, with the answer that all this was done long ago. Christianity has triumphed, we are told, for Rome capitulated at last; and emperors, instead of persecuting the saints and making a shew of them at holiday games, sat at their feet and did their bidding; and so by degrees Christendom became another name for Europe, and the Gospel Rule became law for princes and their subjects.

Would that it were indeed so! Would that persecution had died out when Constantine saw, or thought he saw, the sign in the sky, and inscribed the Cross on his banners, and had it sculptured on his palaces and halls of justice! We are not going to unfold, or even to touch upon the chapter of horrors which that word persecution suggests in reference to many a dark century in the Church's history between that day and this; but in connexion with our text we must just observe, for the warning of some, for the comforting of others, that men tyrannize still, and men suffer still, and men shew in a hundred different ways their hatred of godliness still, quite apart from any thing that is done upon a public stage, or any thing that the historian can record for the instruction and amusement of future generations.

Let a young man, who has been living as in a dream, seeking pleasure greedily, while God and eternity were forgotten, wake up and forsake his old haunts and old companions, and begin to serve God in the faith and hope of the Gospel. Let him resolve to go where his new convictions tell him he ought to go, and to brave opposition and ridicule in the path of duty. Let him say firmly, “I know now the Bible is the book of God, and by it, God being my helper, I mean to shape my course: I know now that the men I jeered at are God’s faithful servants; and with them, if they will let me, I wish to be found living and dying.” Will he be suffered to take his own course quietly? Will there be no mocking words, no unmanly attempts to bring him back to scenes of merriment, not by an appeal to his reason, but by trying to kindle in him false shame, as if seriousness and devoutness were not fit for a man of spirit, but belonged rather to children and women and worn-out old age? Harder still; let a daughter in some home of luxury, better taught than ungodly parents, begin to learn what the strait gate means, and the narrow way; let her strive to combine dutifulness in the largest sense with obedience to the law of conscience; let her say, not reproachfully, but firmly and gravely, that the haunts of dissipation are distasteful to her, and ask



leave to pass the midnight hour in stillness, instead of being fevered and wearied amid a crowd of revellers; let her hours of devotion be accommodated as far as possible to the family convenience; but let it be seen and known that they are real, the heart's living and loving communing with its risen Lord; and will there be no outbreaks of petty tyranny, no words of unkindness as if she meant to censure and condemn, and set herself up as a paragon of virtue; no compliances exacted which a generous nature would gladly forego; no checks and interruptions to many a work of charity which she would gladly take in hand if authority did not sternly interfere; or the dread of secret displeasure hold her back from ministries of kindness? Oh! judge ye, my brethren; these things are not proclaimed upon the housetops. Deeds are done, and words are spoken, in many a quiet and respectable home, fenced about by law and custom so as to be strong as a citadel, which wound tender spirits like a sword; and often, in this nineteenth century, as in the first when men lay in prison, or fought with lions for the Gospel's sake, do men and women, youths and maidens, read in the Holy Book that we must "pass through much tribulation" in our way to "the kingdom of God," and say to themselves, "Yes, it is so, in very deed; *we* find it so. Lord, help us to

bear our Cross with patience: may we walk uprightly in our allotted path, striving to please Thee any how, and aiming to please others ‘for their good to edification,’ if they will let us.”

The troubles of the saints however are not all, nor half of them, selfish troubles. The fearful prevalence of evil makes them often grave and sad. We have but to open our ears to the rumours of almost every week, and we hear of crime in some ugly form. We have but to penetrate into the hiding-places of iniquity, where men nestle out of sight that they may practise their deeds of darkness more freely, and presently we shall meet with sights and sounds to shock us, and make us flee away like men escaping to the upper air from some foul and pestilential mine. We have but to take up, and read for half an hour, the simple record of what is doing by some band of faithful and devoted men to grapple with evil in its more frightful and debasing forms, and we get a picture of whole classes, whole armies of men and women, made in the image of God, and redeemed by the blood of Christ, who seem brutified by sin, and whose possible recovery to happiness and holiness would be a thing to be doubted and hardly believed, if in the Gospel of our salvation we had not an universal promise, and an infallible remedy. I touch upon these

departments of human wickedness and wretchedness, but do not dwell upon them. I point rather to average men as they live at home, and go abroad; and do the day's work, and talk of the day's news, and take the day's pleasure if it comes. And in the world thus presented to us is there not much to sadden every thoughtful Christian man? Oh, the numbers who seem quite at sea as to the first principles of godliness! Oh, the utter profaneness of more than half the current talk of society, in which the speakers and hearers see no fault, but which is really heathenish talk, God and His Providence are so little referred to, and man is assumed so generally to shape the world's destinies, and low moral principles are confessed to so readily without shame, and loss and gain, wealth and poverty, disgrace and honour, are measured so completely by a scale which has no reference to God's favour, and man's advancement in holiness! Oh, the waste of precious time and substance on frivolous pleasures, and the busy trifling of those by whom amusement is made the serious occupation of life; while all that is really serious and solemn and earnest, is sported with in a vein that might make an angel weep, but really makes fun, and passes for wit, with the grown-up children, who swarm in the circles of fashion! Oh, the wretched heartlessness with

which charity-claims are put aside, while every extravagant whim is indulged with as little misgiving as if God had said, not “The silver and the gold are *Mine* ;” but, “The silver and the gold are *thine* to do with as thou wilt, to squander any where, to bury in the earth, if thou likest, or to feed the lusting eye in all its fancies !” Oh, the difficulty of getting men on the plain Christian ground that they are either the *devil’s own*, confederate with the hosts of evil, pledged to do their bidding and share their kingdom, or they are *God’s own*, bought with the precious blood of His dear Son, and bound, not to a life of forced offerings, and routine observances, but to a life of which it shall be the ruling aim to please Christ, and follow in His steps to Heaven !

That world, I say, the Christian looks out upon. His friends and kindred dwell in it. If God’s word be true, he is assured that the men who live there must be changed in heart and purpose and life, before they can be safe for Eternity. And is he not unfeeling if such a plague of ungodliness does not move him almost to tears ? The best Christians surely are those who will mourn the oftenest, and the deepest, for all that is unchristian in this strange disordered scene. While we thank God on our own behalf, there must be compassion for the wounded and fallen, aye, for the

numbers that look like slain all around us. Specially will there be the secret sorrow, prompting the fervent prayer, for some who are near to us in many things, but still parted from us by a broad gulf; living, we are sure, in a land of drought and barrenness, with no elevating hopes, no settled peace, no stored-up treasure against the day of adversity.

Neither is our task done when we have spoken of tribulation coming to the saints from the world of the ungodly; alas! it cometh from the Church too. It is the dream of the young believer that evil is left behind him when he has once given himself to the Lord, and determined to cast in his lot with the godly. It is a blessed hope while it lasts, that all who "name the name of Christ" with confidence and holy joy not only "depart from iniquity," but are busy henceforth in adorning themselves with every Christian grace. Freer, indeed, would be our march, far bolder our onset against the powers of evil, steadier our progress heavenward, our days more bright with hope, our nights less clouded with desponding, self-accusing thoughts, if indeed we found a helper in every brother, and like an army in march or in peril, all were doing their utmost for the common cause and the common safety. But, alas! if the world daunts us, the

men who do not love and serve it disappoint and wound us. Men who have tasted of the heavenly gift are not weaned from selfishness. The candidates for a crown of glory have not forgotten their earthliness. Humility, which is the lesson *first taught* in the school of Christ, is the lesson which is *last learnt*. Light and love do not go hand in hand; and some at whose feet we can sit to hear God's word expounded, and whose lips seem touched with fire from heaven, when they speak of the mysteries of godliness, are unstable men at the best, too readily carried away with the current of evil example, and, though not apostates or hypocrites, fail most certainly to “adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.”

The prying world is sharp-sighted to detect inconsistencies. Naturally, it resents any out-of-the-way pretensions of a religious kind. If one shall come and speak in God's name, and charge it with something of a prophet's earnestness to repent and put away its sins, for a certainty it will scan the doings of the man who speaks so loftily of God's claims and man's duty, and will catch eagerly at any rumour of his acting like a lover of this world while he claims citizenship with a higher. Would that the rumours were always false; but, alas! among our griefs, if we are really serving Christ, this will be a frequent one, that He is

so often wounded and dishonoured in the house of His friends; that men, sincere and earnest in their own religious profession, do not always commend the truth to other men's consciences by the un mistakeable testimony of a perfectly consistent life. Men are hard censors in this matter, we know, most uncharitable and unjust, expecting perfection of those who began to set their faces towards heaven but yesterday, applying to their neighbours who profess godliness the very strictest rule they can find, while their own is so lax as scarcely to impose any restraint on their natural inclination, making the most of every evil report that reaches them, and turning a deaf ear to all pleas and arguments by which the fault might be excused or palliated. But still the charge is true, we deny it not; some are false-hearted who walk with the saints. May God correct and forgive them, lest their guilt and damnation should be like that of Judas! Some are halting and feeble, yet true men notwithstanding. May God strengthen them, and make them holier and livelier and braver Christians in the coming stages of life! Some are really devoted men, most useful in their generation, helping many a weak brother, teaching many an ignorant sinner; but in them there may be a besetting fault unsubdued, hastiness of temper or of speech, self-will not thoroughly

brought beneath the Gospel yoke, indolence and love of ease not befitting a soldier of the Cross.

And, alas! another source of grief remains nearer home. Must we not “groan within ourselves, being burdened” when we find so much that is faulty still cleaving to us, sins not slain which troubled us more years ago than we can count, endeavours after holiness so feebly sustained, surprises by temptation so frequent, pride, self-will, uncharitableness, love of ease, all tainting our common life, words so often spoken that will not bear to be thought over without shame, opportunities of good hardly ever made the most of, zeal cooled so easily, patience under crosses and provocations so hard to keep, faith too often rather a conviction that Christ is near, and we ought to lean upon Him, than the soul’s grateful confiding communion with Him as a Friend close at hand to help us? What a list have we here! and will not conscience plead guilty to the whole of it?

My dear brethren, I know you will not justify yourselves. I know you will freely condemn yourselves. But beware of putting confession, that sounds very humble, in the place of earnest striving after better things. This is a favourite device of the Wicked One, to make Christian men lazy, unwatchful, self-



sparing, even as he keeps the world in open rebellion against God, by telling them the evil is a necessary evil, that perfection cannot be attained by men burdened as we are, that God is no hard Judge, to punish little faults with everlasting burnings. Let us remember the Apostle's exhortation, "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We *must* have tribulation *in* the world, and *from* the world; but let us not make tribulation for ourselves, and for our brethren, by our mistakes, and infirmities, and shortcomings.

Still, however, the objection may be made by some, "Say what you will about sorrow and suffering, you do not reach us; for in our daily course we have experience of neither. Besides, surely in these days God's people may reckon to dwell in peaceable habitations and quiet resting-places. We read, too, that Christ gave peace to His people as a legacy, and strife and tumults, therefore, must be disturbing accidents in the Christian life. We, at least, hardly know what tribulation means, and yet we trust we are not strangers to the kingdom of God." Is it so? Then, my brethren, we ask once more, Is it easy work, now-a-days, for a Christian man to work out his salvation? and was the "fear and trem-

bling” we read of, the trembling of an anxious, watchful, self-distrusting spirit, something for the converts of the first century alone? Is it a light task to get the flesh subdued to the spirit, to pray devoutly and fervently every day, to cultivate the Christian temper in all its exercises, to witness for Christ manfully and consistently in all companies, to keep heaven steadily in view, and speak and act like pilgrims while we live in the thick of the world, and are busy with its labours? Have you no hard duties, no inward struggles, no sore temptations, no self-reproach for work ill done, no secret questionings of the sincerity of your faith and love? Have a care, then, that the course of your days does not flow too smoothly. Be afraid lest the peace you talk of should prove the lethargy of spiritual death. For ourselves, we almost tremble at the tranquillity of our times, and marvel whether all can be right when the Church and the world are so strangely intermingled. Apart from the signs which meet us in such abundance of coming storms and earthquakes, we could almost prophesy that the prevalent stillness is too deep to last. Nay, so easy is it now to be a Christian at little cost, so great the temptation to confound some regard for Christian men and Christian objects with vital, heaven-born piety, that we could almost pray that God would send some startling

visitation to sift our faith, if our zeal and love would grow more bright.

Be it ours, at any rate, my dear brethren, to walk worthily of our high vocation, to improve the present, and to be ready to meet the future. Be it ours, if quiet times be continued, to thank God for our peace; and if troublesome times shall come, to brace ourselves up for yet harder service, remembering that the time is short, that the fashion of this world passeth away, and that none shall harm us if we be followers of that which is good. Let us not covet ease too much, not shrink unduly from what costs us trouble; for is not the army of the saints ever a Cross-bearing army? and hath not our Captain said, that "if we deny Him, He also will deny us; that if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; for He cannot deny Himself?" Blessed be His name! the promise is as true as the warning is needful. "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."

## SERMON XV.

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ST. PAUL AT ATHENS.

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ACTS xvii. 16, 17.

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.”

WE know how large a space Athens occupies in the world's history. Not only does her fame survive to this day, but her Statesmen, Orators, Historians, and Poets are familiar by name and character to our English school-boys at the distance of two thousand years. Her literature is common ground to men of cultivated minds from all the nations of Christendom; and, without exception almost, they who pretend to teach the world have drunk, with more or less of profit and enjoyment, at some of its many springs, and have their minds stored, or

at least seasoned and imbued, with the thoughts of Grecian sages.

We turn to the sacred narrative, that is, to the account of God's dealings with His Church for four thousand years, and there we find Athens hardly named. This chapter contains all that the inspired writers have thought fit to tell us respecting that far-famed people. Once, in the course of his travels, St. Paul went thither. Driven successively from Thessalonica and Berea, he found rest and shelter, for a few days, probably, under the shadow of the Parthenon. The man of God walked its streets, saw its temples, conversed with its citizens, preached to its philosophers; and a few verses in the Bible describe his feelings while he abode there, his single sermon, delivered on the famous Hill of Mars, and the fruit, scanty enough apparently, which resulted from his visit.

To every man who knows how the mind of Athens has diffused itself through so many lands, and so many generations, and who knows, too, what St. Paul *was* and *did*, that visit must have a special interest. How Philosophy demeaned herself, in her chosen seat, when confronted with the Gospel; how the messenger of good tidings delivered himself in the place where Pericles had ruled, and Demosthenes had won his triumphs, and Socrates

had died; whether the lovers of disputation contented themselves with another barren conflict, or the wise men of this world became as fools that they might grow yet wiser,—on points like these every thoughtful man will be glad to be informed, and the writer of the Acts of the Apostles has told the story.

A few plain remarks on the passage will not unfitly occupy our attention just now, as illustrating the condition of the heathen world before the Advent of the Son of God. Last Sunday, in connexion with the history of Zacharias, we saw how pious Jews were expecting Him, and waiting for Him. To-day we shall see something of the moral condition of the nations whom God had left without a divine revelation. They waited not for Him, of course, like those to whom the prophets had testified of His coming; but there was the craving want which He only could satisfy: for questions had to be solved on which human ingenuity had exercised itself in vain; and in all matters relating to God, and man's highest destiny, a cloud covered the whole Gentile world alike, which nothing but the Day-spring from on High could penetrate.

It was a memorable day, when the greatest of the Apostles was found within the walls of this famous city. We naturally expect large results from a meeting between one who had

such a message to deliver, and men of keen wit and cultivated minds, with whom he was sure to come into contact. Who would not wish to see the good seed sown in so rich a soil? Who would not hope that, among the men who still boasted of her ancient name, or flocked to her schools of learning, some would be found who might prove as captains in Christ's army, and dedicate their worldly gifts to the service of the Gospel? Triumphs such as these, we find, were not reaped by the Apostle. Among the ruder people of Philippi, the simpler inhabitants of Berea, the more dissolute Corinthians, at Ephesus even, where the people were mad upon their favourite idol, he found more willing hearers, and was encouraged by larger success. On one page of the sacred narrative we find the most famous name but one in the whole ancient world, and pause upon it, and look that some work of God should be done there. But our expectations are disappointed, as they are so often when we speculate about the Divine dealings with nations or individuals; and the Apostle goes on his way, leaving this record only behind him, "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, among whom was Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a certain woman named Damaris, and others with them."

Observe, first of all, *how the people are described.*

St. Paul found them “wholly given to idolatry.” You remember the fine description of Isaiah, in which he describes the making of an idol, with all the details of hewing down the tree, cutting it into blocks with rule, and plane, and compasses, and shaping it, in some measure, “after the figure of a man.” The carpenter’s work is done, and the image is made to order. The best of the wood is thus used up, and the rest is employed for domestic purposes; so that with the branches of a cypress, or an oak, a man will warm himself and roast his meat, while with the trunk he “maketh a god;” and then falls down before the thing his tools have made, or his money has purchased, and pays it homage, as though it were instinct with life, and armed with superhuman power. It is a simple narrative, describing the common life of a people not reclaimed from idolatry; but every one sees that a vein of irony runs through the whole passage, and that the reader is meant to understand the conduct so described as being the height of absurdity. For ourselves, we marvel at the folly of past ages and untaught nations; and feel humbled for our common nature, when we think of the moral debasement involved in the practice. It seems that Athens was no wiser. Its people were a reasoning people, but they had not reasoned themselves out of this monstrous error. Shrewd in other



matters, and priding themselves on their superiority to less enlightened nations, whom they called, for distinction sake, by the sweeping name of barbarians, they were on the same level, in this respect, with the men whom they despised. They had their tutelary goddess, honoured with peculiar honours, and a crowd of deities besides, each representing some peculiar attribute, or connected with some favourite legend, and all serving, not to exalt the people's morality, or restrain their passions, but rather to amuse their fancy, and cheat them with the shew of worship.

Here, then, we have the most striking illustration possible of the Scriptural statement, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." What we know, let us remember, God has taught us. Our nursery lessons make us wiser than the ancients. The lying fables of heathenism are banished out of every Christian land, and superseded by simple elementary truths which, once learnt, are never forgotten. "To us," since the "Only-begotten" came down from heaven, and made the Jew's treasure common to all mankind, "to us there is but one God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and we are not left to speculate concerning His nature and perfections, but know, as a matter of positive certainty, that He is Almighty, All-wise, All-holy, All-merciful; that He made the

world, and rules in every part of it at once ; and that man, made in His image, but betrayed into disloyalty, may not win back his lost inheritance by heaping gifts on many altars, but must receive humbly and thankfully the one immense gift of Salvation through the blood of the Lamb ; and then in simple, trusting faith, under the guidance of the new-creating Spirit, walk, even as Christ walked, through this tempting, cheating world to a home of purity and love.

An easy lesson, in one sense, my brethren, soon learnt ; yet a hard lesson, (who does not know ?) which we must be learning all our days, and shall know but imperfectly at last. At any rate, let us flee from idolatry. Let us not make idols of the best things we can find here ; nor let our fellow-men rule us, when we know, every one of us, with our better judgment, that "One is our Master, even Christ." Let us remember, that if we are cold-hearted, self-seeking, lovers of pleasure, worshippers of mammon, immersed in worldliness, or even satisfied with home joys and friendships, while the Heavenly Friend is passed by or mocked with scant prayers and formal homage, then, in very deed, the devotee of other lands may cry shame upon us, and the puzzled wise men of Athens or of Rome, who were "feeling after

God if haply they might find Him," will rank above us in the great day of account.

For such there were, we know. The best among them were not contented in their blindness. Something higher and holier than their poor imaginings, something surer and more positive than the stories which amused the vulgar, and of which the selecter class were half ashamed, was earnestly longed for, and diligently sought by enquiring spirits, who were perpetually baffled, yet for ever renewing the search.

From this passage in St. Luke's narrative we learn what profane historians never told us, and yet the fact has a special meaning and importance. There, in Athens, where men were reported so wise, hard by the schools of learning to which men flocked from Rome itself that they might grow yet wiser, there stood "an altar with this inscription, *To the unknown God.*" We see, then, what a poor pretence, after all, was the apparatus of worship which made so grand a show in their streets and temples. There were stately buildings, and forms of beauty enshrined within them, and priests ministered in the holy places, and victims bled when the gods were angry, or some great deliverance was prayed for; but some one who wrote the sentence which St. Paul read and

quoted, and hundreds more who left it unchallenged on a public monument in their streets, confessed that the real God was behind these visible ceremonies, that in very deed their worship wanted aim and purpose, that the Being to whom it was due had yet to be discovered. A painful, humbling confession, indeed. We see and pity their ignorance. As we look back on the sages of antiquity, and read their guesses about the truth, clothed in language of surpassing beauty, we feel towards them as we might feel towards some company of pilgrims, seen from a distant height so that we could not help them, blind or blindfolded, with halting steps and outstretched hands groping their way towards some desired resting-place, but, without guide or clue, sure to miss the one path by which alone it could be reached.

We see and pity their ignorance; and what, let us ask, is our knowledge? Is it clear, satisfying, purifying, elevating? Is it light shining in the heart, light shining in our homes, light brightening the path of common life, and helping us to work by rule, instead of straying at random we know not whither? Is it light from heaven, revealing to us God's holy, unbending law, and our guilty shortcomings, with the blessed hope of pardon through the One Mediator, and of victory over sin by the help of the Divine Sanctifier and Comforter? Is

God indeed our God, chosen, trusted, served in the bonds of the Gospel, with reverence not distant or slavish, with love not too familiar, with prayers not few and measured, but ranging over the whole of life, and varied with our wants and temptations? Judge yourselves in these matters, my brethren. We may be blessing ourselves that we know God, and yet may be no nearer to Him in heart than the men to whom St. Paul preached from that famous text : for this lesson is learnt by none but the lowly-minded ; and pride, and self-confidence, alas ! darken the souls of our fellow-men, and numbers stumble at noon-day while the sun shineth bright above them, and the way of peace is laid open, so that he that seeketh with an honest heart shall surely find it.

Such, then, were these men of Athens as the Apostle found them ; but their ignorance of God was common to them with the whole heathen world. In a hundred other cities he would have found the people wholly given to idolatry, and in none beyond the confines of Judæa would he have found a temple or an altar with Jehovah's name inscribed upon it. This city, however, had a character of its own. The inhabitants were a quick-witted and enquiring people. They had their rival schools of philosophy, and the messenger of God

encountered some who asked in their pride, "What will this babbler say?" They had greedy ears for discussions of a certain kind; and in apt and striking words the Evangelist has written down one characteristic feature, telling us that they "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." What better audience could be wished for? Here was the newest thing of all. "Jesus and the Resurrection" was the Apostle's subject; all that Jesus had said and done, and the broad seal of Heaven put on his mission and doctrine by the fact, certified beyond a doubt, that the crucified Man of Nazareth had come back from the grave, and conversed many times visibly and audibly with chosen witnesses, who had taken their lives in their hands, and were preaching this truth over the wide world.

It was a grand occasion, one of the grandest the world has seen, when in the midst of that magnificent panorama, with stately buildings full in view whose ruins are the admiration of travellers, surrounded by monuments of departed statesmen and heroes, whose deeds have been made immortal by gifted writers in the most eloquent of tongues; face to face with men who thought scorn of vulgar intellects, and to whom the crowd listened with the profoundest reverence as to living oracles, since the old oracles were dumb; the Apostle of the Gentiles,

chosen for the work by his Divine Master, and guided thither by the Providence which watched his steps and ordered all his journeyings, declared God's truth with a brave heart and unfaltering tongue. Stoics were there, with their proud, hard nature, and a creed made up of dry abstractions, whose talk for ever was about the *wise man* to whom all things were alike, pleasure no good, pain no evil, reason, his own poor twinkling light, the only guide; to whom feeling and passion were forbidden, and who needed no help from his fellow-men, as he gave them no sympathy, being self-sufficient, a ruling king in his own dominion. And Epicureans were there, too, to whom the popular belief was a subject of merriment or scorn, but who had found no better in its stead; men who revelled in their fancied liberty, because all notion of a moral governor was discarded; by whom pleasure was chosen and avowed to be the end of life, pleasure in its grosser forms of sensuality, or in the enjoyment of that serene tranquillity which was sought by purer spirits, like a quiet haven far away from distracting cares or burdensome duties.

Had these men given the Apostle time to expound his doctrine, to trace even the great outlines of Christian truth, or to paint the characteristic features of the Christian man, we know that he must have contradicted those

pretenders at every point. Christian morality was the very opposite of all they taught. To become a disciple of the Redeemer, the Stoic must lay down his pride; he must bend to the rule of God's Providential government, and take the evils of life as discipline wisely appointed by a loving Father, instead of arguing against men's convictions that their troubles had no reality; he must look on human sympathy, and condescension to the weak, and unselfish regard to other men's interests and feelings, not as weakness and folly, but rather as wisdom purified after a heavenly pattern. To become a disciple of the Redeemer, the Epicurean must learn that an Almighty Ruler fills the world with His presence, and shapes it to His purposes; that life is a battle-field, not a pleasure-garden; that he, who seeks self-gratification as his main object, will surely miss it; and that the soul must rest in God, must be in harmony with the Divine Will, and feel itself safe, absolutely safe from harm and peril, in His promise of unfailing protection, before any harbour of refuge is really gained.

These holy elevating truths, all bound up with the story of Redemption, all preached by the Apostles, wherever they came, as a part of the Word of Life, were not reached, when the time of interruption came. God the Creator of all things, not dwelling in earthly temples, but



in His own immensity and eternity; God the Father of the human family, all of one blood, though scattered through many lands; God bearing with men in their times of ignorance, though they had debased themselves and dishonoured Him by pretending to fashion some similitude of the unseen Majesty of Heaven in gold and silver and stone; God now commanding men every where to repent, proclaiming a future judgment, and declaring by His ministers that Jesus, the risen Saviour, shall sit upon the throne before which all nations shall be gathered,—this *had* been the Apostle's theme, and *thus far* had he proceeded, when some mocked, and others, not seriously perhaps, but rather in weariness and disgust, like men who were too wise to credit such monstrous fables, said, "We will hear thee again of this matter."

The resurrection of the dead, remember, simple and elementary as the doctrine seems to us, was the great stumbling-block of the ancient world. That the soul might live apart from the body in another state, the best men both hoped and argued; but matter, they said, was essentially impure. Socrates, in his last discourse with his friends, tells them<sup>1</sup> plainly that he despairs of attaining to the wisdom

<sup>1</sup> Plato's Phædo, 150, &c.

he has been seeking, unless the body be left behind, and the soul shall go forth alone into a purer region; that he has borne the shackles of the flesh as a burden, and longed to escape from them, and live apart in a world of contemplation; that death, in some sense, will be the consummation of his hopes, because the encumbering weight will be left behind, and the divorce between the corruptible part of man, and the diviner part, shall be complete and permanent. A risen body, a glorified body, a body no longer an encumbering weight, but a worthy handmaid and help-meet beautified after a heavenly pattern, this was wholly beyond the reach of their speculations: the men mocked who heard of it. Death could not be vanquished, they thought, *in this sense*. "O grave, where is thy victory?" was a triumphant strain never dreamed of in their philosophy.

My dear brethren, let us rejoice that we are better taught. Truly, in His own good time, God hath "destroyed the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that was spread over all nations, and hath swallowed up death in victory." The fact of our Lord's Resurrection is as familiar to us as any fact in our own personal history. Think how all Christendom bursts forth into praise when Easter comes, and sings its thousand anthems,

of which this is the burden, "Christ is risen, and become the first-fruits of them that slept!"

The first-fruits of a glorious harvest! "Them that die and sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." There shall be the saints we have known and loved and lost, along with the army of believers from Abel downwards. Oh! let them not miss us, when the mustering-day shall come. "If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with Him," but not otherwise. If our life now be hidden with Christ in God, He will guard it through all perils; and on the resurrection-day, the worn-out body shall be given back to us, quickened with a new pulse, and beautified as a garment meet for the King's presence. But remember the condition, and beware of earthly-mindedness. Remember there is a grave above ground, the grave of deadness of heart towards God, and contented ignorance, and practical unbelief. If we do not rise from *that* now, there will be no joyful, glorious rising when the Archangel's trump shall sound. Our Lord's Voice of Mercy must draw us into the path of Humility, and Patience, and Self-denial, the path in which Faith worketh by Love, and where the saints win many a victory over the devil and themselves in their Captain's strength, or else, when He shall "come in His glory, and all the holy

angels with Him," the Voice of Power, that wakes the dead, will also seal our doom. May God in His mercy keep us "from ignorance, and hardness of heart, and contempt of His word!" May the truths of the Gospel be to us, not barren dogmas, but living truths, prompting us to holy resolves, and fruitfulness in good works! May we not hear of "Jesus and the resurrection" with the hearing of the ear merely, like the mocking philosophers, but believe on Him to the saving of our souls, like the little company who clave unto the Apostle, in that day of small things, and shall be his joy and crown at the resurrection of the Just!

## SERMON XVI.

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ST. PAUL AND THE ELDERS OF EPHEBUS.

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ACTS xx. 32—35.

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

(*April 23, 1854.*)

No one who reads the last twenty verses of this chapter can fail to remark, that the picture which they bring before us is one of exquisite beauty. Without entering on the history contained in the first half of the chapter, it will be enough to say, that after suddenly leaving Ephesus nearly a twelvemonth before, St. Paul, in skirting the coast of Asia Minor on his way

from Troas to Jerusalem, found himself, for a single night probably, within reach of the city where he had dwelt so long, and laboured so successfully. A summons despatched to the Elders of the Church brought them quickly to the shore; and either *there*, or on some spot conveniently near, the scene took place which is familiar to many of us, as among the best-remembered and best-loved portions of this most instructive narrative.

How dignified, yet how full of tenderness, is the Apostle's address! How well is the plain-dealing of the commissioned prophet combined with all that is endearing in human friendship! How manly his appeal as to the character of his own ministry among the men who stood around him! yet how free from any thing of a proud and boastful spirit! How noble the resolve announced in the simplest words, as he looked into the future and saw it beset with dangers: "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God!" How earnest his admonitions to faithfulness in their pastoral work! and how like himself, and worthy of himself, the practical direction, with which the address closes, to be specially mindful of the poorer and weaker

brethren, urged home too on their consciences by an appeal to the Lord's own words! At such a time, what more fitting than the act which followed, "He kneeled down and prayed with them all?" What more natural than the touching incident with which the narrative concludes,—“they all wept sore; and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more?”

And who are these men? and what is the tie which binds them so fast together? *One* of them made havoc of the Church in its early days, driving disciples, wherever he could find them, both men and women, to prison. The rest had been gathered by him into the fold of Christ, gathered out of the midst of a city where men were set upon their gains, and mad upon their idols; and now he and they shared the same hope, looked upon the Gospel as their common treasure, walked by its rule of godliness and charity, and loved each other with a love passing the common measure of friends and kindred.

The whole transaction speaks of the early days of the Gospel, when Christian brotherhood was far more of a reality than it is at present. The hurried interview of the Apostle's seeking, the ready response of the men who owed to him their own selves, the topics and style of

the farewell address, the leave-taking, mingled with prayers and tears, all come home to our best and holiest feelings, and make us feel that Christianity was doing a noble work in that old heathen world, when men witnessed to it after that fashion, and left on record scenes which make our eyes to glisten, and our hearts to glow, as we, distant islanders, read them after eighteen centuries, in our homes and churches. Oh, may we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the lesson which they teach us, and pray God that, with all our pretensions, and all our privileges, we may not sink into the darkness and coldness of practical unbelief!

Now let us speak more particularly of the words which I have selected for my text. They will yield us ample instruction, and will suggest some important topics for reflection and self-examination, without our wandering from them to the historical or prophetic portions contained in the preceding verses.

Mark, first of all, the terms of the Apostle's benediction: "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified."

He had laboured among them, while he could, well and faithfully. "Publicly and from house to house" he had taught them the



first principles of the Gospel: "repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ." Without compromise and without reserve, he had declared the Divine counsels in all their length and breadth, shewing at once how men might return to the Holy One as penitents, and walk with Him as children. "Night and day," even "with tears," he had given them personal warning of all they needed to know and to remember for their souls' health. Not willingly, but by constraint, he was parted from them, because other cities needed his presence, and rapid journeyings and frequent partings were his appointed portion, often to his own grief, but immensely to the Church's gain; so now formally he commits them to God as their ever-wakeful Guardian and Almighty Friend. "Lean not on me," he seems to say, "who am but a broken reed. If it be God's will that I should dwell among you no longer, as wise men, and true-hearted believers, make not too much of a loss like that. I leave you with God, Whose promises are sure, and Who is able to do for you a thousand times more than all His servants. The word of His grace lives on, and cannot die. Walk by its rule, and live in its light, and you shall neither stray nor stumble. The path of duty, though it be steep and rough, you will find both safe and pleasant; and the

blessing of the righteous shall be yours in earth and heaven."

My dear brethren, Apostolic teaching we have not, and cannot have. Let us be thankful that from God and His truth nothing can part us but our own perverse wills and foolish hearts. Let us see to it, that it is indeed "*the word of His grace*" that we have to do with from day to day. The *word of His power* built up the Universe, and we may study and admire it as the philosopher does, sending our thoughts to roam among the stars till we are lost in the immensity of Creation, or tracing within a narrower range the ten thousand proofs of designing and contriving Wisdom, which make a single world like our own one vast museum of wonders; and yet we may stand gaping, all the while, in idle bewilderment, rather than adore with holy reverence the unseen Hand, and inconceivable Intelligence, which are behind and beyond the outer, visible, material framework. We may hear of the *word of God's truth*, declaring the eternal law of righteousness, and making us to quake and tremble in our sober and thoughtful times, because of the inward witness which speaks in tones distinctly audible of sins done wilfully, and omissions of duty to be counted by thousands; while at other seasons, when conscience sleeps, or evil custom and consenting numbers

have made us hardy offenders, we heed the plainest threatenings no more than the traveller heeds distant thunder. But the *word of God's grace*, the covenant of peace which Paul preached and the men of Ephesus accepted, the message which proclaims us all guilty, and all redeemed with precious blood; the good news which the Son of God brought from the grave to His assembled disciples, when on that blessed Easter evening He stood in the midst of them and said, "Peace be unto you;" *this* is what His saints, from that day to the present, have found to be precious beyond all price, for "correction and instruction in righteousness;" and in the strength of Him who gave it, and gave His Spirit to write it on their hearts, in successive ages, like one of their noblest leaders, they have "fought the good fight, and finished their course, and kept the faith."

We may take the words in a larger sense to include not only the substance of the message, as St. Paul and his Ephesian converts received it, but all that has been added by Divine dictation since. And while we thank God for the completed record of His will, let us repair to it with devout and teachable spirits, remembering what we want, and what we hope for. We want repairing, so to speak, like a dismantled fortress. We need to have our defences strengthened, and our towers and battlements

all beautified after a heavenly pattern ; and the Gospel of the grace of God is "able to build us up." The "inheritance" we long for is not the fool's Paradise, not the rest of dreamy indolence, or sensual enjoyment, we know not where ; not freedom, merely, from the troubles and annoyances of our gross earthly life, with company no more exalted than that of men who love the world as it is, and grow yet fonder of it as they share more of its spoil. "An inheritance among them which are sanctified" is what we aim at, a home of purity to which our own sins, and other men's sins, shall not pursue us, and where to serve God as the angels serve Him, without weariness and without distraction, shall no longer be our daily prayer, but our realized enjoyment. Oh, let us live and labour, let us watch and pray, let us guard our own hearts closely, and have our eye on the deceitful ensnaring world which has a lower aim, and a baser hope, remembering whose we are, and whom we serve, and what is the prize of our high calling, if we be really soldiers of the Cross !

Respecting half our neighbours we may well ask, What is doing in the way of spiritual advancement ? Where are the signs of religious earnestness ? What new defences are being raised against an enemy who is under their walls all day long ? What is done mani-

festly in the spirit of Christian men who grieve for the world's sorrows, and are yet more burdened with its sins, and feel that to live at ease, and attempt nothing in any quarter for its rescue, is nothing less than unfaithfulness to our common Lord? Where is the eager enquiry, the cautious tread, the free consultation with graver and wiser men, the casting away of encumbering weights, which mark the resolute, painstaking, heaven-seeking pilgrim? Oh, let not these things be all lacking in us! Let us not be handling God's word deceitfully without any design of getting our spirits cast into the mould of the Gospel, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Let us beware of a barren orthodoxy, of the poor beggarly, dressed-up Religion, which gains us credit with our neighbours, and involves no sacrifice, no self-restraint, no share in the stern conflict with evil, which is one of the hopeful signs of our age and country, no heart-stirring sympathy with Christian efforts of many kinds, which God is blessing, and God's true servants dare not forego. For, verily, a form of godliness will not save us, and we must know what sanctification means in its inner leavening work on the conscience and affections, before we can have a good hope of the saint's rest and crown.

We come to another part of the Apostle's

address, and *that* a very interesting one, as giving us some particulars of his own manner of life, and the style of his exhortations while he dwelt at Ephesus. By occupation, we know, he was a tent-maker, and busy as he was with higher duties, he laboured at his craft. The offerings of the saints were not abundant enough, it seems, to supply his wants; or for some reason, though he asserts elsewhere the right of those who "preach the Gospel" to "live of the Gospel," he may have thought it right to dispense with their aid altogether. At any rate, he was careful to maintain a character for disinterestedness, feeling that the imputation of money-seeking would spoil his work, and make his preaching vain; and Apostle though he were, called to the ministry by a Voice from Heaven, and blessed in it as man never was before or since, he did not disdain hand-labour; neither did he first toil from necessity, and then hide himself as one degraded and ashamed; but wrought willingly for himself and his companions in travel, and then proclaimed it openly as a thing right for the Ephesian elders to remember, and right for the Church to know.

Let no man think, then, that there is any incongruity between an honest calling of any sort, and active service in the cause of Christ. Ministers may work tool in hand, and do only as the Apostle did; and they should do so,

rather than let their work be hindered, if ever a time should come when public feeling requires it, and their message would find readier entrance into minds that suspect their integrity if they preach as hirelings. As a rule, certainly, in our day, public feeling is the other way; and with a legal provision for those who wait at the altar, (a boon for which we may thank the wisdom and piety of our forefathers,) no necessity can be pleaded for a working or trading priesthood; while there is an obvious convenience in the arrangement which leaves a duly-qualified body of public servants free for sacred studies and employments, while their neighbours are occupied with this world's business. But it may reasonably be questioned whether in our ecclesiastical arrangements we have not run too far from Apostolic practice,—whether the broad line of demarcation which the Romish Church for her own corrupt purposes drew between priests and people, be not continued as a traditional thing among ourselves, so as to fetter our freedom of action and hinder some works of practical usefulness. The Apostle, it seems, could both preach and labour. He thought it no disparagement to his high office to cut, and shape, and stitch like his friends Aquila and Priscilla. He did not apprehend that his message would be held cheaper one day because he had worked indus-

triously at a worldly calling on the preceding day. If the teacher may thus cross the line and become a worker, may not the worker, too, cross the line and become a teacher? Who shall forbid him, in the spirit of Christian humility and Christian charity, to tell his neighbour what he knows? Why may he not use his gifts, if he does not step beyond his province? What law of God or man shall forbid him to pour out his heart when his heart is full, or even to take his Bible to a sick man's bed or a godless man's door, and say, "God's book is the best book; if you will hear what that says, and let me tell you that it has made me a wiser and happier man, it may be well for you in time and eternity?" Oh, it is not in this direction that we need abridge men's liberty! The world in our time, assuredly, is not overrun with Christian zeal, not fed till it is sated with godly admonitions. Rather let us invite pious laymen of every degree to be far bolder and more active for God, more watchful for opportunities of doing good, more willing to be *marked men* in a good sense, and to venture something of reputation with the men who *jeer*, that they may feel doubly bound to the men who *pray*. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil," "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," "exhorting one another daily," "doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus," "holding



forth the word of life," "singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord;" these sayings are not part of a directory for priests, but part of our common rule as Christian men, and gladly will we learn, from the best and holiest of those to whom we minister in our feebleness, how to do better what belongs to all of us alike.

Mark another feature in the Apostle's most instructive example. There was a power in his ministry because he preached by word and deed; because while he taught men to take up their Cross and follow Christ, he did not spare himself; because a man might as well have said the sun was dark, as impute any thing but singleness of purpose and unimpeachable disinterestedness to that noble-minded man. But there was a power, too, because his doctrine was so searching and so practical; because the rule he laid down was amplified into a hundred minute particulars; because men, who need guiding at every step, found the help they wanted in lessons so comprehensive and so varied. So here we have a principle laid down which illustrates very strikingly the genius of the Gospel. The rich should help the poor, *that* all men know, *that* all religions proclaim. If line upon line, and precept upon precept would melt men's stubborn and selfish hearts

to mercy, there would not be a niggard among the millions of Mussulmen with whom the East is peopled, for the Koran teems with exhortations on that subject, leading the unwary or devout reader almost to suppose that heaven may be purchased with money. But in precept and practice St. Paul went beyond *that*. "The poor," he tells us, "should help those who are yet poorer." "*So labouring*," he says (labouring with your hands, that is, for the day's bread), "I taught you *then*, and I tell you *now*, that ye ought to support the sick and weak; the strong, who can toil, should toil harder that they may have somewhat to spare for an ailing brother." Mark *that*, my poorer brethren. It is difficult to say who may not be a giver if he will. Experience shews that selfishness, not poverty, makes almsgiving impossible; for among the most heart-thrilling records of Christian munificence are tales which reach us now and then of humble *men*, and yet *more* of humble *women*, whose copper by some strange alchemy seems turned to gold, so marvellously have they contrived to diffuse blessings around them, because their hearts, warmed with the love of Christ, overflowed in words and deeds of charity.

What then? shall we lay it *as a law* upon our needy brethren that they shall deny themselves, and have to spare for others? What

then? shall we be thought to lighten our own burden, to leave the rich more free, to proclaim a rule which has a sound of equality, but is really partial and capricious when we thus speak? My dear brethren, the Apostle has answered these questions for me, or rather *his* Lord, and *yours*, and *mine*, has given me words which supply the answer. Christ once said, and St. Paul has preserved the saying (where found we know not, but precious to us as a recovered keepsake from the dearest of all our friends), "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I ask you only to *believe* words which *must* be true. I ask you only to try an experiment which, fairly tried, *cannot* fail. I ask you only to be happy on God's terms. I plead with you only to bless yourselves, being quite sure that Christ sits at the fountain-head of men's happiness, and that He Who made our hearts knows best how to fill them with joy.

To the poor I have spoken hitherto, because the Apostle is speaking expressly of those who labour, and earn by labour the money that is to be spent in alms; but if time permitted, I have a wide range of application elsewhere.

One thing I must say, if we had not a thousand other proofs that the society we live in is of an unchristian character, *this* would be decisive; not one man in twenty believes this saying of Christ's, or ever thinks of acting on

it steadily and habitually. Listen to men's grave talk and jesting talk. Hear them speak freely of their schemes and plans. Remember how current and popular are the thousand sayings, in which they avow that to escape from begging claims is to protect themselves, and to put themselves in the way of urgent applicants is to expose themselves to danger. Call to mind the school-boy slang, which grown-up men repeat as if it were oracular wisdom, instead of being both foolish and heathenish, about the cleverness of getting all that can be got honestly from friendly or simple donors; and the policy of being on good terms with the rich and generous; and the good luck of those who get most of this world's spoil with least trouble, and the fewest claims upon it. What is all this but a plain, practical denial of our Lord's words? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Where, then, are men's hearts, and what are they set on, when at the moments in which they have no disguise or reserve, the mouth utters sayings like these?

I must confess that to me a text like this, coming upon us by surprise in the midst of a plain narrative, has a very solemn sound. It is so little in accordance with what we daily read and hear; men act on such totally opposite principles, and avow them so unblushingly; the

niggards and the self-pleasers are so many ; and the really bountiful man meets us so seldom in the haunts of common life, that, try as we will to force ourselves to an opposite conclusion, we are compelled to think that few among us all have the mind of Christ. And yet the Gospel does not change ; men's evil deeds cannot disannul God's righteous law ; what Christ has once spoken must stand while the world lasts, and determine the awards of the judgment-day. If the Bible be not written to deceive us, the Christian man, besides being an honest man, and sober, and loyal, and just, and devout, is an open-handed, far-looking, free-hearted man. Truly, then, we must fear that the close-handed and the cold-hearted, the men who narrow their gifts at every point to the standard of conventional propriety, instead of enlarging them to the measure of Christian liberality, know not the grace of Him Who was rich, and for our sakes became poor ; and yet *not* to know the grace of Christ our Saviour, is to be far from God and nigh unto death.

Ponder these things, I pray you. Take home your Lord's words, if you forget all the rest ; and let them judge you through the coming month. Divine power is wanting to bend the will, and raise the affections heavenward. Christ's love can melt stubborn hearts, and

make hard, proud bigots compassionate like St. Paul. The gifts of Christian charity grow out of God's *great gift*. His children learn that noble lesson, of esteeming themselves "debtors unto all men," when the whole truth, as to their own immeasurable debt to Him Who died for them, is understood and felt. The "faith which overcomes the world," conquers self too, and sets men free to be generous after a new fashion. These are plain Gospel truths: the world, depend upon it, will be less slow to receive them when the Church shall witness for them more faithfully.

## SERMON XVII.

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ST. PAUL BEFORE THE JUDGMENT-SEAT.

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ACTS xxiv. 14—16.

“This I confess unto thee that, after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.”

WE recognize these words at once when we hear of them, as a portion of one of St. Paul's defences when he had to answer for himself before a human tribunal. There were several altogether, and they are reported in the later chapters of this book. In fact, from the twenty-first chapter to the end St. Paul is in cus-

today, sent from city to city, and from court to court, till we leave him, still a prisoner, in his own hired house at Rome. To Rome he must go, for so the Lord had warned him in a vision ; and the narrative tells us very clearly and fully how this was brought about. Rome was a long way off ; a journey thither was a serious matter under any circumstances. When the announcement was made St. Paul was under prosecution by malignant enemies, who would not let him escape if they could help it, and he had no powerful friends at hand to protect him. Still the old saying comes true at all times, Man proposes and God disposes ; and so strangers and enemies, Jewish persecutors and Gentile magistrates, all concur to bring about the Divine purpose and accomplish the Divine prediction. Briefly told, the story runs thus : first, a plot is laid for St. Paul's assassination by a body of desperate men who were in the interest of the chief priests ; and when this came to the knowledge of the Roman officer, he transferred his prisoner at once, strongly guarded, to Cæsarea, where Felix the Roman governor resided. Before this man St. Paul pleaded for himself in open court, and also privately, it seems, for the Gospel. No charge was proved, no witnesses were forthcoming ; several conferences with the prisoner in the palace seem to mark the ruler's conviction that the man



who was accused of sedition was really no wrong-doer; but when Felix left the government and another succeeded to his place (two years having elapsed from the date of the first hearing) no judgment was given, and the innocent man was still in bonds.

Before the new procurator from Rome the old charge is repeated; and with a promptitude which contrasts very favourably with the delay of justice by his predecessor, Festus summons the accusers from Jerusalem to Cæsarea. There an enquiry took place which was presently cut short by St. Paul exercising his privilege as a Roman citizen, and demanding to be tried in the Imperial court. "Unto Cæsar shalt thou go," was the judge's answer; the constitution of his court did not allow any other: but evidently what he had seen and heard satisfied him that St. Paul was no common offender, and before they parted company, either to gratify his curiosity, or possibly from some worthier feeling, he was glad to hear the matter more fully discussed. The opportunity was afforded by a visit from Agrippa, who, though a Jew, had been exalted to something of kingly power by the Emperor Claudius, with jurisdiction over a portion of the Roman province of Syria. This man was the son of Herod, respecting whom we read in an earlier chapter that he slew James the brother of John, and was afterwards

eaten by worms. Since that day the new Religion had made some noise in the world. Persecution had not thinned the ranks of its disciples, nor daunted the courage of the men who preached it. Though Agrippa had spent many years of his early life at Rome, something, doubtless, of the Church's history had been reported to him, and very probably the name of the Apostle himself was already known as a noted convert and a successful preacher. The Gentile ruler, Festus, was evidently perplexed by having to decide matters quite beyond his province. A religious feud between men, all whose customs and opinions were in his eyes both strange and contemptible, made a case of some difficulty for a Roman court; so, wisely and justly, he states his difficulty to Agrippa, supposing him to be versed in Jewish politics, and able to give advice which shall guide him to a right decision.

“I would hear the man myself,” was Agrippa's answer; and he *did* hear him, heard what to his dying day, doubtless, he never forgot; heard from the prisoner, not an apology for wrong-doing, but a prophet's appeal to both his judges; heard what might have been to him a savour of life, but left him where he was, a disciple of the law, a menial of Rome, a worldly-hearted prince, who ruled for his little hour and then died in unbelief. The con-

clusion of the whole matter is comprised in the verses which I have read for my text. Innocence was stamped on the man himself, and on every word he spoke. "Worthy of death or of bonds" he could not be who told so plain a tale, and had such a noble bearing. The charge clearly proceeded from malignity; acquittal and liberty were the prisoner's due; but the appeal was lodged, all must be done formally, according to law and custom, and none but Cæsar or his representative at Rome must pronounce sentence when the provincial jurisdiction was thus challenged.

Thus, through many stages, the great design was brought to its consummation. At the public charge the Apostle goes on his way to the world's centre. His guards, in fact, become his retinue. He is heaven-sent, though in bonds. When he travelled from his prison to the shore, when he embarked, and sailed from port to port, and encountered the furious storm which beat his ship to pieces; among the barbarous people at Melita, among the brethren who gave him a welcome at Puteoli, as he neared the city, and met disciples on the way, the first-fruits of a glorious harvest, to be made yet more abundant by his labours; through his journey of a thousand miles, and his perils by land and sea, a sleepless Eye watched over him, and an Almighty Arm was

around him. At last, his hired house was reached within the ample walls, and the new work began of which we have an enduring record in the Epistle which bears this inscription: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints, Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

So runs the story; and an interesting and instructive one it is, if we look only at the bare outline, and see one disposing and guiding Hand all through. But we will gather up some of the fragments which illustrate the human side of the narrative, if we may say so. Let us look at the man himself whom it pleased God thus to advance to honour, and to make the instrument for conveying such mighty blessings to mankind.

We will begin with his appearance before Felix. You remember how the trial opens. Ananias, the high priest, has come from Jerusalem, and some of the elders with him, rather to demand the prisoner's condemnation than to put him on his trial. They have hired a certain orator, named Tertullus, whose speech consists of little more than courtly compliments to Felix, and terms of abuse heaped on the accused. "A pestilent fellow," "a mover of sedition," "a ringleader of the

sect of the Nazarenes," such were the titles bestowed on the man whom we delight to honour. The court, however, was not the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem: *there* assertions would be taken for proofs, and the completest vindication might have proved as fruitless as Stephen's defence years before; which had been followed presently by his martyrdom. *Here* Roman justice had to be satisfied, and St. Paul's defence contrasts nobly with the malice of his accusers, and the vapid declamation of their advocate. Calm, dignified, forbearing, not courting his judge, but simply stating that he feels safer in his hands, because he has had large experience of Jewish practices in his official capacity; not retorting on his persecutors, or breathing a word about the riot at Jerusalem, from which he barely escaped with life, he partly admits and partly denies the articles of impeachment. He never profaned the Temple: "let the Jews from Asia say so, if they can, who found me there, and ought to have been here as witnesses:" he raised no disputation in the synagogue; he had made no faction in the city: "let the men who are here give proof of either fault, if proof is to be had." One charge, however, was true, and he could not gainsay it: he had a faith of his own which they called heresy; touching the resurrection of the dead he had a clear hope founded

on most certain proof; but for *that*, let him say, he was not a worse man, but a better; *that*, instead of making him a sower of strife or a disturber of the public peace, made him a loyal subject, and a more useful citizen; for "herein," he said (they are memorable words and should live through all time), "herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man."

Through long years, we know, the proscribed and persecuted man, "the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," in the enemy's phrase, the great Apostle of the Gentiles in ours, answered to this description. We rejoice to have such a testimony put upon record by one who proclaimed on every occasion, that "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God." There is no opposition, we are sure, between the doctrine of grace rightly understood, and the cause of pure morality; no excuse for careless living in the believer's hope in Christ; no truth in the cavil that we may sin boldly since the merits of Him, Who was the Lamb without blemish and without spot, must be our plea before God, not any goodness, or fancied goodness, of our own. No; sin is hateful any how; but doubly hateful since it drew the Saviour from His Throne, and nailed Him to the Cross. Love is feeble at the best, when planted and cherished in cold, earthly hearts like ours; but it thrives better, and bears

richer fruit, since men heard of the unspeakable gift, and the costly sacrifice. The disciple who denied his Lord, and lived henceforth to strengthen his brethren; he who lay in his Lord's bosom, and then wrote Epistles which run over with exhortations to the crowning grace; and he, who once persecuted the Church, and then taught us by words of power, and a life of labour and self-sacrifice, what Christian love is, and what Christian love can do; these men, well taught in the Faith which makes much of Christ, and well trained in holiness; these, and ten thousand more who believed their words, and walked in their steps, have refuted the slander that men first take refuge at the Cross, and then live as they list. Let *us* refute it too, my brethren; refute it practically, refute it by exercising ourselves, as St. Paul did, to keep a conscience free from stain, to live, that is, watchfully, consistently, painfully, if I may say so, up to our convictions; disallowing all pleas for sinning, not palliating our thousand little faults, aiming to grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, while yet each day has its tale of shortcomings, and no night should overtake us without fresh application to the all-cleansing Blood.

A second public appearance before Felix, you remember, is a memorable passage in the

Apostolic History. That time, St. Paul pleaded, not for himself, but for his Master. Felix, with his wife Drusilla, a Jewess, came on a certain day to "hear him concerning the faith in Christ;" and like a faithful witness, knowing that the man, who could acquit or condemn him, was a man of profligate habits, and a cruel oppressor (that character is stamped upon him by the pen of Tacitus), he preached that day, not merely of the Christian's hope, but of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." "Felix trembled," we hear, before the sermon was ended. The prisoner was fearless; his life was in God's keeping, and he cared only to be faithful to his trust. Rome's governor, and Rome's legions, could not harm him, if he were at the post of duty, and faithfully doing his Lord's work. But the man of power quailed upon the judgment-seat, then dismissed the preacher instead of putting himself on confession, talked of a "more convenient season" for further conference, and saw him often afterwards, not for the purpose of having his doubts answered, or his mind enlightened, but in the hope that a bribe would be offered for an acquittal.

Alas! for the more convenient seasons which never come! Alas! for the cheat which men put on themselves when they are convicted in their own consciences, and think the present



feeling shall last till it pleases them to act upon it, or shall come back hereafter at their bidding! Alas! for the numbers of whom History takes no record, who never sat in solemn state to hear an Apostle preach, and never sinned so grossly against the law written on the conscience as the man who perverted or delayed justice for the sake of gain; but who yet, in the silent court, where God's whispers are heard, though no human voice can reach it, debate the matter of their own repentance, answer plain arguments with wretched, self-justifying pleas, weave plausible sophistries which they would be ashamed to repeat aloud, and then adjourn the case for further hearing, through dread of an adverse decision!

My dear brethren, the Law of Righteousness is for private citizens, you know, as for magistrates and chief rulers, that law which requires us to give every brother his due. The law of temperance, or self-government, which requires us to have rule over our lower appetites, *this*, we know, is a far-reaching law, and forbids surfeiting as well as drunkenness, commands inward purity as well as continence, charges us, as reasonable men, and yet more, as redeemed men, to beware of grieving the Holy Spirit of God by excess even in lawful indulgence. Oh, judge ye whether Christian men by profession do not need exhorting on

these subjects, as Felix did when he sat with his wife Drusilla before the brave Apostle; and if your hearts condemn you, if neither the Redemption that is past, nor the Judgment that is to come, have been so laid to heart as to put you on serving God in the bonds of the Gospel, serving Him, as His children serve Him, in newness of life, then do not wait till a trembling-fit shall come; do not fancy that God will make a *convenient season* on purpose, when all hindrances shall be removed, and all tempters silenced; but take the wise and manly course of instant confession and submission: rise up and go to your Father, like the prodigal; take with you the All-prevailing Name, and the universal plea, "I am helpless and undone; Christ hath died, and is alive for evermore: I bring no price, I deserve no blessing, yet save me for Thy Mercy sake;" and then the preacher, who teaches like St. Paul, will be a messenger of good tidings to you, and will bid you run the race that is set before you, having your "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace!"

We pass on to St. Paul's trial before Festus. That was very short. His answer is comprised in a single sentence, "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at

all." The mention of the Jewish Law and the Temple seems to have suggested to the Governor that Jerusalem might have been the fitter place for the court to sit in. "Wilt thou go thither," he asks, "and let the quarrel be decided where the charge is laid?" If that course had been taken, there were men lying in wait, the historian tells us, ready to anticipate the verdict by murder. Any how, the very name of Jerusalem sounded ill in the ears of one, hated and hunted, as St. Paul had been, by his countrymen; and Cæsar's court, in the distance, looked like a City of Refuge as compared with that in which the high priest presided; so, divinely prompted, it may be (as we hear of no appeal on the first trial, and the change of proceeding may have to be accounted for), or else supposing, possibly, that the choice now lay between a journey backward to Jerusalem, or onward to Rome, he distinctly claimed his privilege of citizenship, and demanded audience in the higher court. Whatever the wishes of Festus might be, his judicial duty was clear; and from that moment the great question was settled.

The last audience occupies the whole of the twenty-sixth chapter, and a memorable audience it is; an audience, not a trial strictly, for the judgment was already given. Much was

spoken by St. Paul in many places, under varying circumstances,—for the Gospel as the Truth of God, for himself as a chosen witness, marked, so to speak, with the seal and signature of Heaven, to be the herald of the King of Glory, once crucified through weakness, since raised by the power of God, and appointed to be the Judge of quick and dead. But of all his defences or apologies, of all the speeches which declared at once what Christianity was, and how he came to be a preacher of it, this is the fullest, the most methodical; the most pregnant with instruction, the best suited, we may suppose, for its double object of reaching the consciences of Agrippa and Festus, sitting side by side, yet parted widely asunder as respects their nation, their training, and their creed. Grand it is in its simplicity, clear in its statement of the heavenly vision which had made a crisis in his life, very positive in its exhibition of Christian doctrine, modest in his account of himself, as of one who had simply gone where he was sent, and obeyed a divine impulse which it had been madness and impiety to resist, forbearing, almost silent, respecting his cruel wrongs and savage persecutors.

We have not time to enlarge on Festus's rude interruption, or Agrippa's mistranslated reply to the Apostle's appeal. There seems

little doubt among scholars that "almost thou persuadest me" is inadmissible. In a tone of irony almost the words seem to have been spoken; and the probable meaning is, "Lightly or with little trouble, at this rate, thou dost bring me over to thy faith, and make a Christian of me: this is a harder task than thou thinkest. More persuasion is necessary before I shall come down, and be one of a despised sect." And then the Apostle's answer will run, "On any terms, O King, with much persuasion, or little, I would that thou, and all the meaner men about thee, might share my hope, and be filled with joy like mine; only let them serve Christ at large, instead of being a prisoner as I am!"

A noble answer, it has been well said, which "expresses as no other words ever expressed them, that union of enthusiastic zeal with genuine courtesy, which is the true characteristic of a Christian." The man was not beside himself who could thus speak, except in the sense of being unlike other men, lifted into a higher element of thought and feeling, with a soul on fire when great ends had to be compassed, souls saved, his Master's name proclaimed among Jews or Gentiles, and the great work advanced to which his life was devoted. In that sense, men zealous for God, champions of the Truth after a long reign of Error, confessors in bad

times, have often been accounted madmen, and will be, while the world, in its folly, admires active energy, and roused feelings, and fervent aspirations, in its own line of things, but has the taunt and the sneer ready for those who kindle with thoughts and hopes relating to the unseen world. Yet, while the Apostle was thus earnest, thus warmed into the prophet's strain, what self-mastery, what prompt recollection of the seemly thing to say, what kindly feeling, and beautiful aptness of phrase, are displayed in that generous reply, as he looked round upon his audience, and longed to have them all for brethren!

Alas! and what came to the man principally concerned? How did Agrippa fare then and afterwards? Was he stirred to enquiry, and did enquiry issue in conviction? He would have been a notable convert: he might have been famous in the Church's History, as its earliest nursing-father among the princes of this world. But no such triumph of the Gospel is recorded. He lived to old age, in the midst of miraculous evidences; the lives, doctrines, and sufferings of the Christians must have been well known to him. "Believest thou the prophets?" had been the Apostle's appeal to him. He knew them all; he was a born Jew, with large opportunities of observing mankind, and adding acquired stores to a naturally vigorous intellect. But he was

a man of pleasure and ambition : the lust of the flesh and the pride of life enslaved him ; he lost his opportunity that day, and God never gave him such another.

And yet the brief narrative, I think, impresses us irresistibly with the belief, that some feeling was stirred within him which he ought not to have let die. Oh, let us beware, whenever we are confronted with some plain truths, or shaken for the moment out of our self-confidence, of going back to our common haunts, and beginning over again the old round of business or pleasure, without a confession, or a prayer, or half an hour given to earnest self-inspection ! Oh, let us not, when we are brought to see, as by a flash of light revealing the perils of a journey without God for our guide, wilfully close our eyes to the truth that something has to be sought which we never found, and something done, if the Bible be true, and Christ indeed died to bring us back to God, which conscience whispers, yet whispers audibly, is not yet begun ! My dear brethren, those moments are critical, often the turning-points of a life, often the first steps in a journey which carries a man to the abodes of the blest. But, alas ! how often does nothing come of them ! Old habits are resumed, the world's wise men are trusted once again, traditional dogmas recover their sway, the current morality is

voted good enough ; and so conscience, roused for the instant, sinks into a deeper slumber.

Happy they in whom the Apostle's wish is realized, who have a share in his hope, and are fighting the same good fight under the banner of the Cross ! Bonds we have none, except the bonds of indolence and unbelief, of low desires, and weak endeavours, of servitude to evil customs, and contentedness with a low morality. We walk in fetters, because we want courage to shake them off. We creep along the dusty highway, while they, who have walked in the narrow path before us, many a time, have mounted up with wings as eagles. Oh, remember, I pray you, that *for us* St. Paul's precious life was guarded, and his self-denying labours were undergone, and his instructive Epistles written ! Listen to the Apostle's wise and loving counsels, that you may learn what Christians ought to be ; review his holy, useful life, that you may see what Christians can grow to ; ponder, clause by clause, the petitions put up by him for his Churches, that you may understand what Christians ought to ask. It is an easy thing, as we sit in our Christian Churches, to sympathize with the man who stood up for Christ's Gospel eighteen hundred years ago, to recognize the truth that shone through his wise and weighty words, and to feel that they who heard him should have come



down and sat as learners at his feet. We inherit the religion which he preached; we are called by the name which was stamped on all that he said and did; ours is the faith, as determined by profession and outward symbols, for which he lived and died. But are we in very deed like-minded with the man who, not boastfully but most truly, described his life in passages like these: "I bring under my body, and keep it in subjection;" "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment;" "This one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?" His was the religion of open-hearted sincerity, of magnanimous self-devotion, of Faith that committed himself and all his future to the Good Shepherd's care, of love that embraced both friends and strangers, and made him feel like a brother for the weak, the sinning, the suffering, the injurious. Oh! where shall we find the Christian who is "altogether" such as he was? Yet in hope and aim, in humble thoughts of ourselves, and high thoughts of Christ, in our longings to be holy, and our willingness to do and suffer our Master's will, we must resemble him. Faint

wishes, barren resolutions, broken promises, will not prove us better Christians than Festus or Agrippa. Yet, alas! with all our professions, and all our privileges and opportunities, how many among us have no more to shew for their Christianity!

## SERMON XVIII.

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FAITH'S ANSWER TO THE WORLD.

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ACTS xxvi. 24.

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

(*December 29, 1861.*)

FESTUS is one of those men whose names have become celebrated, in consequence of their being brought into connexion with St. Paul. The path of the Apostle at one point crosses the path of the Roman Governor; and the prisoner has lifted up the Judge to an immortality of fame. Some books still survive, and are read by scholars, from which we learn what was doing at Rome while Paul was pleading for himself at Cæsarea. The name of Nero has become famous, partly for the freaks and atrocities which make him a marked character in ancient

story, and partly on account of the graphic power with which Tacitus has depicted the Reign of Terror under an unbridled Despotism. But the History, of which we have been reading a portion this morning, has a hundred times as many readers as the old Roman whose name is unknown except to the educated classes. What befell St. Paul is immensely more interesting to us than the fate of Seneca, or any other victim of tyranny at the same period; and so in ten thousand Churches in our own land alone, to say nothing of the rest of Christendom, men hear of Festus, and can quote his very words, who neither know, nor care to know, how long the Cæsars reigned, nor what were their special characteristics.

The subjects of which the Evangelists treat are immeasurably more important, of course, than the style of their narratives; and so it is that we hear how Stephen died, and how Peter preached, and how Paul became "a chosen vessel to preach Christ's name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the rulers of Israel," without stopping to criticize the language; but I must confess that I never read once again these chapters, from the twenty-first to the twenty-seventh, which embrace St. Paul's journeyings between Jerusalem and Rome, and his successive hearings before Felix, and Festus, and Agrippa, without being struck with the exceed-

ing beauty of the narrative; so full, without diffuseness, so transparently clear, so well sustained, so happy in the impression conveyed of the central figure in every group, without heaping upon him terms of eulogy. Truly, among the wise dealings of God's Providence, in connexion with the great Apostle, this was not the least important, that for a considerable period St. Luke was his fellow-traveller, and was led, probably, by his having been an eye-witness of many scenes in his eventful life, to add this precious history to what he had told the Church already respecting the Lord Himself.

Festus, I said, is among the sketches which his pen has left to us; an obscure name, save for one memorable passage in his life, but now obscure no longer, because Christians in every age hear of it as we hear of Abraham, and David, and John the Baptist. And then the thought is suggested to us, How strangely are the positions of men reversed by the progress of time! How do the first become last, and the last first! What liberties does posterity take with the elder generations, in casting down their idols, and setting up the statues of men who passed once for mischief-makers and malefactors, in a Pantheon of its own! Felix, we learn from a former chapter, "left Paul bound;" and "after two years Porcius Festus

came into Felix' room." He travelled to his province, I dare say, with something of pomp; he had his guards and officers, and badges of authority; and men thronged the streets, probably, and gave him a shout of welcome, as he rode into Cæsarea. Who thought *then* of a certain prisoner, apprehended in the Temple during the term of the preceding government, hurried away by night from Jerusalem because wicked men were plotting his murder; who had pleaded once for liberty before the governor in vain, and then was unjustly kept in prison without acquittal or condemnation? Yet, *now*, who cares for Festus, or knows whether he was a Greek, a Roman, or a Barbarian, except for the two scenes in which we find him confronted with the Apostle? What word of his would have lived in our memories, but that he said one day rudely from the judgment-seat: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad?"

Looking at this particular scene, we must notice the admirable patience and self-possession of the prisoner. Nothing could be more reasonable than his defence. In a plain matter-of-fact manner he describes two separate stages in his career. First, he was a Pharisee of the strictest sect. When the name of Jesus of Nazareth began to be noised abroad, he took an active part in opposing those who professed

the new Faith, driving some to prison, and helping to condemn others to death. But he had been suddenly arrested in this violent course by a vision seen plainly at mid-day in the sky, and by words addressed audibly to himself, which led him irresistibly to the conviction that hitherto he had been fighting against God. From that day he had preached Jesus and the Resurrection. He was compelled to do so; he had been called to the Apostleship by a Voice from Heaven which he did not dare to disobey; and for this reason, and no other, some of his countrymen, who hated the name of the new Prophet, had sought to kill him. Not a word of censure, you see, for his enemies; no hard names for those who were murderers in intention; no complaint of a two years' imprisonment endured already without any proof of crime.

Thus far all was spoken wisely and calmly; but the wisdom and calmness shone out yet more strikingly in what follows. With loud and passionate tones one of the judges assails the prisoner as a mad enthusiast who was pursuing a shadow, having turned into realities the dreams of his once distempered fancy. It was a wise saying of King Solomon's, "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;" and judged by this rule, the Apostle, no cold and passionless man, but one whose

soul contained hidden fire, must rank high among the nobler sort of conquerors. "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness;" such was his brief reply: more words were not wanting; apter could hardly have been found; and then he addressed himself to Agrippa as a better-informed and probably a more candid hearer.

Truly, martyrs and confessors have been a noble race; and never has more of moral grandeur been seen in our poor world, full as it is of meanness and littleness, than in scenes like these. The surviving memorials of those who witnessed for the Gospel even unto death in early days are very scanty, but we have a rich storehouse in the records of a later age. And our country can boast of many worthy sons, who not only had faith and courage to resist unto blood, striving for the truth, but had meekness and patience which reflected the very image of their Master under insult and cruel wrongs, and wisdom, moreover, to speak good words in the judgment-hall, aye, in the very fires, which live in the Church's memory, while the persecutors are named only with scorn.

Our times are tranquil, our lives are secure; we may be bold without danger, zealous without being challenged by authority; our courts (thank God!) are purged of abominations which disgrace some chapters in our history not two



centuries old ; and judges, now-a-days, would be counted mad themselves who should meet a grave and temperate defence with taunts and insults. But let us learn the lesson which may be of use in our humbler sphere of duty, and for our needful contests with sin and error, that Truth needs no passion in its champions. Calmness will win respect and silence gainsayers, when an impetuous, overbearing spirit will strengthen prejudice, and turn disputants into cavillers. Deep waters run smooth : the convictions which are most profoundly felt, and become part of a man's moral being, do not need to be sustained by loud words or angry reproaches ; a grave, quiet earnestness best becomes the discussion of questions which involve the life of men's souls ; and when the Christian's faith is strongest, his spiritual sight most clear, his hold upon great truths most firm, his conscience most at ease ; simple, weighty words come more readily to his lips, and, with no aid of rhetoric or learning, he will often be a persuasive speaker, when the well-armed controversialist proves merely a skilful fencer.

So much for the Apostle himself and the lesson conveyed in his bearing before his judge. Now let us take his words and use them as an answer to what we sometimes hear, not from unbelieving Gentiles like the Roman governor,

but from baptized Christians, who know the Gospel in the letter, but have not yet drunk into its spirit.

To much that we say men have a reply something like that of Festus. Madness indeed they do not charge upon us; but if we call decorous men to repentance, and tell them ungodliness is sin, and claim the heart for Christ, and say that reigning selfishness, and pride, and worldliness, will shut a man out of heaven as surely as robbery and profaneness, we pass for persons not otherwise,—with something perhaps of honest zeal, but straining matters too far, and urging men beyond their powers. If we make much of Christian doctrines which seem to be a revelation, not only of God's purposes, but of God Himself, that we may approach Him safely, and walk with Him, as redeemed bondsmen indeed, but still as grateful, obedient children, men tell us that they love practical matters, and are afraid to meddle with mysteries which they do not understand; they are content to walk in the beaten track, and if they do their common duties well have little fear about the future. If we describe the saints as a peculiar people, and, pointing to ancient or modern examples, say that among their badges are zeal for God, love of holiness, devotion to Christ, as the Master to Whom they

are bound by special ties and owe special service, the answer is ready, that they pretend not to saintship, but hope to be saved along with numbers who walk on a lower level, and are good people in their way, though they make little talk about religion. If we quote Scripture to shew that customary sins may be deadly sins, and that the world's ways have been evil, dangerous ways ever since man departed from God; if in faithfulness lest souls should perish and their blood be upon our heads, we say that men must have courage to stand out from the crowd and seek heaven in good earnest, and walk in the narrow way at some cost, aye, to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, rather than have the flesh for their master, then men talk as they might do if the Bible were written in mystic language to bewilder and mislead, instead of being God's message to guide us heavenward. "Phrases of this kind must not be taken too literally," we are told: "God is both wise and merciful, and will not require impossibilities; Salvation cannot be so hard to find, if it be true that He is not willing that any should perish. Ascetics, enthusiasts, men who love to dogmatize, and take a pride in self-mortification, proud withal, and harsh censors of the world's follies, there have been at all times; but sober-minded persons are not led

away by novelties, and in matters of this sort, where men have their own consciences to guide them, the few must not dictate to the many."

I think I have not misrepresented much of the current talk about religion, and the practical conclusion to which it leads men is this,—that there is extravagance on our part; that we need not cry aloud to wake men up from their dreams; that without striving, watching, and praying, without confessing Christ openly, and taking His yoke upon us as a law of liberty and a badge of honour, without conversion of heart, and self-dedication to God, and sympathy with those who live beneath the Cross, we may not only live with credit, but die with a good hope.

*Is it indeed so? Are these the words of truth and soberness, or ours which contradict them? This is a serious matter, and let us not evade the enquiry, but face it. Truth and soberness: let us test the principles and conduct of worldly men, and see what they are when measured by the rule to which they will hardly object. We have no sympathy with mystics. We believe that enthusiasm, properly so called, brings much discredit on religion, though many to whom it is imputed are really prudent, calculating men, only taking God at His word, and putting eternity into the scale when they weigh the world's favour against loyalty to Christ,*

and the pleasures of sin, with all the world's prizes of every kind, against the "exceeding weight of glory" which God hath prepared for them that love Him." We have not a word to say about heights of virtue unattainable by men who live in the rough working world, or about the asceticism which builds a wall of separation round its little secluded hermitage that polluting associations may not soil its garments. We talk to men living in the thick of the world as we find it, drifting with its currents, listening to its moralists, bewildered often with its sophistries, enticed by its showy baubles, or stirred to emulation by the hope of winning some of its nobler prizes. And to them we say, What know we of truth, moral and spiritual truth, save what God teaches us? Will the stars teach it us, if we gaze at them for ever, or master the secrets of the wondrous system which embraces all that the eye hath seen, all that the telescope hath explored, and fields yet vaster, it may be, in the unexplored regions of immensity? Shall we dig for it in the mine? Shall we sail in quest of it over the wide sea? Shall we search for it in libraries? Shall we turn from dead books to living men, and find out the very wisest of all we know, and sit humbly at his feet, and beg to learn from him all that he has discovered for himself by deep study and prolonged medita-

tion on things human and divine? Alas! when he tells us, we shall be lost and bewildered, we shall hear of no certainties about the soul and salvation. He may talk grandly about the Deity, the Infinite Good, the all-pervading Power, the Self-existent as contrasted with all His works, animate and inanimate, the possible advancement of the human intelligence to higher developments, and the glories of an ideal world where the material shall be a veil to shut out the spiritual; but what God is to us, and how we stand related to God, how I can walk in the light of His presence without being consumed, and live in conscious friendship with Him, sinner as I am, without presumption and impiety, *that*, the question of questions, he cannot answer; *that*, the problem of ages, he passes by or leaves unsolved; yet *that*, if my conscience is stirred, and I have learnt that the law, which neither he nor I have kept, is "holy, just, and good," I must have solved, or be a homeless wanderer, enveloped in mists and thick darkness, walking I know not whither, beset with doubts which rise to agony unless dissipated by thoughtlessness, all my days.

We speak the words of truth when we point to Him who says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father, but by Me." We give men the clue which

will conduct out of a labyrinth of conflicting opinions to peace and safety, when we say, Listen to words like these, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." We put them on the right track when we remind them how the Lord prayed for His disciples, and charged them to pray in like manner for themselves, and their brethren: "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth."

These, we say, are "words of soberness." We follow no cunningly-devised fables, but living words from the living Saviour, Who died and rose again, Whose Death gives us a good plea before God, Whose Resurrection is the type and pledge of ours. Other men are rash men. If they have not this plea, they have none at all. If the pierced Hands blot not out the sentence of their guilt, it stands unblotted in the Book of God, and along with it the doom of the impenitent, written in awful words: "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, upon the Jew first, and also upon the Gentile." Alas! now-a-days the Gentile's doom can be no lighter; for the oracles of God are ours, and salvation is nearer to us than to the outcast children of Abraham, and the Gospel to those who hear repeated in our Churches what was taught them

in the nursery, if it do not sanctify and save them, is "the savour of death unto death."

In other things, too, *truth and soberness go hand in hand*. Men are corrupt, we say, in will and practice. Naturally they prefer the evil to the good. The moral disease is not skin-deep, but taints the very springs of life. We are crippled and cannot walk, blind and cannot see, deaf to the Heavenly Voice, though the ears be wide open to catch the world's gossip, and the tempter's whispered suggestions, and the praises and flatteries of friends which exalt us in our own esteem, till the new-creating Spirit abuses our pride, makes us ashamed of our earthliness, and gives us strength for the spiritual conflict and the heavenward journey. Is this enthusiasm? Do not your own consciences tell you that you cannot conquer self, conquer the world, conquer the devil, on any other terms? You have tried sometimes; how have you prospered? You have made a hundred good resolves about serving God, and mastering your besetting sins; have they been kept or broken? You meant, probably, when this year began, to be some way on towards heaven before its close; *where* are you now? *what* are you now? a trifler, a loiterer, a formalist, a pleasure-lover, excusing yourself in doubtful practices, turning the edge of plain-spoken exhortations by pretending



difficulties, or by gathering materials from many quarters for cavils against the godly? If this be so, are you not a witness to yourself? Is not your experience on our side? May we not quote all that men say as to the hardness of God's service, and the strictness of His requirements, against themselves? We never asked them to break their fetters without Divine aid. We never set them the hopeless task of running with the swift, and battling with the strong, while their limbs are palsied, and their souls are cleaving to the dust. Soberness adapts means to ends, foresees difficulties, counts the cost, furbishes up its weapons while the enemy is at a distance. In all this the real Christian is sober, calculating, foreseeing, far-seeing. The real visionary is the Christian in name and profession, holding to his Bible, keeping his hope of heaven, yet living as the world lives, and dying as the world dies.

If the world is full of disorders and revolt, then we must escape from it, rise above it, protest against it, or perish with it. If Christ "came to seek and to save that which was lost," then He must seek us out individually, must save us by the virtue of His blood and the power of His Spirit, or we remain under the power of sin. If heaven be far off in one sense, and yet nigh to us since Christ opened the door of mercy, and sent down His Spirit from on

high, then heavenward we must look and aim, "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light;" we must be growing under the guidance of the Heavenly Teacher, or we shall remain far off for ever.

These are "words of truth and soberness." To dream of heaven without any moral transformation, for men to scoff at the regenerating process in life, and think it shall all be accomplished in the grave, though they lie down in it with hearts utterly estranged from God and holiness, is not sober; and the Last Day will prove that they who lived and died in this hope believed a lie.

## SERMON XIX.

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TRIAL AND SERVICE.

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ACTS xxvii. 21—25.

“ But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.”

(*December 30, 1855.*)

It is impossible for any man of taste or feeling to read the narrative contained in this chapter without being struck with its singular beauty. Volumes have sometimes been made up of shipwrecks and disasters at sea; and very exciting they are commonly, on account of the striking and awful character of the incidents detailed,

and also on account of the moral heroism which is often called forth under circumstances of the deepest and most thrilling interest; but we shall not find any tale of this kind which is better told than this voyage of St. Paul from Crete to Melita. Under any circumstances we should follow with anxiety the course of a vessel which was carrying the chief among the Apostles to the capital of the ancient world; but even had there been no one so famous on board,—if the story were merely of the perils and escape of a common ship's crew wrecked in the Mediterranean nearly two thousand years ago,—we might still regard it as a curious record of antiquity, and admire the writer's graphic power and lucid style. As it is, however, the moral interest of the scene is of the highest kind, and our time will not be mispent if we try to collect some of its most obvious lessons.

St. Paul then, observe, is in custody, and on his way to the place where he is going to do good service for God. He was not, like Jonah, running away from duty, but was following the guidance of Providence, step by step, and content to be carried a thousand miles as a prisoner, so that he might but preach the Gospel, and win souls to Christ, when his long journey was concluded. Yet, like Jonah, he is

overtaken with a storm, and is in peril of his life. All hope of being saved, at last, is taken away. Tossed for many days between the raging sea and the darkened sky, both soldiers and mariners give themselves up for lost, and St. Luke, at least, if not St. Paul, seems to have shared the general apprehension.

So it is, my brethren, in this troubled scene. We cannot expect for long together to sail over tranquil seas beneath a summer sky. We may be serving God faithfully, and yet it may seem good to Him, Who doeth all things well, to afflict us sorely. The prosperous worldling will mistake most grievously, if he fancies that growing wealth, or an uninterrupted tide of success, is any proof that God is on his side; and equally rash will be the conclusion of the timid, self-distrusting believer, who fears to advance boldly in some selected path because he is met by difficulties, or even beset by dangers. The question whether we are taking the right course must be settled on other grounds. Any decision of consequence should be taken very thoughtfully and prayerfully, with an earnest endeavour to clear our minds from prejudice and self-will, and with a full determination not to let the world's tyranny control us, or our own interests entice us, where God's will can be discovered from His own word; but when the decision is thus taken, it should

not be distrusted because we find ourselves hindered and opposed. The fiercest storm we have ever encountered may come down upon us just when we are doing what is most pleasing to God; and for a time we may stagger and be at our wit's end: yet in such straits we may learn so much of our own weakness, and feel the power of prayer so sensibly, and receive such gracious tokens of God's fatherly love and care, that it shall be as if an angel had come and told us, "This is the way; turn not back from it, but walk in it, and thou shalt find a guiding hand and a sustaining arm as thy steps advance."

Thus it was, we cannot doubt, with St. Paul. "*After long abstinence,*" we are told, he "stood forth;" but we are as sure as if we had seen him on his knees, or heard the petitions which were breathed forth in that hour of danger, that he *prayed* as well as *fasted*. *He* may have marvelled that he was first sent to Rome, and then tossed and buffeted by the angry waves while he was sailing thither; *he* may have questioned, in his lonely musings, about the lawfulness of the course he had taken in joining the four men who had a vow upon them, and may have said, "There, in the temple, when I was honouring the Jewish ceremonies which are to be done away, my troubles began;"

*he* may have doubted whether it were well for him to have exercised his citizen's privilege of appealing to Cæsar, and whether it might not have been more honourable to God, and more encouraging to the brethren, if he had meekly submitted himself to Festus' will, and taken captivity or death for his portion according to the judge's sentence, without wandering so far for a second trial. But he took all his cares and doubts to God; and had an answer which made his onward course quite clear. To Rome he must go; his Master would have it so: he had a troubled journey thither, but *that* was no new thing for one who had faced danger in every shape. Perils in the sea were no worse than other perils which he had been brought safely through; and, reassured by the angel's visit and message, he was as tranquil and self-possessed as if the ship were riding already in some quiet haven.

Ten thousand times, my brethren, has the same thing been seen; when the saints, in their time of sorest trial, have sought God with deeper earnestness than ever, and given themselves fairly into His hands for good or evil, for life or death, with perfect willingness to do hard things, or suffer bitter things, so that they may but have a part in His protecting care and approving smile. Thus it was when Hezekiah spread Sennacherib's boasting letter

before the Lord. Thus it was when Daniel found himself safe for a whole night amidst hungry lions. Thus it *is*, and *will* be, while the world lasts, and God rules in it, and lets His children tell Him of all their wants, and makes His promise good to enrich the humble soul, and to feed the hungering soul, with His most precious and enduring comforts. Angels' visits we do not expect by night or by day; we do not look for dreams, or expect visions: but we can feel as sure that Christ is near to us, and that *His* Spirit is strengthening and gladdening our spirits, and that none shall harm us really if we be doing His work and will, as if Gabriel stood by our side, and led us by the hand in our appointed path, or wielded a flaming sword to smite our enemies with destruction. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea:" this might have been the Apostle's song, and perhaps was the Apostle's song in that night of storms; and the same strain, or others like it, has been echoed from lonely chambers and gloomy prisons, in crowded cities or in unpeopled solitudes, by some of God's noblest servants from that age to this.

Next mark the bearing of the Apostle amidst his fellow-voyagers. He reports to them the



angel's message. They are heathen men, and so can have no part in his best and holiest feelings; but they are men of like passions with himself, and are likely, therefore, to catch at a hope of safety from any quarter. He sets himself, kindly and generously, to comfort them, and succeeds. He makes public confession of his faith in God, tells them the very words that had been brought to him from heaven, and evidently gains credit to his story by his tone of sincerity and earnestness. From this moment the ship's company felt all the safer for his presence, and were willing to be guided by his counsel.

Let a man simply trust God, and have courage to declare himself a believer in Providence, and a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, and you will often see the same result now. It is the half-hearted men, the loiterers and waverers, the hesitating lukewarm disciples, whom the world distrusts or despises. Singleness of aim, and a steady devotion to duty, will win respect in many places where men's own practice is very faulty, and their principles are grievously unsound. Let a man claim and avow his relation to God; let him say without hesitation or reserve, that the all-commanding Law is the law that binds his conscience; let it be an understood thing that what he declares as the truth to other men is the stay and com-

fort of his own soul; let it be seen, too, evidently by his bearing and his temper, that he longs to do them good, and would have them religious that they may be ten times happier than they have ever yet been, and he will have the credit of being a man of God with many who do not adopt his creed, but who yet feel the power of living goodness, and in their sober, thoughtful moments would sell all their pleasures to have a hope like his. Our prayer should be that Christians of this stamp may be greatly multiplied; resolute, single-hearted men, with strong faith, and warm hearts, and sympathies keenly alive to the wants and perils of their brethren. Such men are like "epistles of Christ" in their several spheres; and some, who will not hear God's word in the house of prayer, will read the humbling, convicting lessons which are taught by their useful, holy lives, and begin to wish that an angel, or some heavenly messenger would bring them good tidings, or teach them to spend their days to better purpose. The *angel* will not come at your bidding; but the *heavenly messenger*, the blessed Spirit of Truth and Holiness, *will*, if you really wish to be taught, and mean, like honest men, to yield your wills to God, and to serve Him faithfully, according to your light, in the Gospel of His Son.

We have seen how St. Paul demeaned him-

self in the storm, and what comfort was sent him, when all hope seemed gone. We admire, too, the calmness and dignity of his bearing, when he set himself to encourage his frightened companions, and tried to persuade them to trust God as he did. And now looking at the whole scene, we cannot help remarking that *times of adversity try men's spirits, and bring their real characters to light.*

St. Paul passed for a common prisoner, perhaps, while the wind blew softly, and the sea was calm. If he spoke to the soldiers or to his companions about his faith and hope, he probably did not find willing listeners, or he might be derided as a pretender to visions and revelations, a worshipper of strange gods, whose names were never heard at Rome; but the storm revealed his greatness, and made him the wonder and admiration of that motley crew. His words, and looks, and tones were quite different from any thing that they were used to; and all alike, from the moment of his declaring himself, seem to have felt the presence of a master mind. All is done henceforth under his direction; men in authority carry out his wishes: one might have thought, from their ready compliance with all his suggestions, that, instead of being on his way to Cæsar's judgment-seat, he was some governor from a distant province, returning with his retinue to Rome.

Thus God's Providence brings hidden virtues to light, and shews often, by reverses and revolutions, how strangely men are placed and sorted at common times.

The fact is, that as gold is tried in the fire, so the character is strengthened and purified by conflict, and the man of many crosses and reverses will shew, *in the end*, for the man of noblest virtue. Often and often you will see a friend or neighbour, undistinguished from the crowd for more than half a life, serving God in his own quiet way, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness neither more scantily, nor more abundantly, than the bulk of common Christians; but God first *tries* him beyond other men, and then *exalts* him above other men. He is forced by circumstances into some encounter with the powers of this world, or the powers of darkness, and learns, as he never learnt before, what it is to be "strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man." He talked about the "armour of God" before, and knew that it was proof against the world's temptations, and Satan's fiery darts; but he never proved it so thoroughly, nor understood so well what it was to stand up and fight for life, as *now* since he had to stand upon his guard almost hour by hour, and to confess his Lord where the enemy mustered against him in tenfold strength.

The time comes, perhaps, when the war-cry is sounded, and God's servants must be valiant, as well as zealous, for the truth; and then it is seen that the leaders are chosen by Providence, *not* for the height of their stature, nor for the beauty of their countenance, not for their consequence or worldly gifts, but rather for strength and stedfastness of faith, which have been given to some favoured few in the sharp discipline of long-continued trial. *They* come out *ready-equipped*, and their spirits kindle as dangers thicken around them, and their words become like a trumpet-call, to put courage into a thousand swelling hearts, and conquering or falling, in either case, they win the day: for their death, if it be the martyr's sacrifice, will make the whole army of the saints more brave than ever. We need not pray, my brethren, that God will send us storms, because men are roused by them when they come, and the good that is in God's children shines out with brighter lustre than before; but if we see the sky look black and lowering sometimes, and think that many things betoken an approaching conflict between good and evil, we may well pray God to make us humble and watchful now, that we may be unflinchingly loyal to Christ, and conspicuously useful to our brethren, when the testing-time shall come.

At such a time, remember, it is Christian

faith, and Christian uprightness, that men want; and woe be unto them who have nothing better to guide them than the world's creed, and the world's honesty! What was it that elevated and emboldened St. Paul when he stood amidst that trembling crew, and bade them be of good cheer in a tone that spoke of confidence and hope to all who heard it? It was the faith which bound him to the Saviour, and made him willing to live, and labour, and die, for the Gospel's sake. It was *proved* faith, moreover; faith that had stood the trial, and been found genuine amidst perils and temptations; faith that had borne him up, and borne him on, through a course of self-denying labours, the like of which the world *had* not seen, and *has* not seen, since the struggle between light and darkness first began in this fallen world.

There is a world of meaning in that single half-sentence, "the angel of God stood by me, *whose I am, and whom I serve.*" This may stand for the Christian's motto. We belong to God in a new and special sense, if we are Christians indeed; and, belonging to God, we give Him cheerful and willing service. We live under His eye; we sympathize with all that concerns His interest and honour; we try to become the obedient ministers of His far-reaching and all-controlling will. It will be

in vain for us to pretend that we are of God, if we have not something in hand which we feel to be rather His work than ours; if we are not aiming consciously at some prize which is not of the earth, or earthly; if we have never yet encountered the world's censure for any good thing we did, or suspected its praise and favour as a subtle and dangerous poison; and, on the other hand, we cannot serve God as His children serve Him till we realize our child's privilege and acknowledge Him, through Christ, as *our* God, *ours* personally and individually, ours by redemption and regeneration and adoption, ours to love, and please, and live with, through eternity.

My dear brethren, short sentences are sometimes remembered, when long sermons are forgotten. Pregnant, comprehensive sentences are most useful to gather our thoughts to a central point, and make them more distinct and particular than at common times. I propose this short, pregnant, comprehensive sentence therefore for your meditation to-day. Take in the words, "whose I am, and whom I serve;" dwell upon them: *God* is the person spoken of, the *Great* God, the Holy and jealous God, Who cannot look upon iniquity; the compassionate, long-suffering God, Who has borne with you in all your provocations; the God of overflowing kindness, Who sent His

Son from Heaven to save you; He whose will is written, where you may find it, and grow familiar with it, in the pages of His own word; *this* God is the Almighty Maker, Ruler, Father of all His children, and the least and meanest of them can say humbly and thankfully, "*His I am, and Him I serve.*" Say it yourselves, and try how the words sound. What is there in your daily feelings and daily practice which makes them true? What property does God seem to have in you? or in what special sense do you demean yourselves as His servants? Do you walk by rule, like men who have to give an account of their time and doings, and yield your will continually to Him Who has the Master's right in you at all times, and in all places? Oh, remember, it is idle to say we are Christ's if we do *not* serve Him, and most presumptuous is it to pretend to serve Him on any terms but His own terms!

Happy, *for themselves*, we say, are the men who, being sharers of the Apostle's faith, can thus confidently claim relationship with God; and happy, too, for the sake of many beside themselves. There is great force and beauty in that part of the angel's message, "Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." For St. Paul's sake the whole two hundred were spared and brought safe to land. He had



work to do at Rome, and the vessel could not sink that carried him. With the exception of St. Luke, probably, they were only chance acquaintances and associates; but as they sailed in the same vessel, so they shall be carried to the same haven. The expression "*I have given them to thee*" implies, I think, that the Apostle had begged their lives from God; and now his prayer is heard: not one shall be missing when the vessel lies a wreck upon the shore.

Many a man has a gift from God which he does not half value as he ought, if among his near friends there be some who pray in earnest, pray much and often, pray for the safety of their homes, for the comfort and credit of those whom they love with a special love, for pardoning mercy and converting grace to come and visit every soul among their kindred. Temporal blessings are given in answer to petitions like these, and spiritual gifts besides. We may dwell more safely because the godly dwell with us. We may stand when others fall, may have health given back to us after a time of sickness, may escape perilous snares, and overcome strong temptations, because God has heard some of His saints who besought Him earnestly on our behalf before our own souls were alive to God. Such blessings often come unsought; but they are not less God's

gift; nor are our thanks less due to those who have been thoughtful and generous in our behalf.

We have but to enlarge our field, and pursue this thought beyond our homes, to larger sections of the human family, to neighbours, and fellow-worshippers, to fellow-citizens, and brother-Christians, and then we see that the godly, wherever found, are public benefactors. Their example, often, is a silent rebuke to the open transgressor, so that he sins less boldly. In their households, as we hope, youths and maidens are growing up, who shall take the place of Christ's missing soldiers in the coming age. But besides these gifts, for which their country owes them thanks, the defences of a nation are strengthened as the numbers of the faithful are multiplied, and holy hands are lifted up in ten thousand secret chambers for that blessing from above, without which its strength may be turned to feebleness, and its towering prosperity sink and disappear, like icebergs in the summer heat.

Happy the nation which has an army of such defenders! Let us thank God, that His faithful servants are so many among us; and let us pray that they may be multiplied twenty-fold. The prayers of the godly are a choice blessing for ourselves; but let us try, in this matter, to be givers, and not receivers only

Let us aim to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and then, in some sense, we shall be our country's champions. Let our households be nurseries of piety, and then they will be like scattered fortresses, or like towers upon the walls, if evil should assail us in some threatening form.

## SERMON XX.

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ST. PAUL AT ROME.

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ACTS xxviii. part of v. 14.

“And so we went toward Rome.”

(*May 2, 1858.*)

IN these few simple words we are told of the last of St. Paul's journeys which St. Luke has recorded. What a world of thought is opened to our imaginations and our memories, when we think of *St. Paul* and *Rome* together! The *first* is among the most prominent characters in God's history of the world; the *second* is a sort of type or representative of what figures, principally, in every merely human story, the might and majesty of earthly dominion. There is moral beauty on one side, material grandeur on the other. The *spiritual teacher* shews us what goodness could do, witnessing for God in the midst of an evil world; the *conquering nation*, aiming at uni-

versal empire, shews us what could be accomplished in the way of self-aggrandizement by strong wills, and daring enterprise, combined with favouring opportunities and political sagacity of the highest kind. We hear of *Rome*, and think at once of crushing power, well symbolized by the beast which Daniel saw, "exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, which devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet." We hear of *St. Paul*, and think at once of a suffering, afflicted man, beset almost wherever he came by enemies and persecutors, yet in his feebleness, with no weapons but Truth and Charity, casting down many a stronghold, and winning blessed triumphs over the powers of this world and the powers of darkness. *Rome* in its pride did not want, or seek any prophet to guide aright its senators or citizens: *St. Paul*, so long as he was free, had never been prompted by the Holy Ghost to seek the capital of the world, or to confront the Cæsars in their palace; but now, by the Providence of God, they were brought together. The sea was crossed: Melita and Sicily were left behind. Under the charge of a Roman centurion, the Apostle and some companions, who were prisoners like himself, landed at an Italian port called Puteoli; and thence, after a week's delay, were marched to Rome. His condition

at the time he reached it, his residence and employments there, with the blessed fruits which resulted to some of its inhabitants from his preaching and example, are topics which may fitly come under review this morning.

“When we came to Rome,” (the history runs, the writer himself, St. Luke, being one of the company,) “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him.” This was a privilege conceded to him by those who had him in custody; but still he, like the rest, was at the bidding of armed soldiers, carried hither and thither by those who were for the time his masters. He entered Rome, then, a prisoner. Its streets were busy with life; citizens were abroad, there as here, on their several missions of business or pleasure. In that vast assemblage of untold multitudes,—*some* dwelling there as lords, *others* gathered for their own purposes, or for purposes of government, from a hundred conquered provinces,—human society would be presented in all its various aspects, from the representative of some old patrician house, who had a hundred slaves drudging in his halls, to the captive soldier who had walked in procession behind some general’s car of triumph, and might soon be called to make sport for the

populace, while he fought for his precious life against fearful odds. Along those peopled highways St. Paul would travel, and look around him at all that was new and wonderful, not with a dazzled eye, not like one who came to feed an eager curiosity with sights and scenes of which the fame had reached to the far east and the far west, but with the inward feeling that God had sent him thither, sent him, as he hoped, for some high purpose; and that *there*, among those teeming multitudes of traffickers and pleasure-hunters, and poor, unregarded sufferers of many kinds, were some hidden ones whom God's word might reach, and Christ might gather into His fold.

He came not thither by his own choice, but we know he was well content to be there, and glad to be employed about any work which his Lord might find for him to do. "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also," had been his message by letter to the Christians of that city years before. "I have a great desire these many years to come unto you," he had told them in the same Epistle, and when he travelled to Spain (so far-reaching were the desires, and so comprehensive the aims, of this man of God), when he travelled into Spain he meant to visit Rome in his way. God, however, had ordered it otherwise, and sooner than he intended or expected he was

brought to witness in far-famed Rome, and before Cæsar himself, for the truth which was dearer to him than life. There was nothing of *fear*, therefore, we are sure, and nothing, probably, of *sadness*, in his countenance as he paced those endless streets. He came charged with a message from the King of kings. He looked like a prisoner, and moved the pity, perhaps, of those who turned to see what sort of persons had come from the provinces to be tried in the imperial court; but he was really a heaven-sent ambassador of peace, the noblest man, and charged with the noblest office, of any who were found that day within the walls.

So little does man's judgment, as the tide of events rolls on, accord with God's. So much is doing in this busy world that has *one* look and shape to those who only see some naked fact, or some solitary individual, unknown as yet to the dispensers of worldly fame, and quite *another* look and shape to those who see what has come of the unnoticed fact, or been achieved by him who was once despised. The *first* have become *last*, and the *last first*, since the day we speak of. Nero has gone down to his grave with shame. His outraged subjects followed him thither with curses, and succeeding generations have made his name a by-word of infamy. And what is proud Rome itself? A city of ruins; a garrison town, just now, for



a people whom its citizens once called barbarians. And if we ask where her successor is to be found, what great power has been marvellously raised up by God to touch the world at many points, and rule over subject provinces almost at its two extremities, and control, as no other nation is doing, the destinies of mankind, we can name no other than our own. London is as marvellous in its way as ever Rome was; and if the stranger who catches a first glimpse of its distant outline, asks what is the dome that towers proudly and gracefully over every meaner edifice, the answer itself marks the strange revolution of which I have been speaking in the affairs of men, the lifting up of some, the casting down of others; for it bears the name of him who was once committed by a Roman centurion to the captain of the guard, committed, it may be, along with felons and common reprobates, and then "suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." Heathen men kept him in bondage; heathen men, when a time of persecution came, thought him unfit to live: many were fluttering about the court that day, in the pride and pomp of office, whom the world thought greater, and who thought themselves ten times greater, than the despised Apostle: but *they* lived out their little day, and were buried and forgotten; whereas Christendom,

at the end of eighteen centuries, delights to honour him as one gifted beyond common men and common saints, yea, the chief of that "glorious company of Apostles," of whom the least must rank for ever above crowned kings and emperors.

And never let us think that contrasts of this kind are things of the past only. Never let us think that *our* judgment of men is always right, and that posterity will not reverse it. A great work has been done since St. Paul was led through the streets of Rome. A leavening process has been going on, indeed, which leaves us far less at the mercy of those who judge always after the sight of their eyes, and weigh every thing in an unrighteous balance. But oh, how is tinsel still preferred to gold by the world's rulers and masters! How *little*, often, are our *great men*, and how *great* our *little men*! What base, earthly, mammon-loving selfishness is seen in high places, and what heroic virtues,—heroic, I mean, in a high Christian sense,—are found often among those who toil and drudge for a bare living. A poor man bearing all the privations of his lot with calmness and patience, and meeting all its temptations bravely in the spirit of faith, resolutely banishing all suspicious and hard thoughts of God, and learning to say, when his house is barest of comforts, as he counts up his mercies

and his privileges, and looks on to his rest and crown, "I have all things, and abound: the Lord is my Shepherd; therefore I shall not want: *He* maketh me to lie in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters;" *that* man may be mean in the world's account; he may never covet human praise, and never win it; but he is the charge of attendant angels, and has his part, appointed by the great Lord of all, in the Church's doings upon earth, and shall hear his Master's "Well done" spoken from the throne of judgment in the great testing-day which shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. So also the humble woman whose worldly cares are all of the domestic sort; the little child who plods its way between home and school, trying to be dutiful; pleasant-spoken, unselfish,—both are great in God's eyes; they are among the blessed family whom He guards and tends with watchful, loving care from hour to hour, making gains and losses, life's joys and life's burdens, to "work together for their good," if the heart be looking heavenward, and Christ be loved and served in their little round of common duties.

Oh, that we may learn to live *less* in this cheating and cheated world, and *more* in the light of God's truth and God's presence! Oh, that we might walk through life as St. Paul walked through Rome, not dazzled by what he

saw of earthly magnificence ; with no thought of courting the great that he might escape from bondage ; little curious about the future so far as his own fortunes were concerned, but feeling that God's world was every where, and that there was work for him every where, to be done in Christ's name ;—*then*, I say, may we tread our lowly path, or fill up the round of public duties, remembering that we are not our own, that life is too short to be spent upon vanities, that beyond all, and before all, we belong to Him Who died for us, and that *debtors unto all men for Christ's sake* is the noble character which St. Paul himself has taught us to assume.

Finely is this last trait exemplified in the course of this very chapter. For mark the diligence and promptitude of the Apostle in his new sphere of action : “After three days he called the chief of the Jews together,” and having declared to them the object of his journey, began to reason with them out of their own Scriptures respecting the doctrine of Christ. “From morning till evening,” not sparing his strength, nor contenting himself with a hurried discourse, “he testified the kingdom of God, and persuaded them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets.” “And some believed the things which were spoken,” we learn,—believed them, and became

disciples; believed them, and henceforth, like their noble-minded teacher, hoped no longer to be accepted for their gifts or sacrifices, but trusted in Him Whose blood alone could cleanse their consciences from guilt. And for two whole years, which had elapsed when the history was finished, St. Paul's preaching work was continued. All men were free to come to him in his hired house, it seems, and many came. He was bound, but not silenced; and so little was public attention roused as yet by the doctrine of the crucified man of Nazareth, so little jealous, at this period, were Nero or his officers of any rival creed to that which made Jupiter the father of the gods, and Mars the patron and protector of Rome, that the man who said that other religions were lies, and that by the name of Christ all men every where must be saved, met with no check or interruption, but spake "with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

With all confidence, and with much success. So "the kingdom of God," often, "cometh not with observation." Thus the wheat groweth while men sleep. Thus the word of truth, again and again, becomes "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." It was not strange that St. Paul should be brought to Rome. The great Apostle might reasonably be selected to proclaim Christ's name in the

very centre of earthly dominion. The scholar and man of learning, too, some might think, would be the fittest champion of the Truth, where such accomplishments had a special value. So, instead of wondering to find him there, many readers of Scripture, possibly, would have thought the narrative wanted coherence and probability, or, at any rate, had missed something of effect, if the City of Seven Hills had not been included in the wide circuit of his travels; but, assuredly, we should not have expected that he would be brought thither in chains, and then have liberty to preach to all comers. Had he been at large, his zeal might have prompted him to preach in the Forum, as it prompted him once before to preach to the men of Athens on the Hill of Mars. In that case, short work might have been made with this troubler of the peace of Rome, this setter forth of strange gods, this propagator of some new creed, which declared, among other things, that One slain as an evil-doer by an officer of Tiberius was advanced to power and dominion immensely above all that the Cæsars ever had, or ever dreamed of; but, as God ordered it, His servant was guarded without being positively secluded. His hired house was his castle, and it was kept by one of Cæsar's soldiers, and numbers resorted thither from day to day; and soon, in the very house-

hold of the emperor, some were found who became obedient to the faith.

Thus God works in His own way for His own ends, and proves Himself stronger than the strongest, and wiser than the wisest. And never let us think that nothing can be done for Christ and His Gospel but in high places, or before large multitudes, or in some way that shall fix upon us the gaze of our fellow-men. Great things may be done very quietly; great things are doing very quietly, in a thousand different spheres where Christian men and women are found to use their gifts for God; to tread the beaten path of common life with a firm step, and an honest heart; to preach silently every day, and all day long, by the beautiful consistency of a holy life, to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour by practising what is "pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report." The forward, bustling professor of religion, who loves publicity, and thinks every thing is to be done by energetic action and overbearing zeal, is often very far from being either the best, or the most useful witness for Christ. Quiet, unostentatious, persevering goodness, goodness that keeps its place, and fears to offend against seemliness and propriety by invading ground that belongs to other men, that busies itself rather with some ministry of love among

those who live in obscurity than with larger objects which attract public admiration; goodness of this kind wins many a blessed triumph over hard, stubborn hearts, and melts many a man into sensibility or penitence who never yielded to the dictates of authority, or the powers of eloquence. Godly zeal need not stand upon the public highways, need not lift its voice among the throng; it may love the shady nook, and work effectually in some secluded sphere. Only let us not plead modesty when our real feeling is deadness of heart towards spiritual things, and the reason why nothing is ever attempted for God is just this,—that we are sinfully pleased and contented with the world as it is.

For two years before St. Luke concluded his narrative, and for some considerable time afterwards, it is supposed, the Apostle there dwelt, and there taught, in his house at Rome. But this was not his only occupation. His spoken words have perished, and live only in their fruits. Some heard him, who shall bless God through eternity that ever he was brought as a prisoner to Rome. Some heard him, too, who sowed the good seed in other hearts, so as to have their share in the work of purifying the spring from which so many streams flowed out to the very ends of the earth. But the *words themselves* are lost. We retain none of them



but the few recorded in this chapter, as having been spoken by the Apostle on the occasion of his first meeting with his Jewish brethren. Other words, however, are recorded, which shall never perish. It was not for nothing that an eager, active spirit like his, was cooped up in that obscure dwelling at Rome, when he would gladly have wandered on to Spain, and Gaul, and Britain, or to any place beneath the wide heavens, where men were found burdened with sin, and longing for a remedy. Read the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, all sent from Rome, and think what a treasure *that* was for the Church of *his* day, and the Church of *our* day, to gain from his captivity. What heavenly wisdom is stored up in them! What force is there in the appeal, "I, *the prisoner of the Lord*, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called!" How would the distant brethren be stirred up to holy zeal and diligence when the words of so brave a captain reached them from afar, and charged them to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!" How would some learn to bear more patiently all their crosses of every kind, when after months, and years it may be, of captivity, while he longed to be astir, yet was willing, if God so willed it, to be "an ambassador *in bonds*," they received the welcome letter,

and traced it line by line, to see how it fared with their spiritual father, and met with those comforting, animating words, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound;" "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content;" "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me!" How would they learn to pray more hopefully both for him, and for themselves, when they knew in what measure, and in what terms, he poured forth his petitions in their behalf, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request with joy;" "and this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God!" How would they be ashamed of any known shortcomings, how would coldness of heart, or slackness in their Christian work, or any contentions that had broken the Church's peace, seem to be black and ugly sins, when they listened to a moving request like this,—"Only, (I ask no other favour of you, *I* to whom you owe much, and for whom you might well be willing to make many sacrifices,) *only* let your conversation be as becometh the

Gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel!"

Such were the employments of the Apostle, my dear brethren, and shall not *we*, as well as *they*, praise God that he had leisure to bequeath such a legacy to the Church? Shall not we feel that his prison hours were amongst his best hours, that his resting-time was as useful as his labouring-time, even when he toiled most diligently and successfully, that *his* loss, —(if loss it were to be brought to commune so closely with his God, to review his course, and gather up his strength for fresh encounters,) —*his* loss has been *our* unspeakable gain? Assuredly, we shall feel this, to-day and every day, if we have drunk into the spirit of those most instructive writings, if his faith and hope be ours, if the Gospel which he preached and for which he lived and died, has become, and is becoming, the power of God to our salvation. Be it so that in them "there are some things hard to be understood;" —(St. Peter said so, and no scholar or theologian will deny it;)—be it so, that every sentence is not plain to an unlearned or a learned reader, and that some passages, often read and thought over, are still less clear than we

desire to have them. No man who wants to learn God's will and his own duty, no man who esteems a cleared conscience as the first of blessings, and submits himself, as a little child, to heavenly teaching, will be at a loss to see the great outlines of the Apostle's doctrine. Beware, however, that you read these precious writings with an honest mind, like men determined to search for truth till it is found, and to buy it at any cost. Read them, too, remembering that, before you can discern spiritual things, your spiritual sight must be cleared, and that prayer is ten times more precious than scholarship for unlocking the sacred treasury. Above all, see that you do not adopt a low and worldly method of interpretation, accommodating the Holy Scriptures to your weakness, instead of asking that strength may be given you to follow the Lord fully wherever He shall lead you. Thus reading, you will "know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Thus reading, you will understand the meaning of sentences such as these, "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience; but God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were

dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" and again, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Reading thus, when you hear of goodness, or of Christianity shewing itself in action, you will not think of the world's beggarly code of conventional morality, but will understand that the "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," is holiness made up of those graces which are the fruits of Christian faith. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,"—"Be ye followers of God as dear children,"—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,"—"Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness,"—"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above,"—"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him,"—these you will feel to be governing principles, applicable to the whole of life and to every walk in life. Well furnished, too, shall we be for common duties, clear-sighted, practical, and diligent Christians, if we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, the plain rules contained in the later chapters of each

Epistle. And if we want to have a picture of the advancing Christian, when he breathes a purer air than common saints, and has hopes that soar high above the vulgar level, where shall we find any thing grander or more elevated than the Apostle's prayer for the Ephesian Church: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God?" Animating, soul-inspiring words! shewing us what Christians ought to wish for themselves, and for each other. May they dwell in our memories, to rebuke our tardy pace and feeble efforts, and to make us aim to be more like him who could say truly, "This one thing I do;—forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

THE END.

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