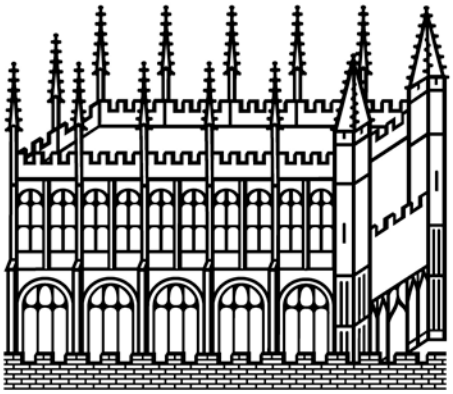

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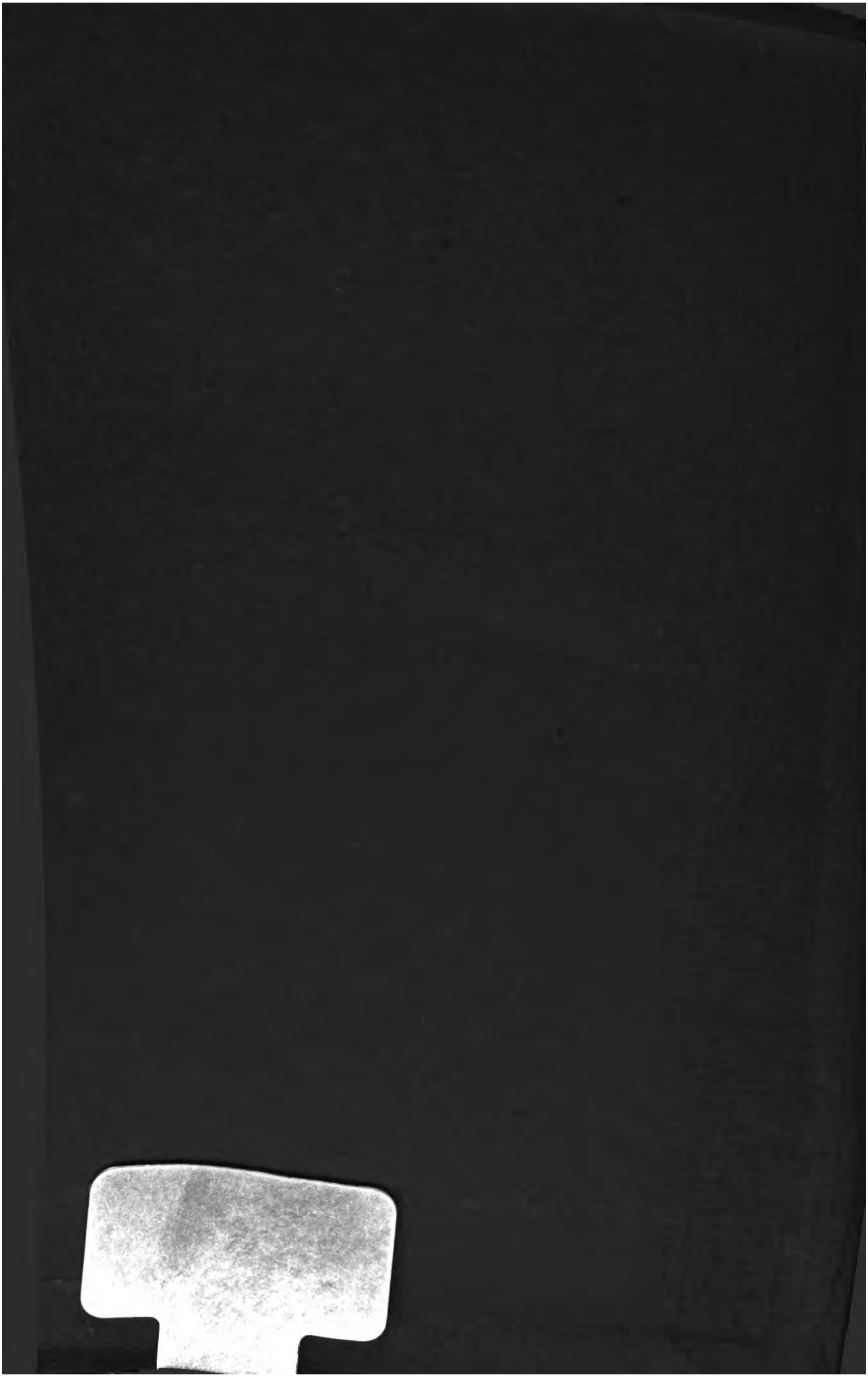

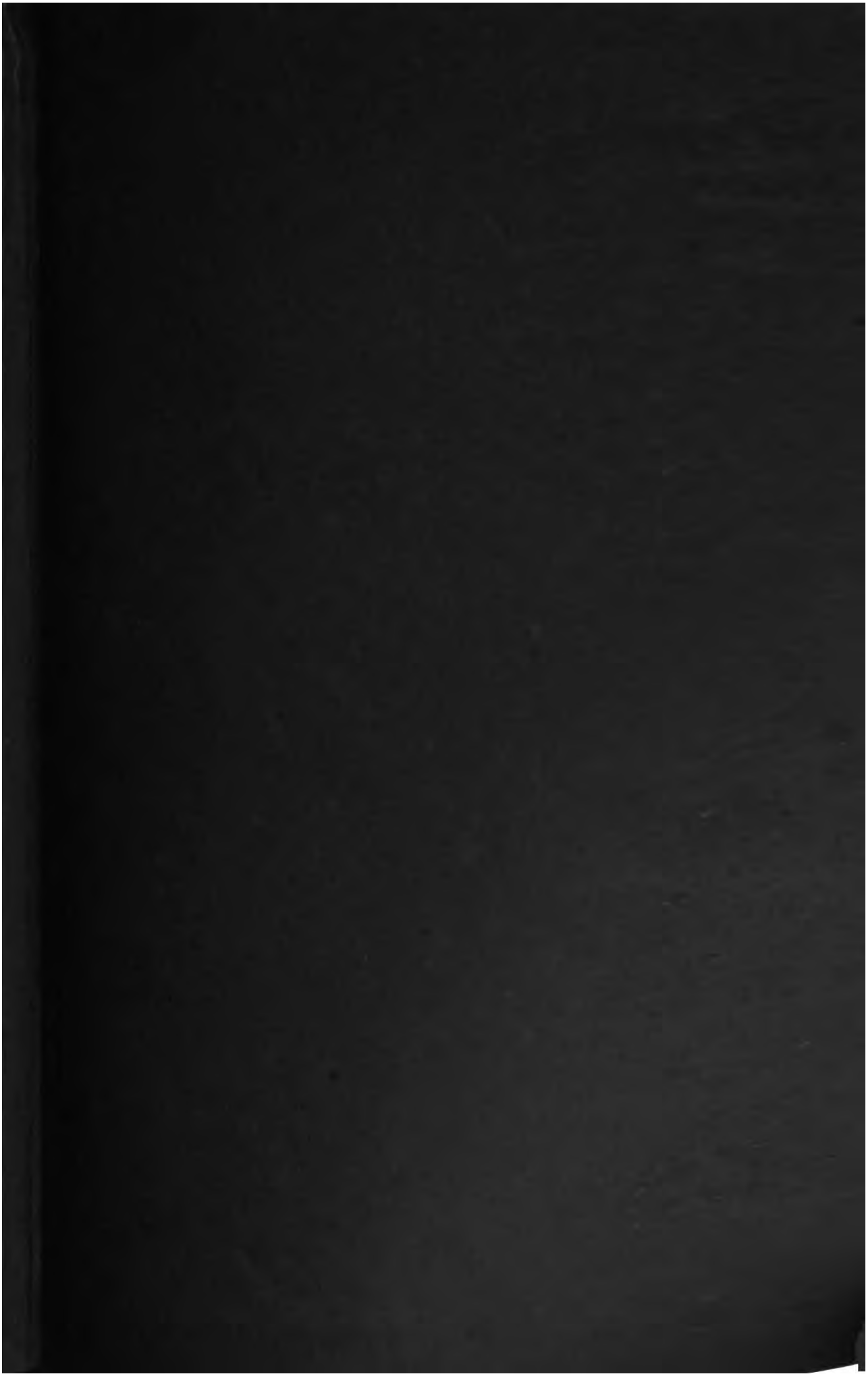

THE

NEW NAME

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY

REV. DAVID DAVIES,

WESTON-SUPER-MARE.

LONDON :

YATES AND ALEXANDER,

CASTLE STREET, HOLBORN, E.C.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE : C. ROBBINS.

1881.

105. bb. 179.

C. ROBBINS, PRINTER, WESTON-SUPER-MARE.

TO MY WIFE,

WHOSE GENTLE SYMPATHY HAS BEEN

IN NO SMALL MEASURE

HELPFUL IN THE PREPARATION OF

These Sermons,

AND TO THE

CHURCH AND CONGREGATION

WORSHIPPING IN WADHAM STREET CHAPEL,

WESTON-SUPER-MARE,

TO WHOM THEY WERE PREACHED

DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS

OF MY PRESENT PASTORATE,

This Volume

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

THESE Sermons, preached in the ordinary course of pulpit ministration, are published at the desire of some friends who heard them.

I am fully aware of the ready disposition of an affectionate people to clothe the utterances of their minister with their own kindly sympathy and charity, and thus to attach to them a sacredness and worth which are not always intrinsic, but which are derived from happy surroundings. Of course I cannot expect this from general readers; I nevertheless trust that in these pages they will find, however crudely, yet clearly expressed, some of those sacred truths of our religion, which cannot fail to present to them numerous and exalted motives to love and reverence Him who is their Divine Redeemer, as well as powerful incentives to imitate His holy example, and to follow trustfully His gentle leading, alike in the bright day of prosperity and joy and in the dark night of adversity and sorrow.

In conclusion, I desire to express my sincere thanks to the numerous friends who have subscribed for upwards of three hundred copies of this book, and have thus rendered very valuable assistance in promoting the publication of it.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE,
April 4, 1881.

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SERMONS.

SERMONS.

I.

THE NEW NAME.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*."

—REV. ii. 17.

GOD'S Sacred Book opens with the record of the creation of "the heaven and the earth;" it closes with the story of the creation of "a *new* heaven and a *new* earth." It begins with the song of the morning stars, and of the sons of God; it ends with the Hallelujah Chorus of heaven's countless myriads. Between these there are strange and almost discordant sounds, telling of the tragedy of sin, and of the mystery of the cross; but all are made conducive to the full and rich melody with which this Holy Book closes. In its first chapters there is described the earthly Paradise that was; in its closing chapters is described the heavenly Paradise that will be. It reveals to us much that we have lost; it reveals to us more that we may yet gain. It awakens regret; but it also quickens hope, and "a hope that maketh not ashamed." It adapts its revelations of heaven to our feeble comprehension. It gives us one glimpse at a time of its many-sided glories. These

appear to us at first sight strangely conflicting, because we only see them in part, and thus miss the divine and heavenly symmetry of the whole. But there are times when even we can trace a marvellous harmony between some of these opposite statements. For instance, we are told that "there will be no night there;" we are also told that "neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat." These words present a striking paradox, and the paradox expresses a glorious truth. The two burdens which we have so often to bear here—the burden of the day, and the burden of the night; of the glaring sun, and of thick darkness; of heat, and cold—will not be found there. So with regard to the other descriptions given; a sublime harmony exists between them, though we may not always trace it. All heaven cannot be expressed in a single earthly figure, and all its glories cannot be taken in at a single human glance. The revelations of heaven will fill all eternity with their glory. At present we necessarily have but very limited glimpses of them, partly because of the limitations of our vision as finite creatures, and partly because of the further limitations of it through the degenerating influences of sin. The visual angle of the physical eye comprises only so many degrees; so with our spiritual vision, we can only take in a very small portion of heaven's glory at once, such portions as the words "no night"—"no sea"—"no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain"—can convey to us. It is a gracious provision that thus, notwithstanding our limited vision, so much of heaven should be revealed to us in separate glimpses; and thus that we should be in possession of so many encouragements to duty, and incentives to hope.

In our text, heaven is presented to us in a different aspect from any of those to which I have already briefly referred. It is represented as

I. The Bestowal of a Hidden Blessing.

II. The Revelation of a Hidden Secret.

There are two figures used to express this. 1. "The hidden manna." 2. "The new name . . which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

I. The Bestowal of a Hidden Blessing.

The figure used in our text to express this is—

"*The hidden manna.*" Some able expositors trace in the first four at least of this series of promises a historical progressiveness. The first takes us back to Eden, and represents heaven as a second paradise,—"To Him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The second refers to man's fall and subsequent penalty, and represents heaven as the restoration from death, and as the reversal of the terrible retribution of sin,—"He that overcometh will not be hurt of the second death." The third promise, which we have taken for our text, and which is the last I shall now consider, refers to the manna, which, under the Mosaic Dispensation, was kept in the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies, in commemoration of the miraculous provision which God had made for the wants of His people while they wandered in the wilderness. It was a sacred relic hidden from vulgar sight, and treasured in that Ark, above the lid of which there dwelt the mysterious Sheckinah, the symbol of the Divine presence.

But this does not seem to represent all the historical significance of the phrase—"hidden manna." It brings us

into contact with the belief, so prevalent among the Jews, that when the army of the Chaldeans sacked Jerusalem, the Lord would not suffer the sacred treasures of the Temple to be defiled by the unholy hands of the invaders; that therefore Jeremiah, the prophet, carried them "to the mountain where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God," and where they would remain hidden from the curious gaze or sacrilegious touch of men, "until the time that God" should "gather His people again together, and shew them His mercy." This expectation is exalted and Christianized in our text. There was no "hidden manna" on the top of Pisgah. The sacred treasures of the Temple, which had disappeared when the Chaldean army had laid waste the Holy City, could not be found again; the Urim and Thummim, the Ark, and the Tables of Stone, and the Pot of Manna, would never be restored; but this dream of a devout imagination would find a more glorious fulfilment in the accomplishment of God's gracious designs, for "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the *hidden* manna."

Again, this is the promise to the victor in the Church at Pergamos. In general you will find that the reward promised to the Christian victor in each of these messages to the churches is just that reward for which, by virtue of the conflicts in which he has to engage, he will be specially fitted. There is throughout a marked correspondence between the joy in store for each and the discipline through which each has to pass. This correspondence is specially clear in the message to the Church at Pergamos. The difficulties which beset Christians in that celebrated city were exceptionally great. Pergamos is described in the context as the place "where Satan's seat" or "throne" was. A brief glance

at the history of this city may enable us to understand better the meaning of these words. Very early in the history of Pergamos we find that through the treachery and cunning of its founder in making himself the master both of the treasures entrusted to his care, and of the city where those treasures were deposited, it became the capital of a celebrated kingdom, which was called by the same name as the city itself. Soon it became the greatest rival of Alexandria, and aroused the jealousy of the Egyptian monarch, by reason of its possessing a library of no less than two hundred thousand volumes. It also became noted as an idolatrous city, and as one of the foremost in the worship of Æsculapius, the inventor of the probe, and the discoverer of the art of healing wounds. The *serpent* was a prominent object in the worship of this god, because it was believed that he had on various occasions appeared in that form when on his healing mission. The worship of the "serpent" by the name of "Saviour" was the very height of abomination, alike to Hebrew and Christian. As a centre, therefore, of serpent worship, Pergamos would be described as a city "where Satan's seat" or "throne" was.

But, in addition to this, we find that in this city persecution had assumed its worst features. While we read of poverty, tribulation, suffering, &c., as befalling the Christians in other cities, we read of *martyrdom* as having already taken place here. Antipas, the "faithful martyr," had been "slain" among them. Human hatred had become more virulent here than in any of the other places mentioned.

Here, too, as in Corinth, there were special difficulties, arising from the custom of offering meats to the gods.

When those meats had been solemnly offered in the temples, the greater portion was set aside as the perquisite of the priests, and the smaller portion was taken home by the worshippers for household use. The larger part of the meats which fell to the lot of the priests was sold to the meat dealers, and, in turn, was retailed by them in the public markets. In connexion with these offerings, too, feasts were held within the very precincts of the temples, which were characterized by the greatest excesses of gluttony and licentiousness. The greatest test of faith to the Christian disciples in Pergamos consisted in resisting those pernicious influences by which they were beset. To him who overcame those temptations, and separated himself from the social customs and licentiousness of that city; who abstained from taking any part in those idolatrous feasts, either in the homes of the idolators, or in the vile orgies of the temples; who withal would not even traffic in the meat offered to idols, the sale of which became indirectly a source of revenue to the licentious priests and harlot priestesses; and thus, to him who in every way avoided entering into the whirling eddies of idolatrous associations; who at every cost came out from among them, and touched not the unclean thing; would God give to partake of His feast in His Heavenly Temple—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna."

We shall now consider heaven as—

II. The Revelation of a Hidden Secret.

The figure used in our text to express this is—

"*The new name.*"—"I will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth

saving he that receiveth it." There are various suggestions given as to the meaning of this passage. Some expositors trace the figure of "the white, (or better rendered, *lustrous)* stone," to a Jewish source. They believe that it refers primarily to the Urim and Thummim (lights and perfections) which were hidden behind the high priest's breastplate, and on which there was a mysterious and secret inscription only known to the high priest who possessed it. According to this explanation the figure of the "white stone" is derived from the same source, and to some extent from the same historical epoch as that of the "hidden manna."

There are some very able critics, who object to this construction on the ground, as they affirm, that in the Translation of the Old Testament into the Greek by the Seventy, as well as in the original Greek of the New Testament, the word in our text *(psēphos)*, translated "stone," always refers to pebbles or stones used for political and social purposes, whereas another word *(lithos)* is used of precious stones or gems.

Those who, notwithstanding, adopt this explanation believe the "new name" to be God's name, and thus accept this promise as identical with a part of the promise given in Rev. iii. 12—"I will write upon him . . *My new name.*"

Looking at our text in this light there appears a very striking correspondence between the *commendation* of the victor and the *reward* bestowed upon him, "Thou holdest fast *My* name . . . To him that overcometh . . . I will give a white stone, and in the stone a *new name* written."

To those who hold fast His name as they now know it, He promises to give His "new name" which will

reveal Him still more fully and gloriously. Thus the condition of knowing more of God is to hold fast that which we already know. The revelations which He will give of Himself to us will become clearer and fuller in proportion as we are true to those revelations of Himself which He has already given us. This has ever been the condition of all new revelations in the past, and this will be the condition of the glorious revelations of heaven itself. We must be "made meet" for heaven before we can enter it. There, as on earth, the Divine One will reveal to us only what we are able to bear, and the power to bear future revelations is received by entering into the full appreciation of the present.

These words, too, thus accepted, set forth the priestly dignity which will be conferred upon the true victor. As the high priest of old alone received the mysterious Urim and Thummim and read the incommunicable name or message, so the victor will be made "a priest unto God," and will receive "a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

But, above all, the great truth taught by these words is that the highest reward of the Christian victor will consist in a new revelation of God which shall consummate, and thus supersede, every other revelation. The name should be the epitome of character, and in this case will be. God's full name will be the sum total of all that He will have to tell us concerning Himself and all His love. Only *He* can give this name; and only those who, having passed through many a conflict, will enter into *the* "secret place of the Most High" and there "abide under the shadow of the

Almighty," can be the happy recipients of this Divine communication.

"What is Thy name?" exclaimed Jacob to the Mysterious Being with whom he had wrestled until the breaking of the day, and who had at length lamed him with a touch, so that now all wrestling was over, and Jacob had nought to do but to cling to Him with all the strange persistency of helplessness, and request that he might know Him better, and be blessed of Him. So in all ages man's highest aspiration has been to know the name of Him who is so much with us—often in our darkest nights—and, knowing His name, to know Him. And observe that God by all the revelations He has given man has been answering this question gradually but certainly, and as men are willing and able to hear. As some one has said, God has been spelling out His name, a letter at a time, throughout the ages, until at length the Divine "Word" appears complete in Jesus Christ our Lord. But even now we only see in part, and know in part. When He shall appear we shall see *Him as He is;* and when His wondrous revelation of the Godhead will appear in all its Divine proportions before our wondering eyes, then will the name of God be a "new name" to us, because of the new glories and perfections which that name will convey, and which until then will be hidden from us. Who can tell how much of heaven will consist in the fact that it will be the highest revelation of Him whom even now, though having not seen, we love!

Accepting this as a Jewish figure, the high priest's hidden jewel which bore a Divine secret to him, and to him only, is made to represent the revelation which God will give of Himself to the Christian victor, in the

land of light—that which no eye hath seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, and which only he who receives shall know.

There are many, however, who believe that in this figure there is a reference to a heathen custom which probably prevailed in Pergamos, as well as other parts of the world, at this time.

What precise custom this was is hard to decide. The difficulty consists in the fact that two or three customs, well-known to have existed at this time, are capable of supplying explanations more or less plausible.

Some believe that the "white stone" in our text is a symbol of *acquittal*. In judicial assemblies in those days the vote concerning the guilt or innocence of an accused person was given by ballot—the *white* stone being a vote of acquittal, the *black* of condemnation. I do not think, myself, that we have only to look to a voting pebble for the figurative meaning of these grand words, or that the highest promise conveyed by them to the Christian victor is mere *acquittal*. His acquittal is not a reward in store, he is acquitted already.

Again, the "white stone" bearing the name of him who received it, was often given, in addition to other honours, to the victor in the public games, as a symbol of rank and dignity. Such a stone was also given as a token of the most sacred friendship. It generally consisted of two parts, each of which bore a portion of the name of the receiver. It was hence used as a secret token. One part constituted a passport for its bearer, at any distance of time or space, to the hospitality and kindness of those who possessed the counterpart. The stone was a pledge of a strong and lasting friendship which neither space nor time would destroy. Plautus

refers to a stone of this kind, with this addition, that the name of a favourite deity, as well as the names of those pledged to each other, was inscribed.

If we accept these words as referring to the white stone which bore the name of the victor in the ancient games, and to whom it was awarded as a symbol of the honour and rank conferred upon him, and furthermore as a token of, what was still more sacred, a close and lasting friendship with the giver, and as a secret pledge of a hospitable welcome to his or his friend's table, this figure is a very beautiful one. Let not the Christian victor in Pergamos grieve because he could not receive from society the white stone of honour and hospitality. God will give to him the "white stone" which shall be the symbol of high honour; which shall also bear upon itself the secret communication of a Divine fellowship; and shall be the pledge of welcome into the heavenly banquet.

Archbishop Trench, however, repudiates the idea that this symbol is borrowed from heathen antiquity, affirming that the Book of Revelation moves exclusively within the circle of sacred, that is, Jewish imagery and symbols, and that the explanation of its symbols are in *no case* to be sought beyond this circle—a statement which many critics pronounce as unproved, and some as even incorrect.

But, whether we trace this figure back to the Jewish Urim and Thummim, or to a heathen custom, the central idea in each case is—*the communication of a secret, given and received as the token of high approval, and in all the sacred confidence of the closest fellowship.* If the reference be to the Urim and Thummim, the "new name" communicated is *God's;* if, on the other hand, the reference

be to the *tessera* of the ancient Greeks, the "new name" is the *victor's*. In the former case it is God's new revelation of Himself to the victor; in the second case it is God's new revelation of the victor to himself.

And, after all the discussion as to which is the correct exposition of these words, Does there not appear to exist a very close relationship between the two constructions? Do we not see in them the two sides of the same glorious revelation? Does not every revelation of God, to the measure that it is received into the soul, transform that soul into the image of the Divine One who is revealed? And, on this principle, has there not been even in this world a wondrous identity in *name* between God and His people? In ancient days were not the *Lord* Himself and Jerusalem called by the same name. The Prophet Jeremiah, on one occasion, speaking of the God of Israel, exclaims, "This is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our righteousness;" and on another occasion, speaking of Jerusalem, he exclaims, "And this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." If there was such a wonderful identity of name, between the God who revealed Himself in ancient days, and those to whom He was revealed, is it surprising if the "new name" which shall be given as a Divine secret to each spirit in heaven, will be alike the name of Him who gives, and of him who receives? Is it not a sublime paradox that we can only see as much of tenderness in God as we, under His gracious influence, are able to assimilate of that tenderness; and, on the other hand, that we can only become assimilated to His likeness in proportion as we have a clear vision of Him? How wonderful are the acting and re-acting influences of our

conception of God, and of our likeness to Him! Even in heaven we shall not all see Him equally glorious: those who will be most of all like Him will see most of all in Him. The "name" by which He will be revealed to us will be the measure of Divine fulness of which we shall have partaken. Hence the name on "the white stone" will be the Divine seal on the measure of our growth in His likeness, and thus will be in very truth a declaration of our individual relationship to Him. Hence, while heaven will be the fullest revelation of Christ as a Saviour to each redeemed spirit, it will also be to such the fullest revelation of himself as a partaker of that Saviour's nature, and of His loving approval.

This will be a secret only known to the one who receives it. The greatest realization of the heavenly life, like the lesser ones of our earthly life, will be a sublime secret between God and the soul. If "the heart knoweth its own bitterness" *here*, "and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy," then be assured that in the heavenly world, when God shall communicate to each redeemed spirit in *one word* the measure of His love and of His approval—in a word which shall alike epitomize His *mercy*, and the *result* of that mercy in our perfection—no man shall know *that* "saving he that receiveth it." Oh, how this secret between Christ and each spirit will unite each by the most sacred ties to Christ in that heaven of untold multitudes of redeemed ones! No one will be lost sight of there in the numberless throng. Each will feel the mighty pulsations of Christ's loving heart, and each will receive from the Saviour the token of His peculiar approval. The joy of *personal* religion will culminate in heaven. There each will receive a "new name"—yes, and a

"new name" *for himself.* God in ages past has given new names to men when they have grown greater than their former ones. He called Jacob Israel because he was no longer a "supplanter" but a "prince with God;" and when at last, through His infinite grace, we shall be transformed from the image of the earthly to the image of the heavenly, He will call each of us by that name which shall best express what we then shall be. *That* name—unlike the one which we may have previously borne—will be our *right* name. It will be that which our Lord Himself will give us. It will be the "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" condensed into a distinctive name which shall present, in a concentrated form, the character of him to whom it will be given. Each, then, will have his peculiar name. One star will differ from another star in *that* heaven, as in the heavens which we now see. The rich variety of individualities, which adorn this world, and this life, will be found in far grander proportions in the spiritual world, and in the future life. It is this that will make heaven so beautiful and its song so full. Each redeemed one will have his own special secret of love, and his own special name given him by the Great Saviour who knows full well all who are His.

This secrecy between the individual spirit and God, which men are so desirous of intruding upon here, will form a part—and a very important one—of the bliss of heaven. The greatest reward will be a *hidden* testimony, too sacred to share with any save He from whom we shall receive it. The highest joy of each redeemed spirit will be an *unutterable* bliss, an *incommunicable* name.

This joy too will be *enough*, for if this name be the communication to our heart of Christ's love, and of Christ's approval, what shall we want more! If we know what *He* has done for us, and what *He* thinks of us, it will not trouble us what others may think. If *He* will say "well done," who shall lay anything to our charge?

But, remember, our Lord will not say "well done" to any one who has *not* done well. He will sacrifice no element of truth in the expression of His loving approval. The reward is promised, in our text, to the *victor*. The conflict must precede the victory. "No cross" on earth means "no crown" in heaven. Heaven will be the crowning gift of Infinite Love, but, like all other gifts of God, it will be conditional. Let us beware of spending our lives in "gazing," like the disciples of old, "up into heaven," and in devoutly imbibing all the consolations and promises which our risen Lord can give, forgetting that He who, "having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers," requires of us an appreciative love, and a living faith, which shall express themselves in a readiness to do and to suffer for Him. Heaven is the gift of Infinite Love, but it is not therefore an arbitrary and unconditional gift. "To him that *overcometh* will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*."

How much more may be in the text I cannot tell. Some of you may have seen far more than I have, but who can see the whole! Heaven alone can reveal that. I have, I trust, touched the hem, or fringe of the

subject. I gratefully lay hold of that, for virtue will come out of it. May we hold fast that which we have, until at length you and I shall draw still nearer to to the great, loving, and central presence—Jesus Christ, who is all and in all. When we "see *His face*" we shall know better what these words mean. Meanwhile let this conviction and this hope sustain us, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

"The time of reigning is not yet,
And yet we feel as it had come;
The pilgrim journey is not past,
And yet we feel as if at home.

Strange mixture of the low and high,
Of strife and peace, of earth and heaven,
The cross and crown, the bright and dark—
'Tis night, 'tis noon; 'tis morn, 'tis even.

Still in the flesh we burdened groan;
Our strength is small, our friends are few;
Yet we are risen and glorified,
Old things have passed, all things are new.

Our life is hid with Christ in God;
When He who is our life descends,
That hidden life shall be unveiled
In beauty that all thought transcends.

And we shall see Him as He is,
And we shall know as we are known—
His bride, His love, His undefiled,
The sharers of His endless throne."

II.

TWO PHASES OF OUR LORD'S LIFE.

"And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong."—LUKE iv. 28, 29.

"And the common people heard Him gladly."—MARK xii. 37.

THESE words present to us two very different aspects of our Lord's life. There is a danger of exaggerating the one at the cost of ignoring the other. Very often this is done, not least frequently by ministers of the Gospel. Those who themselves enjoy public favour delight to dwell exclusively upon those instances in which the multitude followed Christ; while their less successful brethren seem to find unspeakable consolation in dwelling devoutly upon those instances in which the multitudes stood aloof, and many of His disciples walked no more with Him. This is only one instance, among many, of how our individual circumstances and experiences may, almost unawares to ourselves, give us a very distorted and one-sided view of a great and many-sided truth.

There are two facts connected with our Lord's life presented to us in our text.

I. His Unpopularity.

II. His Popularity.

I. His Unpopularity.

What can account for this?

1. *His lowly parentage.* The record of our Lord's return to Nazareth on the occasion referred to in our text presents an instance illustrative of this. His fellow-townsmen were the first to be offended in Him. They asked, "Is not this Joseph's son?" Nazareth was the little village in which He had for many years toiled for His daily bread. The words that Jesus uttered now seemed to His former neighbours and fellow-townsmen to be unbecoming a carpenter. They demanded of Him a miraculous proof that He had been called to a higher sphere than the carpenter's shop. Such a stride as that made by Him shocked them. It was very exceptional —if not unprecedented—in the history of the world. Why should He so far surpass His fellows? Was it possible that all the converging rays of sacred prophecy should find their focus in the obscure workshop at Nazareth! And why in His? They could not welcome the carpenter of yesterday as the prophet of to-day. They were, notwithstanding, startled by His teaching. What could account for such originality of thought and utterance? Could early privileges and influences—the home of Mary, or the shop of Joseph the carpenter, —give the clue? "Whence hath this man these things?" was the question they often asked in their perplexity—a question which has baffled sceptical enquirers ever since. What can account for such sayings as these, if He who uttered them be not Divine?

They demanded a miracle of Him as a proof of His divine mission. In reply, He intimated that faith alone

was blessed with the miraculous. The miracles performed in Capernaum could not at present be repeated to them, because of their unbelief.

On a subsequent occasion, He gave proof of His divine mission by mighty works; but after all, the same question was doggedly repeated, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? and they were offended at Him." A sad illustration of the force of prejudice and jealousy! "No prophet," exclaimed Jesus, "is accepted in his own country." Men are too petty-minded to accept a prophet from among themselves. Nazarenes were the first to believe that no good could come out of Nazareth; by-and-bye others believed it.

They judged the teaching of Jesus by His genealogy, and His works by the petty standard of parentage. This has ever been the vulgar way of judging men. It would seem as if Our Lord's life on earth, from its beginning to its close, was one grand protest against this. It taught men that excellence was confined to no locality or people, that greatness could exist in the cot as well as in the palace, that goodness could come out of Nazareth as well as out of Jerusalem, that the Divine One could dwell in the carpenter's shop as well as in the Temple itself.

But this was a truth which the world would take long to learn. The Nazarenes rejected the world's Saviour, because He had been a carpenter among them, and not a king. They sought to destroy Him, but He "went His way," never again to make the town of His childhood and youth His dwelling-place. "Leaving

Nazareth he came to Capernaum." The expression is significant—*Nazareth is left.* There is every reason for accepting these words in their full force. The peculiar tie between Our Lord and that little town was now broken. His fellow-townsmen became intolerant, and Christ departed. Being persecuted in that city, He—in harmony with His subsequent injunction to His disciples—fled into another, and thus gave place to wrath. That little town, so endeared to Him by all the hallowed associations and sweet memories of childhood and youth, and by those scenes of silent growth and of gradual preparation for His holy work, He now left. How hard the separation which the bigotry and intolerance of others had rendered necessary! Capernaum was henceforth to be called "His own city,"—an appellation forfeited by the town of His childhood and youth. A very great and important moment in the history of Nazareth and of Capernaum, was that in which Our Lord, being rejected in the former on account of His lowly parentage, left it, and chose the latter as the first centre of Christian influence and missionary enterprise.

2. *The high spirituality of His teaching.* The Jewish religion had for centuries been robbed of its spirituality. The cry of the nation was, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord." The Temple and its ritual, as such, had absorbed all their religious affections. Our Lord taught men that the Temple and its ceremonial were to pass away—that soon not one stone of that sacred edifice would be left upon another. He pronounced obsolete sacred spots and holy mountains. God was a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, not exclusively on Mount Gerizim, nor yet on

Mount Moriah. He attacked formalism in its very centre, and thus aroused in the religious authorities of the day a hatred that could only be satisfied with blood. In a frenzy of anger, "Many of them said, He hath a devil and is mad; why hear ye him?"

3. *The high morality of His miracles.* His miracles were not only deeds of power, but also deeds pregnant with great, and, in many instances, unpalatable truths. One instance. Our Lord went over the Sea of Galilee to the land of Gadara, to those unholy Jewish traffickers who valued their swine more than their men. In that land there was a demoniac, who, as far as they were concerned, was welcome to run over any cliff he pleased. What cared they, if their herds were safe? Our Lord cast out the devils from the man, and sent them into the swine. What did this teach? It taught the lesson which the Gadarenes needed most to learn—that it was worth while to heal *one* man though he be a *demoniac*, at the cost of drowning a whole herd of swine. But this was an unwelcome truth to those traffickers, who, sacrificing conscience on the altar of greed, estimated everything by market value. "The whole city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw Him they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts."

4. His *occasional refusal to perform miracles* at the bidding of the people may somewhat account, too, for the disfavour in which He was now and then held by them. Christ came into the world not to startle men with the wonderful, but to testify of the truth. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth."

He never allowed His miracles of power and love to degenerate into a performance. "When Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad, for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing." Our Lord looked at him, saw him, as if He saw him not, heard him, as if He heard him not, and clad with a terrible reserve, "*answered him nothing.*" He had not come to satisfy the curiosity of an impenitent murderer. Nor indeed had he come to satisfy the idle curiosity of any. An instance already referred to illustrates this. Jesus on His first return to Nazareth after His baptism, refused to repeat the miracles which He had performed in Capernaum. He then, as on another occasion, could not, in harmony with the divine economy of working, do any mighty work, because of their unbelief. He intimated that in all history there had been a reserve about miraculous manifestations. God had never lavished miracles upon men, they had ever been the rare rewards of simple faith; "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus, the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." God had, before now, denied Israel the miracles wrought to the faithful elsewhere. Embittered by Christ's candid utterance, and His refusal to satisfy their sceptical curiosity, they sought to cast Him over the brow of the hill, "but He," to use the graphic language of the Evangelist, "passing through the midst of them, went His way."

II. His Popularity.

What can account for this?

1. One reason is supplied by the context. This was a *moment of triumph* over the religious authorities of the day—the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees—those who had made themselves obnoxious by their tyranny. The masses applaud the victor, and side with the conqueror, especially when, as on this occasion, he has overcome their oppressors. *Him* they hear gladly.

2. Jesus attracted the people too by the *novelty* of His teaching. He boldly departed from the orthodox phraseology of the Rabbis. The people were attracted by the freshness of His utterances, apart from the higher consideration of their truthfulness. We have a striking instance of the power of *novelty* over the masses on that occasion when filled with astonishment, they exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man;" in other words, "We have not heard the like before. Is not this divine?"

3. The *authoritativeness* of His teaching was another element of His power over the masses. Nought tells upon a people like the authoritativeness which comes from conscious power or worth. He who would sway the masses must not hesitate. Our Lord could be more unhesitating than all others. He ever dwelt in the perfect light of truth; hence, in His teaching there was no "perhaps," or "peradventure." All was an emphatic "yea," or "nay." "Verily," exclaimed the multitude, "He spake with authority, and not like the Scribes and Pharisees."

4. His teaching was *addressed to the common people* at a time when their instruction was overlooked

by the recognised teachers of the day, and, as such, it proved surpassingly acceptable to them. "Cursed are the people who know not the Law," was the utterance of those Rabbis who all the while took care to keep them in ignorance. These then were new opportunities; and have you ever witnessed the enthusiasm of a people who awake for the first time to new privileges? If you have, you know something of that enthusiasm with which the people,—whose instruction had been neglected, and whose rights had been ignored for centuries,—hailed, at this time, this new teacher into their midst. Christ was a friend of the common people at a time when power was in the hands of a few, and hence when flatterers only visited palaces and courts. Since then power has passed into the hands of the masses; hence flatterers have left the palaces for the workshops. Young ambition seeks a seat in parliament, and issues an address commencing with the words, "Fellow working men," although he has never handled a chisel, a hammer, or a shovel in his life. What does all this mean? It is nothing but a despicable pandering to power, none the less so because it courts favour at the door of the working classes. Any coward can cry down the royal family and the aristocracy now-a-days; but it takes a heroic man to speak the truth to working men. It was not so in the days of Our Lord. He took the masses by the hand when no one else would. He broke down all monopoly in religious teaching. He gave His truths to all. Like the light of the sun, and the air of heaven, they entered the cot as well as the palace. He spoke to *men*. And, brethren, truths that will reform the world must be truths for the people. All great reformers since the time of Our Lord have com-

menced with the masses. Great reformations have originated as reformations with, and have been sustained by, the common people. Heat ascends; so does moral and spiritual influence. Christ commenced His work amid the lowest *strata* of society; and when He left this world and took His flight to heaven, He committed His truths, not to princes, but to fishermen and the like, and commissioned them to go to all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature.

5. His teaching was *adapted to the common people*, and thus was gratefully accepted by them. He taught the multitude—as He did His disciples—as they were able to bear. He introduced none of the subtleties of the Rabbinical schools into His teaching. He spoke, as all teachers do when they are intensely earnest, *simply*. His teaching was *practical*, too. They were not truths for the study, but for the fishing-boat, the farm, the mart, and the various spheres of toil and activity. His parables touched upon every variety of industry. Thus did His teaching present a striking contrast to that of the Rabbis. Even as much of the latter as was directed to the crowd excited no interest; it was abstract, men could not take it with them to their fishing boats, and be the better fishermen for it.

6. His *general conduct toward the common people was in harmony with His teaching*. This is a great element of power in a religious teacher. Our Lord's life consisted of constant deeds of benevolence and power—a series of miracles, all reflecting a boundless compassion. Small natures reserve strength and benevolence for special occasions. When did He ever fail to bless? When were there signs of exhaustion in His sympathy?

When was He beside Himself? When had He to apologize for want of time, or for an unguarded expression, or a momentary unkindness? Never. He taught charity, and lived a life of charity. There are two ways of giving to men. The one man gives, and doubles his gift by the smile that accompanies it. The other gives in such a way as to rob the recipient of independence, self-respect, and all that makes him a man. There are some men in the world from whom we could, on no account, accept a gift. We could only receive it at the cost of being unmanned. The gift would cost too much. How unlike all such givers was Our Lord? He attached to each gift a blessing; and added to every act of healing the consoling words, "Depart in peace, thy sins are all forgiven thee."

This leads us to the more general fact.

7. Our Lord *identified himself with his teaching*—embodied His truths in His life. The teaching of the Rabbis was excellent in many respects, but they never thought of *living* it. They analyzed truths, reduced them to theological formulæ, but did no more. For instance. For thirty-eight years there lay at the pool of Bethesda a poor man in need of a friend. Daily there passed by, on their way to the Temple, the Rabbis and Scribes, wearing broad phylacteries, bordered garments, and pious countenances; but not one of them was man enough to give a helping hand to the impotent man in the hour of need. They had forgotten their humanity in their religion. When, at length, Jesus drew nigh to the impotent one, and asked him the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" he, poor man, expressed not so much the wish to be healed, as the vanity of having wished so long. Brethren, that man had lost con-

fidence in human kindness. He had seen so many that were religious, but so few that were human. His was scepticism of the worst kind, and the responsibility of it all lay on those who said and did not perform. The great mass of the people cannot grasp a principle by definition and description. They must see it in life, breathing, acting, living in a person. Our Lord taught purity, and with the self-same voice exclaimed, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "Believe me, for the very works' sake." There was a ring of sincerity about this which they had only heard once more—and that was from the great prophet of the wilderness. Ah! it is this that tells upon the world. It may be you distribute tracts. It is a good work, but remember that people will read your life before they will read your tract with any interest, and then they will only read the tract in the light of the life. Oh, to be epistles known and read of all men. Epistles worthy of the great theme upon which there has been heaped so much meaningless cant.

8. Our Lord loved not only the masses, but also *individual* men. The narrative is condensed in the Gospels. All is summarized, and thus we are apt to overlook Christ's individual contact with men—the "Thou" with which He addressed each man and woman as He blessed each. Multitudes followed Him, but He did not need the presence of the many to excite His sympathy. How numerous are the recorded instances of individuals drawing forth His Spirit into deeds of benevolence and pity! He found something in all men, except hypocrites, that He could love. There was no ruin amid which Christ could not stoop and pick up a treasure too costly to lose. Breathing a

bright hope over those who had fallen lowest, He taught them what an influence each could exert in His lowly sphere, what an available future there was before all, what heroisms could distinguish the lowly paths of life, how suffering may be turned to joy, and heaven begin in the poorest cot. What wonder that the common people heard him gladly!

9. Our Lord *loved the children* of the people. His was an intense solicitude for the rising generation. I can well understand how the mothers of those children whom He took into His arms would love Jesus through their children. I am not surprised that the women of Jerusalem were seen weeping at the Cross of Him who blessed their little ones. I should be surprised had it been otherwise. And how significant was His reply, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and *for your children.* Strangely enough—and perhaps the secret is to be found partly here—there is *no record* in the Gospels of woman being guilty of an unkind act or word against the Christ. That seems to have been the monopoly of man. Does not Christ's intense love for children cast some light upon this?

Thus did Our Lord during the days of His flesh divide all with whom He came into contact into two great classes—those who rejected Him, and those who heard Him gladly. This process goes on to-day. We no sooner come into contact with the Gospel than we identify ourselves with the one or the other of these companies. Christ's message must have a repelling or an attractive power over us. The degrees of attraction or repulsion may vary. The fact, however, remains that either we welcome Christ or reject Him. And consider how much more it is to reject Him now than

in the days to which I have referred. Then the Revelation was incomplete. The Story of the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension formed no part of the message. The crowning height of Divine Love and Self-sacrifice had not yet been revealed. The Christ presents Diviner charms to day than then, and His message a mightier plea. Oh! in these days of fuller light and greater privileges are we to be found among the rejectors or among the receivers of the Christ? Which is it? Our eternal interests hinge on this. The division by the Great Judge of all on the last Great Day will not be an arbitrary or even an unprecedented one. It will be the Divine and eternal seal upon the choice which each man and woman has made in time. These are the words of Him who will be our judge, "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven."

III.

THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM.

"Thy kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations."—PSALM cxlv. 13.

THIS Psalm is a "Psalm of Praise." It commences with the words, "I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever." Some of the Psalms are *prayers*. They are the cry of the soul to God in trouble and in darkness. They are set in the minor key. This and many other Psalms are, on the other hand, set in the major key. They express the *thanksgiving* of the soul to God for deliverances wrought, and mercies received. The sense of need is no longer the prominent one, but that of gratitude. The child no longer thinks of his own sufferings; they are past; he thinks now *only* of that Father whose love overshadowed him in the hour of danger, and suffered no evil to befall him. He speaks of Him and Him alone. His whole soul is absorbed in one master passion—gratitude. He goes to God and tells Him all he can of the love He bears to Him, and the reverence He cherishes toward Him.

It is this that attaches such beauty and worth to the Book of Psalms, that it is the Book in which the human soul chants its love and its gratitude to God. Such high sentiments as those which breathe in this Book

could only be expressed in Psalms. There are thoughts in man which rise far too high, and feelings which lie far too deep, for ordinary prose; only the truest poetry can express them. And then only does poetry reach its culminating height when it expresses man's highest thoughts, and most profound reverence, in a *Psalm to God.* The deepest feelings of the soul, if they are to be expressed at all, must be expressed in song. Song is not only the language of joy; for in that hour, the darkest of all others in our Saviour's life, when He was about to enter His Gethsemane, and when as yet the "Thy will be done" had not escaped His lips, in that solemn sadness He and His disciples "sang a hymn," and thus gave utterance to feelings too deep for ordinary language.

This Psalm breathes the spirit of *loyalty.* It is the language of a heart that seeks to pay its homage to God, its king. It speaks of "the glorious honour of His majesty;" "the glorious majesty of His kingdom," and in our text of His "kingdom" as an "everlasting kingdom," and His "dominion" as enduring "throughout all generations." We are told that, as the Psalms are poetic, we are not to attach a literal meaning to all this, as if when the utterance of the soul concerning God attain unto the grandeur and sublimity of inspired poetry they cease to be true! Nay, in these utterances there is embodied a sublime truth. The Jew ever spoke of God as his king, whether in poetry or prose. This was his highest idea of God. Doubtless the kingship of God was specially a pleasant theme to the *royal* Psalmist of Israel; but it was not a mere figurative expression on his lips. He knew the history of his people, and remembered that the word king primarily applied to

God, and that when, after centuries of exclusive application to Him, it was at length applied to man also, it was only borrowed, and was then used in a very limited and qualified sense. He remembered how, in the beginning of the history of his people, God had called out Abram from the Ur of the Chaldees to inherit a land which He would give to him and his seed after him. He remembered how the family grew into a people, and after centuries of bondage to the Egyptian tyrant, how the Lord with His own right hand wrought their deliverance. He remembered that God brought them out of Egypt, and opened a way for them through the sea, and that, when the haughty Egyptian monarch sought to lay hands upon the Lord's anointed ones, and claim them as his own, God buried him, his horsemen, and his chariots in the depths, and thus vindicated His own right, and His alone, to be their king. In that earliest of national emancipations on that memorable night, when, from being a servile people, the Jews became a nation, possessing national independence, the Psalmist recognised in the people's divine Deliverer the nation's divine King. He remembered, too, that soon afterwards the nation assembled round that awful mount,—which no foot dare tread, save that of Moses, who ascended it,—so that their divine King may speak to them out of the darkness in the voice of thunder, and that, by the hand of Moses, He may give them His Law engraven on tables of stone, as a token of His kingship and a pledge of their submission. He remembered that throughout their wanderings they, in all their trials and conflicts, looked to their Invisible, but ever-present King for aid and protection, that He spoke to them through "Moses *His servant;*" sent to them daily food from

heaven; and leading their armies, made them mighty in battle against their foes. He remembered, too, that when at length Moses ascended Nebo, and as the King's highest servant delivered up to Him the seal of authority which he had received, the Lord was still their King and forsook them not, but gave them Joshua to lead them into the Promised Land, and forth to victory. He remembered that for centuries the nation had no king, even by name, save the Lord, and when, in the face of all the protests of the "men of God," the people demanded one in imitation of the surrounding nations, that even then, and ever after, the human king was but a *representative* of their divine King. Human kings had passed away, their dust had been buried with that of their fathers, and their names, in many instances, were all but forgotten, but their Invisible King still lived, and was faithful to His covenant with His people. "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations," was the utterance of that godly monarch, who—probably near the close of his life—felt that he was uttering no mere poetic figure, but an eternal truth. He himself would soon pass away, like those who had occupied the throne before him, and even his kingdom might collapse, and become a thing of the past; but one thing he knew, that God was King, and that He would never cease to sit upon His throne, and sway His sceptre.

In a very emphatic sense, then, the Jews believed in *God as their King.* The title they viewed as a *divine* one, and as only *borrowed* when applied to human rulers. It was this profound conviction that added such special fervour to Jewish patriotism. Theirs was emphatically a religious patriotism; hence, their prophets, and

not their kings, were the nation's greatest patriots. In proportion as the fact of God's kingship was realized by the nation, and they acted up to this conviction, were they a mighty people; but in proportion as they forgot this, and they looked to human kings, and trusted to their human resources, did they become powerless to defend their kingdom, and to sustain their nationality. And when, after long ages chequered by prosperity and adversity, they at last, through loosing their hold of the mighty convictions of their fathers, were forced to bow to the Roman sceptre, the saddest of all the sad thoughts, that weighed heavily upon the nation, was that God was no longer their king. Hence, when, after four centuries of ominous silence, that stern prophet, "in the wilderness of Judæa," clad in a prophet's garb, lifted up his voice, and announced that thrilling message,—"Repent, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*,"—he touched a tender chord in the great heart of the nation; old hopes, long dead, were revived, and the people, the publicans, the soldiers going to battle, yea, even "Pharisees and Sadducees of Jerusalem," came to hear this startling announcement, which reminded them of former greatness, and bade them prepare for a future of surpassing glory.

And verily the "kingdom of heaven" was "at hand," and very close at hand. The herald was announcing his King, who would come quickly. But this was not such a kingdom as they expected, or desired, though far more glorious than the ancient Theocracy ever was. The King would appear among them as He never did before. He would "indeed dwell with man upon the earth," and thus fulfil the devoutest hopes of

bygone prophets and saints, but though "He came unto His own, His own received Him not."

Our Lord came to this world in "the fulness of the time" —the time in which were met the consummation of Divine purposes and the maturity of human need. The birth of the Christ is presented, by Luke especially, as the fact of all history, as an event pertaining to mankind, and not merely to a family, an age, or a nation. The name of Augustus Cæsar passes like a bright meteor over the sacred page. The very mention of the decree of Augustus to "all the world," in connection with the birth of the Messiah, is significant. This is the first time we read of one man sending forth an edict to "all the world." This decree, too, great as it was, was an anticipation of something greater; taxation was to follow in the wake of registration, even in those countries which had hitherto been independent. In eleven years more Judæa was a taxed province. The Roman power was at this time on the eve of swaying its sceptre over all the nations of the world. The conquest of the west and east was even now almost complete. The Romans had realized that they were a people destined for a world-wide rule, and that conviction made them irresistible. A certain kind of unity among the nations had already been brought about by the might of Roman arms, and that had been cemented by the comparatively wise and lenient rule which followed. The triumphs of Julius Cæsar's sword had been strengthened and furthered by his noble and magnanimous bearing toward the conquered, and by his subsequent rule. The sturdy nations of the west, as well as the more effeminate peoples of the east, had, with a few exceptions, to become fewer every year, bowed before the Roman

power by accepting Roman teaching and Roman protection. Peace was established the wide world over, and the Temple of Janus, open in war and closed in peace, was shut.

> "No war or battle's sound
> Was heard the world around:
> The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
> The hookèd chariot stood
> Unstained with hostile blood;
> The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng."

Nations had been violently brought together, and firmly kept, under one ruling will. This was the age when a great event was an event, not for a nation, but for the world. But that unity which had been brought about by the sword, and maintained only by the tact of rule, had in it the elements of discord. Peace, too, to such a people as the Romans, was not without its dangers. The integrity of the Roman character, so nobly maintained in the time of Rome's hard conflicts, degenerated in those days of ease which followed her victories. The people who had conquered the world in battle, became in times of peace a prey to their own indulgence. Every student of history has learnt that the Augustan age was the golden age of Rome, and in one sense it was. Never had Rome been so high in culture, but never had it been so low in morals, as at this time. Never had the Roman people been so refined by education, but never so degraded by indulgence, as now. That the very polish and culture of the day made its licentiousness more winning, elaborate, and diabolic, the writings of the authors of the age, and still more the paintings discovered at Herculaneum, furnish abundant proofs. Thus blending with Rome's greatness were the elements of Rome's ruin. Our Lord

appeared at this crisis of the world's history to save—if not the Roman Empire, as such, from downfall,—the world from the overwhelming flood of vice, which, under such a powerful but licentious rule, threatened to submerge the nations. Thus when the angelic voices, ringing over the fields of Bethlehem through the midnight air—fit symbol of the world's dark night—announced Messiah's birth to the lowly shepherds, it was in a thrilling song of hope for human kind. "Glory to God in the highest, and *on earth peace, good will toward men.*" He came as the *Prince of Peace*, to whose kingdom there should be no end; came as the Saviour of the individual, the Regenerator of Society, and the King of men. Behold, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord arose, and His glory shone; and ever since then there has been heard on earth the echo of the ancient prophecy, resounding from hill to hill, and gathering sweetness as the ages move, until at last it shall be a song sweet enough for a heavenlier world than ours:—"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the *government shall be upon His shoulder.*"

Yet when Christ came, even the chosen race did not recognize Him as their King. His kingdom, unlike every other, was not sustained by the sword, or based upon temporal power. This so-called King spoke to men in poverty and in tears. He had "no place to lay His head," and was "a man of sorrows." He even repudiated temporal power and splendour. He gave no promise that He would deliver the chosen people from the bondage of foreign dominion. He did not seem to desire it. Even His deeds of power were wrought on behalf of the obscure blind, deaf, and

dumb, and not on behalf of that nation, who, rich in sacred lore and ancient memorials, yearned for the national freedom and splendour, which for so many centuries were theirs. He seemed to them to lack all those attributes which essentially belonged to a *king*. They would not have "this man to reign over" them. The expectations excited in them by the cry of the Great Forerunner, —"The kingdom of heaven is at hand,"—were, as they thought, doomed to disappointment. This Jesus spoke of their Holy Temple as something to pass away, and not one stone to be left upon another, and of the old Jewish economy as something to be superseded by another and a better. He attached little or no importance to sacred spots and holy mountains. All that was most sacred and dear to the Jew, He seemed to speak of in irreverent and blasphemous tones. He who could do this, they thought, was an impostor and not a king.

They had not yet learnt the nature of His kingship or the extent of His dominion. His purposes were too broad, too deep, too high, for their immediate comprehension. His kingdom was to extend far beyond the Jewish pale; it was to comprehend all nations. The middle wall of nationality was to be taken away. In Christ there would be neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor Barbarian. He would become the King of all men by becoming their Deliverer. The Jews were not prepared for this. They knew not that if He ruled men, it would be by the might of love and self-sacrifice. Prophets, it is true, had foretold the peaceableness of His rule. The grandest of all prophetic imagery was made to picture the final blessedness of His reign. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard

shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." But the nation had yet to learn that these words had a far wider application than to themselves; that the peace here spoken of was much deeper than any that could be originated, or sustained, by the might of arms; and that when the angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men," there was a far sublimer meaning in their song than that. The peace that existed throughout the Roman Empire when Christ was born was only symbolical of a diviner peace which should attend His blessed reign. His kingdom would be reared on patience and self-sacrifice; His royalty would be the royalty of self-denying love. It is this highest of all claims that would constrain men. The Cross would constitute His throne, and the crown of thorns would testify to His royalty over human hearts as nought else could. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," were His own words. It is the sight of a crucified Christ that alone can make the heart of man submissive. It is at the Cross that we see One great and divine enough to give up His life a ransom for sin. It is when we see Him bleeding and dying there that we exclaim, from the depths of our hearts, with the centurion of old, "Truly this was the Son of God." It is in that crowned Sufferer that we recognise our crowned King. Never

has the Divine One appeared so near and dear to us as at that hour. Above all, when we hear Him offer, with His dying breath, that fervent prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," we are forced to exclaim, "I will extol Thee my God, O King, and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever;" and with our hearts subdued by a love so mighty in death, subdued to submission, to reverence, and love, we will each add, "Accept me as a subject of Thy kingdom. Thou hast conquered my rebellious spirit by the might of Thy compassion. Thou didst of old speak in thunder, and human hearts trembled at Thy voice, and the earth shook; but Thou now speakest in love, and our hearts are subdued by the divinest of Thine attributes. I can be rebellious no longer. Thy love constrains me to love Thee. I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. Tell me Thy will, and I will run in the way of Thy commandments. Where I fail do Thou help and sustain. Imperfections may and will characterize all my efforts, and my best service will be poor indeed; but I will never prove a traitor to Thee or to Thy throne."

Brethren, such is the exclamation of the penitent at the Cross; and the number of those who repeat it is increasing day by day. Tens of thousands are to-day Christ's willing subjects. The kingdoms of this world are becoming "The kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ," and the day to which we look forward with unwavering hope will yet dawn upon this world of ours, when He will come in the glory of His Majesty, when all men will acknowledge Him as Lord and King; and "He shall reign for ever and ever."

IV.

THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER.

"And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought Him that He would come into his house," &c.—LUKE viii. 41—56.

OUR Lord, rejected on one side of the Lake, was gladly received on the other. "The people gladly received Him, for they were all waiting for Him." Those deeds of mercy performed so recently in their midst were fresh in their memories, and needy multitudes longed for His return. There was no period in the life of our Lord,—as there has been no age of the world,—when the Divine One was altogether shut out from human hearts and homes. Prominent among those who welcomed Christ's return to the western and more populous shore, was Jairus, probably the ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum. Nothing is known of Jairus previous to this; he, like so many others in gospel narrative, is brought into prominence by virtue of his contact with Christ. He breaks into the sacred circle for a time, but soon to disappear, and no more is seen or heard of him. In him fatherly anxiety had overcome Jewish prejudices; the bigot for the time-being, at least, was lost in the man. Jesus had taught and healed at that synagogue of Capernaum, and now a keen sorrow brought its ruler to the great Teacher and Healer. "He fell at Jesus' feet." There was in this falling more than the

ordinary mode of eastern prostration. This was not a conventionality. It was not a mere act of homage even. It was a prayer, and a very reverent and earnest one. His "only daughter . . . lay a dying." She was one of those blessings given by God to parents, which so brighten a home, and, when missed, leave such a terrible gap behind. She was in that period of life, too, which is so full of prophecies and promises. How many hopes clustered around that one budding life! This is the oft-told tale. Precisely at that hour of promise a blight struck the unfolding bud. What wonder that *now* the ruler of the synagogue—forgetting his position and his prejudices—fell at the feet of the Great Healer, "and besought Him to come to his house." Nothing overcomes our prejudice like a keen sorrow, and a deep need.

Observe, however, the particular way in which the love of Jairus towards his dying child expressed itself. Leaving the sick chamber, he had come in search of the Healer. Meanwhile the mother remained at the bedside of her dying child to administer consolation in the last hour. Here we have two pictures—the one of a *father's*, and the other of a *mother's* love. Both loved much, but each expressed it in a different way from the other. The father hurried for aid, the mother remained to comfort. Woman is fitted to minister at the bedside. Man, as a rule, has not the peculiar tenderness and patient endurance necessary for that. The author of Uncle Tom's Cabin very forcibly illustrates this. "O God, this is dreadful," said St. Clare,—turning away from the mortal agony which passed over the face of Eva, his dying child—"O Tom, my boy, it is killing me;"—and again—"Pray that this may

be cut short; this wrings my heart." That is *man's* utterance, not woman's—a father's, not a mother's. It is not in man to bear the dying scene, as woman does, in patient service. He walks out of the sick chamber, and will weep, and serve, and love, anywhere sooner than there. How often is the story of Jairus repeated? The father seeks the Healer, while the mother fondly fosters the sinking life at home!

"My little daughter lieth at the point of death; I pray Thee, come and lay Thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live," was the earnest petition of a father whose heart was sorely troubled; who shuddered at the thought of seeing that young life vanish from the home which it had for twelve years cheered with its brightness. She for whom he pleaded was his "only daughter." Upon her had been bestowed all the affection, and around her had clustered all the hopes, that a father's heart could cherish. His whole soul went forth in this prayer. This was to him *now* the prayer of prayers—that his only little daughter, whose life seemed to be fast withering beneath the cold touch of death, may yet be restored to cheer a father's and a mother's heart. And, doubtless, the same prayer was offered in silence by the bedside at home. And who shall tell which was the more powerful with Him who saw and heard all,—that of the father, which was uttered audibly in the presence of the multitude, or that of the mother, which, in the silent sick chamber, expressed itself in the patient and self-denying service rendered to the dying child? The heart of Christ was moved. He "went with Jairus; and much people followed Him and thronged Him."

Now we come to the record of *a miracle in parenthesis*. The record is within a record, as the miracle recorded is within a miracle. It is a deed of mercy in *passing by*—such as giving sight to Bartimæus, and many others—a type of the numberless blessings which Infinite Love gives "on the way." Among that throng there was one poor woman who bore a hidden sorrow. She could not, like Jairus, speak openly of her peculiar affliction. Her womanly delicacy forbad that. Nor would she dare do so; for, according to the law of Moses, she was unclean by reason of her affliction. Her very presence in the throng was a violation of that law. But what could she do? She had suffered greatly for twelve years, and spent her all on physicians. She determined upon making one more effort. In this woman there was a hopefulness—so often found in those who have experienced a long and lingering series of disappointments—that would not give up hoping. Very different were her feelings from those of the throng: she had no heart for idle curiosity or wonder; all the little energy that remained in her converged and centred in a stubborn hope. She would try this Great Physician, concerning whom she had heard so much; yea, even though crowds intervened, and though every touch of hers, as she wended her way to Him, be the touch of uncleanness. This was the daring act of one who had a mighty faith in the possibilities of the hour. Her confidence that she could be healed seemed obstinate now in the face of all past disappointments. This was an opportunity too precious to be lost. "If I may but touch His garment I shall be whole," were the words she uttered within herself. There was no "perhaps" or "peradventure," about this. It is

possible that her faith was based upon very erroneous opinions. It may be that, as it has been suggested by some, she, in common with the Jews of her day, attached special sacredness to the *hem* or *fringe* of the garment, and that she sought to touch it because she believed exceptional virtue would be received through that touch. But why desire to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, more than those of Rabbis and Scribes? Superstitious as her faith to some extent may have been, it was more than faith in a fringe, it was faith in Jesus.

She drew nigh to Christ with the same womanly delicacy, and in much the same manner, as that poor woman—a sinner—who, at Simon's house, "stood at His feet behind Him weeping." Oh! have we not sometimes felt that there are sins and infirmities too delicate and sensitive for the gaze of the multitude, and we seek to take them in secrecy to the Christ, and, if it may be, to escape even His full glance. Such was this infirmity. "She came behind Him and touched the border of His garment"—only "touched"—and through that one touch healing virtue flowed to her. She only came within reach of His garment, but she came as near as she could, and no one who comes so near as that can fail with Him. "She was healed of that plague." But so great a blessing must not be received by stealth. She, who in her affliction bore her sorrow in silence, and the multitude knew nothing of it, now that she was healed, must utter before them all her grateful testimony to her great Benefactor. There need be delicacy no longer. "Who touched Me?" asked Jesus, accompanying the question with a searching glance upon all around. "When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng Thee and

press Thee, and sayest Thou, who touched Me? And Jesus said, somebody hath touched Me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me." That was a touch unlike every other. It was the touch of a mighty faith, a touch that *drew* upon Christ's healing power. "When the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before Him, she declared unto Him, before all the people, for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately." The question of Christ filled her heart with fear. She had now nought to do but to cast herself upon His sympathy, and confess all. She had witnessed His power, but what of His love? She had yet to learn that nothing was so great in Him as His tenderness. The gracious words now uttered by the Saviour, "Daughter," (not the ordinary word, "woman,") "be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace," added a heavenliness to the act of healing, imparted peace to the trembling woman, and rested as an evelasting benediction upon her head. Concerning her, as concerning another woman, and another, in sacred story,—"Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached, there shall also this which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

This was a trying hour to the anxious father. That brief, brief time in store for his dear child, unless the Great Healer came, was fast wasting away, and soon every possibility of restoration would be gone for ever. That woman, who touched the hem of her Master's garment and was healed, he may have thought, could afford to wait; why trouble Him now? Probably these thoughts passed through his anxious mind. The very intensity of his grief would have a tendency to make

him impatient, and the very urgency of his need to make him somewhat selfish. At such times we are apt to think that there is no sorrow like our own, no need to compare with our need, and therefore no claim to equal ours. Ah! if when a hidden sorrow gnaws the heart, and a cloud of cares envelopes us, so that the very heavens seem black, and there is no ray of light for us, we become unconscious of all sorrow but our own, and become deaf to the urgency of every plea but that which we present, it is not greatly to be wondered at; and though this be a sin, we may be sure it will be forgiven by Him who is acquainted with us altogether. This narrative has a lesson to each of those who are tried by Divine delays on the way to bless us. There are two dangers to which we are exposed. *(a)* To believe that our cares are too insignificant for God to notice. *(b)* That our cares are the all-absorbing objects of Divine solicitude. This narrative warns us against both. The delay in the way is not because the sorrow of Jairus has no place in the heart of the Christ, but rather, because there are other sufferings which have a claim upon His sympathy. Jairus must learn that his cares are known to Christ; while, on the other hand, they are but a type of a thousand others that appeal to His heart. This woman now blessed had waited twelve years—as many as Jairus had possessed his child—let him not murmur if she has the precedence. Probably Jairus felt impatient, and thought, though he uttered not, hard things at this hour. But perhaps not. We have judged from the ordinary type of human nature. He may have excelled by the might of his faith, and never doubted throughout. But there was one at home, who was

passing through a severe discipline. Commentators have referred to the painfulness of this delay on the way to Jairus, but have forgotten the mother at home watching for that Great Healer who alone *could* heal her child, watching, too, the ebbing energy, and the life expiring, one spark after another, so that ere long all must be over; and still He had not come. We have thought little of the fearful conflict there, the wondering whether Jairus had seen the Master, and told Him his sad story; and if so, how one so sympathetic and kind as Jesus *could* delay His coming so long. It is hard to wait and not know the full meaning of the waiting. It is hard to hope, and expect, when the life of our dearest is in the balance, *even for an ordinary physician.* How much harder in this instance to wait for that Great Physician, whose presence would mean life, and whose absence would inevitably mean death. And how hard at last, when, having hoped long, her hope, disappointed and baffled, gave way to despair, and she stood in the presence of death in childless agony. It was not her privilege, like Jairus, to hear at once the comforting assurance, "Be not afraid, only believe." It was hers to endure patiently the keen sorrow of the hour, until, after long delay, the master came and spoke "Peace" to that house. The message which came from the house of Jairus to Him, was a message from one in whose sky there was no star of hope:—"Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?" We are apt to think that they only bear crosses who bear them openly before the multitude, and we forget those who carry their loads in silence, and think little of "hearts that break and give no sign, save whitening

lips and fading tresses." Thus it is that we have thought much of the patience of Jairus on the way, and have scarcely given a consideration to the patience that could endure and toil in the sick chamber, that could wait until the waiting became inexplicable, and hope until the very hoping became a mockery.

At length, however, the message came to the father that told all was over. There was a tone of impatience in that message. Jesus at once broke upon the terrible silence which followed—for now hope had ceased to whisper, and even the deep undertone of fear was heard no more, because the dread fact had made even fear an envied joy—and said, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole."

Our Lord, having heard the tidings of death, and having spoken these words of cheer to Jairus, dismissed the multitude, and suffered no man to follow Him, save Peter and James and John. Arriving at the house, He found there a band of hired mourners, filling the house with their clamour. All this, though an oriental custom, and very much in harmony with the oriental nature, was repulsive to the mind and spirit of the Master. "Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth," was His exclamation. But "they laughed Him to scorn." In their presence He would now perform no mighty work. By their ridicule they had proved themselves unworthy of witnessing such a deed of power and love as that which He was about to perform. He put those scoffing and mercenary mourners out of the death-chamber, as He had previously cast out the dealers from the Temple of God. The death-chamber was too sacred a place for

their loud clamouring. Nought like silence, awe, and solemn reverence became that place where death was.

Taking the father and the mother of the maid, and also His three disciples, Peter and James and John—those dearest to the child, and those dearest to Himself—into the chamber where the dead child lay, and taking her lifeless hand in His, Jesus uttered the Aramaic words, "Talitha cumi." In this act we have a violation of the letter of the law; but on this occasion life flowed from the living to the dead, and not pollution from the dead to the living. Everything that Jesus touched became transfigured in the touch.

These words,—"Talitha cumi"—so full of love and tenderness, are given by Mark, the friend and companion of Peter, upon whom this scene in all its details, must have left a very lasting impression. This Aramaic phrase was difficult of translation into Greek; hence, probably, the reason why the original is given by Mark. The expression is a very endearing one, and can, perhaps, be best translated, "*My precious little lamb*, I say unto thee, arise." How touching these words upon the lips of the Great Shepherd who took children as lambs into His arms! What wonder that Mark, having so often heard this repeated by Peter, as he must have, desired to give the original, as well as the translation which at best could but imperfectly convey its full meaning and tenderness.

By this miracle, Jesus, for the first time revealed Himself as the *Lord of Life*. This was but the prelude to the fuller manifestations which were to follow. In His presence death even now gave way. At His bidding the maid arose out of her deep "sleep." Jesus called death by this name, and to the end of time

this will be the name it will bear. We do not cease to be when we quit this earthly scene, we only rest. Those who have toiled for the Lord fall asleep in His arms. They will again awake at His bidding, and looking up, and gazing upon His countenance, will be satisfied with His likeness.

Jesus "commanded them to give her meat." His miraculous intervention was not extended beyond the point of necessity, and did not encourage the neglect of ordinary precautions. The Divine One did not by His mighty working put a premium upon human thoughtlessness and inactivity. He who had accomplished for the sorrowing parents what no one but Himself could accomplish, called upon them to do in the service of love, what was within the scope of their power, and thus to become "workers together" with Him. Here we have a striking instance of the wondrous blending of the divine and the human, of the extraordinary and the ordinary, in the accomplishment of God's most gracious designs concerning suffering humanity.

"He charged them that they should tell no man what was done." Here, as in other instances, He enjoined silence upon those whom He had blessed. The "parents were astonished." This astonishment must not be dissipated in talk, but deepened into reverence and love. There are certain powerful impressions which can only be matured in silence. Such was this. The very process of often repeating the story to inquisitive men would take away from the sacredness of the event. Brethren, there are times when Christ sends us, as He did the man of Gadara, to our friends, to tell them of what He has done for us. There are

other times when the manifestations of His love and power are given as sublime secrets, and we take away from them their rich delicacy and beauty, and almost commit a sacrilege, when we flippantly talk about them to gaping multitudes. Surely there are some present, who, in their best moments, have known of experiences like Paul's, which were not "lawful for man to utter." There are times when the Christ, with closed doors, reveals Himself to us by blessing us. Such revelations are not intended for the idle gaze of indiscriminate observers, but are given to us as the pledges of His fellowship, and as the secrets of His love, and we divulge them only at the cost of depriving them of their special sacredness, and of betraying the confidences of a Divine fellowship. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."

V.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF OUR LORD.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, &c."—MATTHEW iv. 1—11.

THE record of our Lord's baptism is immediately followed by that of the temptation. The Spirit who descended upon Him, as "He went up out of the water," forthwith led Him up "into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." "Then," "immediately," are the words with which Matthew and Mark respectively link the narrative of the temptation to that of the baptism. In the life of Jesus the *consecration* was immediately followed by the *conflict*. Temptation presented itself on the very threshold of His consecrated life. The *Divine testimony* from the opening heavens, "This is my beloved Son," at once called forth the *Satanic whisper* from the deep solitudes of the wilderness, "*If* Thou be the Son of God."

The details of the first forty days are not given by any of the three evangelists who record the temptations. The general fact only is mentioned, that for forty days He was tempted of the devil, and fasted. This has very much the appearance of a miraculous preservation. There had been fasts of similar duration in the lives of Moses and Elijah, marking two great epochs in the history of divine revelations, and we are reminded by some writers that great mental or

spiritual tension has, on rare occasions, raised others above hunger, and made them unconscious of bodily want; but that theory can scarcely solve the difficulty connected with fasts of such long duration as these were. We cannot see how anything less than a superhuman intervention could account for them. We read, however, that at the close of the forty days Jesus was "an hungred." This was the hour of physical exhaustion, and as such, one that exposed Jesus in a special sense to the power of the tempter. It was now that the *first recorded* temptation took place.

At the very outset the question presents itself,—In what consisted the temptation of Jesus? We shall just now only answer the question negatively. Was it, as some suggest, a vision merely? We think not. This would do away with the reality of the temptation. If thus He was tempted, he was not "tempted in all points like as we are." We have been in conflict with sterner temptations than visions can present. Was it, as others suppose, merely an interview between our Lord and a member of the Sanhedrim sent to tempt Him to adapt Himself to the wide-spread expectation among the Jews of the Messiah's advent? That would scarcely be the event to call for so strange a narrative. Why is not the fact simply mentioned? What possible reason could there be for clothing so simple an event in so strange a garb? There is no straining at effect elsewhere in the simple narratives of our Lord's life—why here? That Satan appeared to Jesus in a bodily form is a belief now almost obsolete; to treat this as a parable, is to do away entirely with the reality of the temptation, and, as far as it relates to Jesus, render it meaningless; whereas our belief in the inspiration

of the Gospels precludes our accepting that blasphemous theory which treats this record as a myth.

Again, in what capacity was He tempted? Did the temptations appeal to His human or to His divine nature? As God, He could not be tempted, for temptation involves the possibility of a fall. The tempter at the very outset questioned His divinity. "*If* Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Jesus replied as *man* to the devil. "It is written, *man* shall not live by bread alone," &c. This was the hour when Jesus, on entering His public career, was called upon as a man to choose one or other of the great alternatives of life. In the three temptations, the law of expediency presented itself to Him in its various forms. We will dwell upon the temptations singly, and see how, in each instance, He triumphed. The study may prove interesting and instructive. Temptation is the highest test of character, for that reason no biography is complete without the narrative of the hour of temptation. In reading the lives of the greatest of the past, one of the first questions which we ask concerning each is, "How did he stand the conflicts, the reverses, the tests of life?" The answer to this interests the thoughtful reader above all else. It gives a clue to the whole character. The history of *one prominent* temptation often gives the key-note of a whole lifetime. Surely there is some such purpose in giving so detailed a record, thus early in Gospel narrative, of that hour of conflict, which brought to such glorious relief the whole character of Jesus.

I. THE FIRST TEMPTATION. "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." A

review of the surrounding circumstances may be helpful. Jesus had for the space of forty days eaten nothing; at length He was "an hungred." He hungred as man; at the same time He had the consciousness of superhuman power. Satan appealed to this consciousness in a moment of extremity. Did he hunger? There were stones around: (possibly those crystalizations of limestone, resembling small loaves of bread, and known to exist in Judæa) let Him convert them into bread. If He was more than mere man, let Him satisfy His human wants in a superhuman way. This was a temptation to the *man* Jesus, in a moment of trial, to misuse the divine power which He possessed as the Christ. The temptation which, in lesser proportions, comes to every man blessed with exceptional powers, presented itself to Him. If—as the voice from heaven had affirmed—He was the Son of God, then why suffer hunger as if He were only a man, like other men, and subject to all the limitations of a human existence. The reply of Jesus was decisive. *He was man*, and as man he had a duty to observe, that of *patient trust*. To have recourse to the supernatural would be to betray a lack of confidence in the Father. Among the first truths He was about to teach men in the Sermon on the Mount were these, that a life of implicit trust in God was the noblest type of life on earth, and that a far higher end than bread-eating was to call forth to active exercise men's noblest powers; in other words, that human life was a sublime thing, not entirely dependent upon bread, but deriving its higher nourishment from a source above the earthly—the full assurance of God's Fatherhood. The same truth had long ago been taught the Israelites when for forty years they

wandered in the wilderness, trusting day by day in God's sure word of promise, and prospering only in proportion as their trust in Him was implicit and unwavering. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," was one of the prominent lessons of the forty years' wandering. Will the Son of Man pass through *His* wilderness strong in the inspired truth, or will the first fruits of His miracles be devoted to bread-making in a moment of impatient distrust? Will His conduct in the Wilderness harmonize with His teaching on the Mount, or will it present a painful contrast to the forthcoming, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink. . . *Is not the life more than meat?*" Great are the issues of this hour. Shall hunger triumph over patience? Will the Son of Man only trust and obey whilst He is regularly fed? Or will He rebuke the tempter,—who brought Him a stone when He asked for bread,—and still wait patiently upon His Father, that He may give Him His meat in due season?

Again, will His life be a life of *self-indulgence* or of *self-denial*? This hour will supply the key-note of His life. Will He have recourse to the supernatural for mere personal ends? In other words, will His earthly career be with, or without, a Gethsemane and a Golgotha, an agonizing prayer and cross of shame? The reply is decisive. Self-indulgence will form no element of His life. This spirit of self-denial not only resisted the subtle tempter in the wilderness, but also confounded the chief priests and scribes around the cross, when they exclaimed, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," —a truth sublime as it was startling, though uttered with

a bitter sneer. He had come to give His life *a ransom* for many. His death was only the culminating point of His life of self-denial. He ever soared far above self, and lived and died for others. He provided bread with a superhuman hand for the hungering thousands in the wilderness, but when *He* hungered He withheld the hand that could miraculously provide for His want. This sublime harmony in *miracle*, as well as in life, was never broken.

Thus, to manifest patience and self-denial at this hour was a great victory over the tempter; whilst to have recourse to the supernatural would have been a defeat. In this instance, *patient trust and self-denying love were greater than miracle.*

II. THE SECOND TEMPTATION presented a contrast to the *first.* The first encouraged *distrust;* the second encouraged *presumption.* The *scene* of the second temptation, too, was very different from that of the first. Jesus was no longer in solitude, he had now left the wilderness for Jerusalem, and had ascended the Stoa Basilikè, or Royal Porch of the Temple. Jesus had once more mingled with men, the hour of hunger was at length over; hence, this temptation assumed a very different form from the first. *In the Wilderness* when there was no bread to satisfy keen hunger, the temptation was, in an hour of impatience and distrust, to provide bread miraculously; but, *in the Temple,* where the multitudes assembled together to worship God, the temptation was to adapt Himself to the Jews' expectation of the Messiah's advent, by a miraculous descent from the "pinnacle" into their midst. An inspired prophet had exclaimed, ages since, "The Lord whom ye seek shall come suddenly in His temple." "Cast Thyself

down," exclaimed the devil; in other words, "Adapt Thyself to the wide-spread expectation of Thy coming. Choose the temple as the favourite spot of Thy miraculous advent, and there, amidst the applauses of the multitude, assume the sceptre of the Jewish Theocracy."

Such was the second proposal of the tempter. This proposal was sustained by words quoted from Holy Writ, "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Here we have an endeavour on the part of the tempter to misinterpret and even pervert Scripture by citing it only in part. "It is written again," exclaimed Jesus, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The partial truth repeated by the tempter required another to make it complete. One part of God's Word had been cited at the cost of ignoring the rest. The "It is written" of the devil, needed the counter-balancing assertion on the part of Jesus, "It is written *again*."

In our Lord's reply there is a reference to Deut. vi. 16, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God as ye tempted Him in Massah?" How did the Israelites tempt God in Massah? The twentieth chapter of the Book of Numbers gives the account in detail. The people who had just entered the Wilderness of Zin, were without water, and chided Moses, saying, "Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into the wilderness . . . to die there." Moses, in a moment of impatience *struck* the rock *twice*, though God had told him only to *speak* to it *once*, and thus violated

God's method of providing for the thirst of the nation. The people had not learnt to wait, and the voice of their discontent impelled even their leader to impatience. He sought to hurry God in the accomplishment of His purposes, by *striking* the rock instead of *speaking* to it, daringly calculating on the supernatural aid of God at the very moment he departed from His appointed plan. Jesus, in casting Himself from the "pinnacle" of the temple, at the suggestion of the tempter on this occasion, would be guilty of a similar act of daring presumption, by trusting in His Father's miraculous aid, even at the very hour He was setting at nought the divinely appointed manner of His appearing. This temptation to impatience, to seek general approval by violating the plan of life, was afterwards repeated to Him by His brethren, "Shew Thyself to the world." On many other occasions, too, during His long and patient career of cross-bearing, the same diabolic whisper came to Him, even from the lips of disciples, to ignore the cross and assume the sceptre, to startle men by the wonderful, rather than attract them by His patient endurance and self-denying love. To all such premature suggestions He calmly replied, "It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God," and "My hour is not yet come."

III. The Third Temptation. The *scene* of this temptation was an "exceeding high mountain," probably one of those mountains to which Jesus so often withdrew during His subsequent career. The wilderness, the temple, the mountain-top were His favourite resorts throughout His public life. They were so, all the more, because at the outset they had been to Him the scenes of conflict and of victory—because, ere He entered upon His great

work, He had withdrawn to them, and in each had done battle with the tempter, until he yielded and fled. These scenes of bygone conflicts, made so sacred by the memory of triumph, were the best in which to prepare for other victories. The wilderness, the temple, the mountain-top, would ever after this, in His life, be connected with very thrilling and inspiring associations.

In this instance, too, as in others, the temptation was specially adapted to the scene. At this height, a vast and varied landscape, beneath a clear eastern sky, lay open before Him. Jesus was moved by the thought of the vastness, wealth, and beauty of the world He had come to redeem. "The power and glory of the world," said the tempter, "are delivered to me;" look beyond those lands which fade away into the distant horizon to other kingdoms far away; "All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." This was a temptation to sacrifice spiritual integrity for worldly influence, to ally His cause with the tempter's, to pay homage to the spirit of the world, and thus possess power. Satan no longer tempted in disguise. The mask was at length cast aside. He presented himself as a worthy object of adoration. He appealed by this temptation to that which is noblest in human nature —*the spirit of devotion*—and sought to pervert it. In Eden he had succeeded in perverting that which God had implanted very deeply in man, and in which consisted man's chief glory—*the desire to be like God.* He had succeeded in *perverting* it when he could not *subdue* it. The attempt was now repeated. The mightiest temptations are not those which appeal to our *basest impulses to make them still baser,* but those which appeal to our *noblest impulses, and seek to misdirect them.*

Again, this temptation was given with promise. It was connected with a proffered bribe. "All these things will I give thee," *i.e.*, "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." This was not altogether an idle promise. Grant the conditions, and you have the result. Let Jesus but startle men with the miraculous, and not, at the very outset, shock them by His demands for purity, and He will gain universal approval. His subsequent life sufficiently illustrated this. He became popular by miracles; He became unpopular by His stern denunciation of error, and by His faithful utterance of the truth. One instance recorded by John will suffice here. Jesus had wrought the miracle of the loaves, and the multitude with one voice hailed Him as their king; but He no sooner *taught* them, than even His disciples exclaimed, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" and "from that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." His miracles attracted men, but His teaching frequently proved a stumbling block. Men loved the wonderful more than the instructive, the startling more than the true. Miracles ever secured a multitude; divine instruction seldom did.

This, so true of every age, was specially applicable to the days of our Lord. At this time, the wonderful, apart from the good, would have exerted immense power over the civilized world. The whole Roman Empire had become sadly degenerate. The oracles which had for ages kept Roman vice in check, had gradually lost their authority, and philosophers encouraged indulgence in sin by teaching men that no punishment would follow. The Romans, and those under their rule, had thus forsaken their ancient

religions and their ancient gods, and now, in their degeneracy, they sought another deity, who, whilst encouraging the vicious, would surprise men with the wonderful—a deity who would fill their amphitheatres and empty their temples! Such a god the Roman world yearned for!

Even the Jewish nation had forsaken the God of their fathers, form had taken the place of true worship, the Mosaic religion had become an unreality, and the service of the temple a farce. This was an age when superhuman power, apart from demands for purity, would have attracted the world; hence the tempter exclaimed, "All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me;" in other words, "Omnipotent Jesus, unite to Thy power a leniency to sin, and the nations of the world will be Thine." Jesus confronted the last temptation with the severest rebuff of all. One temptation overcome has prepared the tempted One the better to meet another. The resistance of the devil has now become an intense enthusiasm, before which the tempter must flee. Thus, the finest heroism has been developed in stern conflict with the devil. Jesus speaks the last word in the might of anticipated victory, "Get thee hence, for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt Thou serve.' Then the devil leaveth Him,"—and the temptation is over. A fact world-wide in its importance has been established—*man has overcome the devil.* In one instance, at least, goodness has triumphed over evil in a fallen world.

The temptations over, "Behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." The temptations by the devil are immediately followed by the ministration of angels.

Temptations overcome end in angelic visions. There is a joy which nothing but hard-won victory can give. We must all fight our way to this. Rest will be the reward of long and faithful toil; victory of consistent and manly strength.

In these temptations we have that struggle which—whilst it is repeated in every life, as it was in His—in a *special* sense comes only once in a lifetime; the struggle which is inseparably connected with our making the great choice of life. This is the hour which has in it the secret of years, the hour which—abounding with infinite possibilities—claims our immediate decision. We have seen how Jesus met this. There was the absence of hesitation and compromise on His part throughout, His resistance amounting at last to an enthusiasm, which bade the devil depart. There can be no half-and-half course in the hour of temptation. There must be a decisive "Yes" or "No." To hesitate is to fall.

"The devil leaveth Him for a season," writes Luke, intimating that the tempter and the tempted One will meet again; and thus it proved. Often were the same temptations afterwards presented to Jesus in His toilsome path; and with special force as the end drew nigh, in Gethsemane and on the cross. Jesus when in the wilderness had trusted in His Father, despite the hunger, and the suggestion of the tempter that He should give up His trust; when on the cross, the diabolic sneer—though at this time from human lips—came to Him, reminding Him of the former conflict, "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said I am the Son of God." Jesus, too, had refused to cast Himself from the "pinnacle" of the

temple at the bidding of the tempter; again the same voice came to Him in His death, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross . . and we will believe." He had also refused an earthly empire, or to ally His cause with worldly power; the tempter appeared again in the mocking throng, who bowed their knee before Jesus, and, as they spat upon Him, said to Him, "Hail, King of the Jews."

From what I have already endeavoured to say, you will see that I view our Lord's conflict with the tempter as being much of the same kind as ours—with one limitation. He, unlike ourselves, entered the conflict with a sinless nature, and thus He was not fettered or weakened by the consciousness of sinfulness, or by the remembrance of past spiritual reverses or falls. His was the vantage-ground of a warrior who had no bleeding or festering wound to think of, and no defeat to recall.

But, it is asked, was a fall possible to Him? I approach this question with reverence, but I would answer without hesitation, because my conviction is deep,—certainly. Jesus was tempted as *man* and not as *God*, for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man," therefore, *as man*, it was as possible for Jesus to fall as it was for the first sinless man in Eden. I believe, not that Jesus was not able to sin, but that He was able not to sin—a far higher attainment. There the glory of the triumph lay. He was able not to sin—and having that power He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Temptation ever involves the possibility of a fall, or it would be no temptation—it would be a hideous sham; at the same time it involves the possibility of not

falling, or it would be more than a temptation—it would be a resistless, tyrannic might.

Brethren, our Lord's temptations were real; we have a High Priest "who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, who was in all points tempted like as we are," who was "made perfect through suffering," and "who in that He Himself *hath suffered*, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted." How inspiring the thought that there is One in the highest heavens who knows full well what temptation and triumph mean, and who in the might of His ascended life is to-day engaged in succouring tempted ones! Fellow-feeling unites the risen Christ to struggling humankind. We are to be found in the category of tempted ones; may we never fail to go to Him for succour, and aided by Him, may we know by joyous experience that—

"It is one thing to be tempted,
Another thing to fall."

VI.

MAN'S ONLY ADVOCATE AND PRIEST.

"My friends scorn me: *but* mine eye poureth out *tears* unto God. O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man *pleadeth* for his neighbour!"—JOB xvi. 20, 21.

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."—1 JOHN ii. 1.

THE Book of Job is one of the most mysterious, and, at the same time, one of the most interesting of the historical books of the Old Testament. Accepting it as the biography of the man whose name it bears, much difficulty has been felt with regard to the time in which he lived, and the people among whom he dwelt. At the same time, there is sufficient brought incidentally to light to make this book exceptionally interesting and instructive. It is less Jewish than any other book of the Old Testament. Job is represented as living outside the pale of the Jewish people. He is not identified with them in respect of time or country. He thus appears before us as a *man* and not as a *Jew*. There is nothing national or exclusive about his feelings. The difficulties he experiences are those which every man would feel, more or less, in the circumstances; and, as such, his utterances have found an echo in the human heart in all ages.

Job appears first of all as a good man, living in much affluence, and surrounded by a happy family. Against him, however, that Satanic sneer is soon

uttered, which has been so often repeated against the good since then. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" In other words, "What wonder that he appears so good, when he is hedged in on every side from those temptations which beset the poor? Religion pays him well. Let him be stripped of his possessions; let calamity follow calamity until he has nothing left; let God withhold his favours, so that Job, like many others, will have to fight the battle of life with poverty, hunger, and want; and his religion will soon vanish, he will curse God to His face." The history of Job's trial was an answer to this sneer. Though stripped unsparingly of his vast possessions, and bereft of all his children, that great man—made poor and childless in a day—remained reverent and submissive; and even when his wife, with the devil in her heart, and a cruel sneer on her lips, exclaimed, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die," he replied in words which expressed a calm and reverent faith which would not let go its hold of God, whatever might befall him—"What? shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips." But what calamity could not do, want of sympathy on the part of his friends did. It was Job's lot to have been misunderstood by those who should have known him best. This has been the lot of some of the noblest and best of men. Job, in the hour of calamity stood alone, even his friends recognizing in his exceptional suffering the highest proof of his exceptional hypocrisy. Ah, it is hard thus to be misunderstood by those who should love us most. Harsh words, spoken by friends at a time when they should have breathed out their sympathy in gentle tones, made Job fretful

and impatient. He could bear anything but that; that he could not. He uttered strange and irreverent words, but turning now and then, from earth to heaven, and pouring forth his tears to God, he still affirmed that his "witness" was "in heaven," and his "record on high;" and from the depths of a heart that still believed God was just and good—that though "clouds and darkness" were "round about Him, righteousness and judgment" were "the habitation of His throne—he yearned for some one who could draw nigh to God on his behalf and plead his cause before Him: "O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour."

I have already spoken of the Book of Job as being less *Jewish* and more *human* than any other historical book of the Old Testament. I desire now, in the first place, to impress upon you the fact that these words of Job, which form a part of our text, express a yearning common to man, wherever he may be found; and, in the second place, that the Gospel truth, as expressed by John in our text, supplies the only satisfactory answer to that yearning.

I. These words of Job express *a yearning common to man* wherever he may be found. Job *expressed* this in so many words—and that very early in the world's history—but all men have *felt* it. So it is. The greatest of men, in all ages, have been those who have expressed most clearly and fully what all have deeply felt, but what they could only feel, and never utter. These words of Job, uttered so long ago, find an echo in the human heart to-day, in whatever land, and among whatever people, you may repeat them. There is nothing specially Jewish

about this cry; it is pre-eminently human. Man everywhere feels that he dare not draw nigh to God except through the medium of something or someone that shall stand between him and God. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" has been the cry of the human heart in all ages. This has called forth many false replies. One is, "*Do* something great. Go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and back, and take that as a plea to God." Another answer is, "*Endure* something great. Wear sackcloth next your skin, and walk a rough path, bare-footed and head-shorn. Or, shut yourself up in a cell, apart from all the joys of social life, and fast until flesh become so weak as to be almost absorbed in spirit, and then come to God." Another answer is, "*Give* something great. Contribute a princely fortune towards St. Peter's, or if that be denied thee, renovate some cathedral, or build some chapel; or even if that be denied, give a large donation to any worthy cause, and bring that before God." Man obeys these different voices, and still he is not satisfied. He wants some *person* to stand between him and God, and to plead his cause, "O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour." No deed, no gift, no self-denial, or endurance on his part, satisfies the yearnings of his soul, he must have an *intercessor*. Thus it is that inseparably connected with the idea of worship, everywhere, is the idea of a priesthood. Men require one who shall not only offer their gifts, but also intercede on their behalf, one who will "plead for a man with God as *a man pleadeth for his neighbour*." One purer than they; and yet one from among themselves, with *human* sympathies and affections. There must be a close connection between

the advocate and him for whom he pleads—that of man to his neighbour. To this deep craving in man the false religions of the world have their answers. They say, "Yes, you need a mediator, a human priest who can present your gifts and your petitions to God, and one who can convey to you, in return, the forgiveness and peace of God. Thus, for you there are set aside those who—clad with divine authority—stand to receive the secrets of your burdened souls, and the offerings of your grateful spirits; and, in return, to bestow upon you those blessings of forgiveness and of peace which can only be received through their hands." These are the fallacious answers given to the earnest cravings of the human soul for an advocate with God. Slender men, with shaven countenances, M.B. coats, and priestly cassocks, step in recklessly "where angels fear to tread," and blasphemously claim to be the ordained channels of communication between God and the sinner.

II. The Gospel supplies *the only satisfactory answer to this craving*. The Gospel has not overlooked this deep craving and need of man. And yet the Christian religion differs in one important feature from all the religions which preceded it. Sacrifices, which for thousands of years occupied such a prominent place in the devotions of men, and were considered so indispensable to the worship of God, have no place in the Christian religion. Yet the profound sense of guilt which found expression in those sacrifices has not died away. The Gospel, above every other message, convinces men of sin, and proclaims human depravity with an emphasis which none can overlook or evade. One of the utterances immediately preceding the words which form the second part of my text, is, "If we say

we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Nor does the Gospel, in contrast to those religions which enjoin the offering of sacrifices, teach men that anything short of sacrifice can atone for sin. Its full and clear utterance is, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." The hope with which the Gospel inspires men is based upon a sacrifice for sin, but mark, a sacrifice which *has been offered once for ever*, and which needs no repetition. It teaches us that He who died for us has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. He, who offered Himself a sacrifice, ever lives to make intercession on behalf of those for whom He shed His blood, and thereby completes in heaven the work of love which He began on earth. Thus our Lord embodies in Himself the truth which was but imperfectly shadowed forth by the altars of other religions, and, above all, that which was symbolized by the costly sacrifices, and the imposing priesthood of the Jewish faith; and the Gospel which He has bidden His servants to proclaim throughout the whole world, presents to us "One mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus;" an Advocate fulfilling in Himself the two characteristics of a true advocate for man, *sinlessness* and *sympathy*. One "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin," and who "for in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted:" a High Priest "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;" who "hath an unchangeable Priesthood;" "wherefore is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." We need no other priest.

Any other one who stands between man and his God is a wretched impostor—"a liar, and the truth is not in him." Teach your children not only that Christ has died, but that He also ever lives in heaven to make intercession for us. Tell them that "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Do not keep the intercessory work of Christ in the back-ground, but give it the prominence which the greatest of Apostles gave it—"It is Christ that died; *yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*" Teach them this simple truth, and the most profound yearning of their heart will be satisfied; and you need not fear that any priest, with stealthy and unholy tread, will insinuate himself into those sacred confidences of the soul, which are intended for Christ, and Christ alone.

VII.

ELIAS.

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are."—JAMES v. 17.

AS we advance in life we do not change more in any respect than in our views of things. Our standpoint shifts as years pass by. Hence the young man's and the aged man's points of vision in life are, as a rule, essentially different. The young man looks forward, the aged man backward. The one anticipates, the other remembers. During our earlier years we seem to be accumulating energy and life. Every day adds to our stock. During that period we live in the future. Hope and expectation are then our mightiest incentives to duty. The promises of to-morrow buoy us over the disappointments of to-day. This continues for a time. Then comes the hour when hope becomes less sanguine and active, and memory steps forward to minister consolation and strength. And as the tendency of hope in our earlier days is to over-estimate the future, so the tendency of memory in later years is to exaggerate the past. The young man concludes far too readily that the world's great past has nothing to tell him; whereas the aged man is apt to think that the past has all to tell, and that the future (as far as this life is concerned) has a very little worth the hearing.

And as with individuals, so with nations and communities. All the earlier energies of a nation are quickened by hope; its later impulses are sustained by memory.

As long as a nation is accumulating energy it ever looks forward, but the moment its vigour begins to ebb it looks backward. That nation has ceased to grow which can only look to the past, however glorious that past may be. In that one fact you have a sure sign of a hidden decay. The days of that people are numbered who have ceased to hope of the future even greater things than the past has ever known. Memory, however glorious, is never mightier than hope in a progressive people; it almost invariably is, in a retrogressive one. These remarks have a special application to the Jewish nation at the time this Epistle was written "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Their glory had now departed, but they had an illustrious history to review. Indeed, for the last five centuries the nation had lived upon its past history; and now the last spark of national energy was fanned by these inspiring memories. The result was, that great as the heroes were that distinguished the bygone ages, their greatness was exaggerated by the Rabbinical expositions and traditional teaching of later times.

Of these, probably, no character was so much overestimated as that of Elijah. The exceptional nature of his life may have somewhat accounted for this. There is a strange mystery and reserve about the narrative which gave scope to superstition. In the sacred record he suddenly emerges out of obscurity as a man fully equipped for his superhuman task. The names of his parents and the place of his birth are alike unmentioned. His subsequent movements are strangely exceptional; the miraculous mysteriously blends with all his actions. He calls fire from heaven, and it descends at his bidding. He prays for rain,

and a three years' drought is brought to a close. During the famine he is miraculously fed by a raven, and subsequently from the barrel of meal which "wasted not" and "the cruise of oil" which did not "fail." His appearances, too, are sudden and brief; the greater part of his life is spent apart from the world, and he only appears among men when he has a message from the spiritual world to deliver. He no sooner delivers that message than he disappears again, and his footsteps are, for a time, lost even to the inspired historian. This life, so exceptional throughout, finds an exceptional close. There is a harmony of mystery from beginning to end. He does not die as other men do. God sends his horses and chariots of fire, and Elijah ascends to heaven in the living flame.

In the review of such a life, there was, as I have intimated, great scope for superstition. One of the Jewish traditions states that Elijah in his infancy was fed with fire, and wrapped in flaming swaddling clothes. Some of the Rabbis affirmed that he was an angel hovering on the outskirts of the world; and so strange was his departure—so different from that of all others—that the nation felt convinced that they had not seen the last of him. They believed that he would come to restore the pot of manna, Aaron's rod, and other sacred possessions. Any thing valuable that was found, whose ownership could not be established, was to be held by the finder, and, if needs be, by his descendants, "until the coming of Elias." So powerful was the impression he made upon the nation that as centuries passed away the expectation of his advent grew more and more intense, so that when the Christ appeared both He and His forerunner were mistaken for Elijah. And, in one

sense, he did appear, for in the person of John the Baptist, that great prophet of the wilderness, were to be repeated all the might and mysteriousness of Elijah's character and life. But still—in this nineteenth century of the Christian Era—the vacant chair, placed in one of the Jewish festivals for Elijah, should he appear, tells of an expectation deep-rooted in the heart of the Jewish people which thousands of years of hope deferred have not eradicated.

In our text the Apostle, in inculcating the duty of fervency in prayer, guards the "scattered tribes" against a false and superstitious view of the life and character of Elijah. He triumphed by the might of his faith, and not because he was exempt from those passions which beset smaller natures. The faith that made Elijah mighty with God would also enable them to move the hand that moves the world. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Although the mysterious aspects of his character might not be theirs, yet that faith which underlay all, and imparted a resistless force to the whole man, might be possessed by them.

This, my friends, is what I desire to impress upon you to-night. I want to fix this one truth upon your minds, *that we are united to the greatest and holiest men of all ages by a common nature.* I readily acknowledge the exceptional natural endowments which have in so many instances accompanied spiritual greatness; but that which has constituted this greatness has not been special

talent, or an exemption from those chilling influences which have, in so many instances, stunted promising lives; but a faith which could believe God at His word, and implicitly trust in the boundlessness of His mercy and love. All those supernatural gifts, which added a glory to the lives of prophets and apostles, may pass away, and be no more repeated in the world's history; but faith, hope, and love, abide, and will abide to the end of time, the secret of all spiritual greatness and moral heroism. Learn, then, that those great men of sacred story are not so far removed from us as that we cannot imitate them in that which was noblest in their character, and divinest in their spirit. There is a bond pre-eminently human uniting them to us. It is this fact that attaches such a value to the testimonies of bygone saints. That which made them strong in the battle of life, and caused them to triumph, is within our reach, and can make us mighty in the same conflict. "We are men of like passions with you," exclaimed Paul to the half-civilized people of Lystra, when they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, and would have done sacrifice to them as gods; in other words, "We are *men*—not *gods*, nor yet *angels*, but *men*—engaged in the same struggle with sin, beset by similar infirmities and trials, and therefore, feeling a relationship to you as dear and as sacred as life, 'preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.'" There is a sublime and very cheering truth embodied in these words. The greatest and holiest of men are united very closely to us by the very infirmities and trials which they share in common with us; and thus it is that the victories which they, in the might of their faith and the force of a holy consecration, achieved

over their passions, become incentives to us to engage in the same conflict, and triumph through the same grace.

There has been a tendency in all ages to deify the great men of the past. The Greek poets raised some of their ancestors to the level of the gods. The Romans, too, attributed superhuman power to the ancient heroes of their country. The Jewish people became the victims of the same delusion. The strange feature of all this is that those who have left the most powerful impression upon posterity, and have drawn most upon their superstitious awe, have not been the most consistent men, but the most demonstrative. Elijah was the man who cast the greatest shadow of all the great men of the Old Dispensation. His life was the most massive, but by no means the most symmetrical or beautiful. For instance, Elisha was a man very different from Elijah, his great predecessor. Elisha did not dwell in solitudes, to emerge, now and then, like a supernatural being; he abode among his people, a man among men. His life was not characterized by the great struggles and daring deeds of Elijah's life, at the same time we do not find in it any of those reactions which are found in Elijah's. We look for him in vain under the juniper tree, despairing of life. His was that calm faith which though—unlike Elijah's—it did not reach the height of daring, yet never degenerated into cowardice. His was a silent, firm, changeless faith, which never seemed to have failed him. Elijah's life was spent amid wind, and fire, and earthquake, and was characteristically closed in a tempest which took him to heaven. Elisha's life was characterized by "the still small voice," which spoke of

hope, peace, and love; and that life, so marked by peacefulness, closed in a quiet and honoured grave. His was a far less stirring, but more successful; far less grand, but more beautiful life than Elijah's. The time had passed which demanded a prophet of exceptional vigour and sternness, for Ahab and Jezebel were dead; at this time the nation was in need of one who could counsel, guide, and comfort, in the midst of those calamities which had come in the train of Ahab's sins. Such an one was given in the person of Elisha. Such men are invaluable at times like those—men who can be calm in the midst of a national consternation, and steer the course of a people amidst reefs and quicksands, when no other hand can be found sufficiently steady, or head clear and calm enough. But they are not the men who are likely to be deified by posterity. That is the prerogative of the Elijahs of history. Which of the apostles is remembered to day with the most superstitious awe? Not John, or even Paul, but Peter—the patron Saint of the Church of Rome—the most demonstrative but the least consistent of all the apostles. Peter was a grand man, of a volcanic nature, quivering with a hidden fire, and, at times, presenting an irresistible force of character; but he was the last who would have laid claim to infallibility, or have thought it possible that such superstitions should have gathered round his name and memory, as those which are taught and believed by a Church which numbers its millions of devout adherents.

But we all know of the tendency—a tendency, if not indulged in too far, which partakes of much that is noble and beautiful—to overlook the failings and only recognize the virtues of those who have gone before.

This applies to all. "Speak not ill of the dead," say those who feel no compunction whatever in speaking ill of the *living*. There is something in death which speaks very forcibly even to the most inconsiderate of men, "Hands off; this is a place too sacred for cold scrutiny." Thomas Hood, in his "Bridge of Sighs," has given expression to this human feeling very beautifully. A poor woman from the city, "who was a sinner," was found drowned in the Thames. By one rash act she had herself brought to a close a life which was too burdensome to be endured any longer. The poet passed by, and from the depths of a heart intensely human, he exclaimed to those who were about to lift up that dead body—

"Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully;
Gently and humanly,
Not of the stains of her,
ALL THAT REMAINS OF HER
NOW IS PURE WOMANLY.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into her mutiny,
Rash and undutiful;
Past all dishonour,
DEATH HAS LEFT ON HER
ONLY THE BEAUTIFUL."

If thus we feel with regard to one whose life has been exceptionally blurred by sin and shame, how much more with reference to another whose career has been one continued struggle against evil, and has closed in everlasting triumph. The reverses are lost sight of in the final achievement. Thus we are apt to over-estimate the excellencies of departed saints, at the cost of overlooking entirely those failings in their life which stamped

them, in common with ourselves, as human; and, as the result, at the cost of depriving ourselves of those assurances with which the record of their struggles, reverses, and final victory, is calculated to inspire us.

Read the record of Elijah's life, and see how true the words of James are. Though there are heights in Elijah's character which are far removed from human experience, yet how much is in it that is very human. On one occasion he appears as a prodigy of spiritual power, on another as a living proof of human weakness. What a contrast between Elijah on Mount Carmel, confronting all the priests of Baal, and calling fire down from heaven to consume his sacrifice; and Elijah—having fled before the anger of woman—sitting beneath the juniper tree, in the wilderness, despairing of life. From such a life as this—so full of human weakness, yet so distinguished by triumph—let us learn the lessons of faith and perseverance. Let us be worthy followers of those who, beset with weakness like ours, "through faith and patience, have inherited the promises." As they struggled hard, and "were in trouble on every side, fightings without, and fears within," so may we, inspired with the same hope, and aided by the same Divine Spirit, contend with our common foe, until at last we, like them, shall close our life with the words of triumph on our lips, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

VIII.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—MATT. iii. 1, 2.

"John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her."

—MATT. xiv. 4.

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"—MATT. xi. 2, 3.

JOHN'S birth was foretold by an angel, and attended by supernatural events. Consecrated from his birth, and called to a high but arduous mission, he spent his early days in obscurity, and even in solitariness. Like other great and holy men of the past, he spent the preparatory period of his life in the wilderness; his spirit was disciplined in solitude for the stern task of a lifetime. He was a Nazarite from the womb, and dwelt apart from men. "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." At the close of thirty years he appeared clad in a prophet's garb, and with a thrilling message upon his lips, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was "He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." In sublime harmony with this message to others, his own mission was pre-eminently to prepare—in the wilderness to prepare the way of the

Lord, in the desert to make straight a highway for God. He was a man of a special type, sent by God for a special work. He was the stern genuine John sent to perform a stern genuine task. It was for him to bear heroically the brunt of preparation, so that another may enter into his labours. He presented a startling contrast to the religionists of his day. Though of priestly birth he was withal a prophet, and possessed all the informality and sturdiness of the prophet's nature. His early training in the wilderness was that of a prophet as distinct from that of a priest. Priests were trained among the altars; the prophets amid the solitudes of the world, alone with God. John was brought up on nature's lap, in her countenance he saw nothing but profound reality. He was a child of nature and not of society, and by so much the more genuine. Beneath his rough garb was a noble heart, loving all that was true, and detesting all that was false.

Abstaining from all stimulants, and from self-indulgence of every kind, he developed a sturdiness of character essential to the prophetic calling. Thus was he prepared by God's wise Providence, unawares to the world, and almost unawares to himself, for life's great task. A very instructive and interesting element in history is the way in which God silently prepares men for a great work. The *preparatory period*, in the history of individuals and nations, is pregnant with interest and instruction, and we can only overlook it at our own cost. It is surpassingly interesting, in instances like this, to see a great life develop its resources in the quietude of a wilderness, until—when years of silent growth have passed by—it sends forth a voice that arouses nations out of their lethargy.

In order to understand the life and character of this great man the better, we shall take as our subject "Three Scenes in the Life of John."

I. John in the Wilderness.

II. John in the Palace.

III. John in Prison.

I. John in the Wilderness. The preparatory period being over, John appeared equipped for his task, with his soul aflame with a message from God to his age. Like Elijah, his great prototype, he stood alone—a prodigy of spiritual power. He was but "a voice" in the wilderness, yet a voice as if from another world, which aroused all Jerusalem, and all the country round about Jordan from their lethargy. Thousands were attracted by the stirring message of the godly man, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This message was what the world needed; hence it found a willing response in the hearts of multitudes. John inspired the nation with what they had for centuries sadly lacked—a spirit of solemn and genuine enquiry. His mission was to quicken the moral sense of the nation, as well as to strengthen the people's belief in the prophecies which had been all but forgotten. He came to announce the culmination of Jewish hope and faith in the "kingdom of heaven" that was at hand, and to demand repentance as the condition of becoming subjects of that kingdom. He laid bare the hypocrisy of the day, and brought men face to face with their sins. Luke graphically describes the result of his mighty preaching. The people, the publicans, and the soldiers going to battle, all came to

the great preacher with the same question, "What shall we do?" He bade them all in their different spheres bring forth fruit meet for repentance. He had the moral courage which the Rabbis sadly lacked. He was never the slave of his audience; he was their teacher, and, when duty so bade, their rebuker too. He gave utterance to hard things, spoke of the axe laid unto the root of the trees, of the fan separating the wheat from the chaff, and of the unquenchable fire which should burn up the chaff. He spoke great truths fearlessly and with startling effect; in his voice there was authority, and in his word there was life. At the bidding of his great soul, his eyes flashed with inspiration, and his countenance glistened with the heavenly glow of truth. He was pre-eminently the preacher—the pioneer of preachers—attracted the multitude, not with ceremonies or miracles, but with his message. "John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true." He was the truthful speaker and not the miracle worker.

His message to all was clear, distinct, and intensely earnest. It was a solemn warning based upon deep unwavering conviction, a powerful utterance of great truths profoundly felt, and divinely inspired; it was, nevertheless, preparatory, and therefore incomplete—a fragment. John pointed to a Greater One to follow, in whose message his would find its completion, and in whose mission his would culminate. "Repent," was the message of John; "Repent *and believe*," was the message of his Lord.

Among the many who came to the baptism of John, there came One at length to whom the word "Repent" was not applicable, but who, nevertheless, desired to

be baptized of him. In His presence the stern preacher of the wilderness became a child-like disciple, and exclaimed, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" We learn from John's own testimony that as yet he had not recognized Jesus as the Messiah; yet, perhaps from His personal appearance, or more probably from a knowledge of His previous exemplary character—being His cousin according to the flesh—he was conscious of His superiority; he stooped before Him as before a greater one than himself, not altogether free from the enquiry whether or not He might be *The* Greater One.

At length Jesus was baptized of John. In His baptism the heavens were opened; the Spirit, dove-like, descended upon Him, thus testifying to His purity; and the heavenly voice confirmed the testimony. Here we arrive at a sublime climax. The "voice in the wilderness" was now superseded by the "voice from heaven." The Forerunner had hitherto exclaimed, "There cometh One mightier than I after me;" the Father now exclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Henceforth John's message was not "There cometh One," but "The next day John seeth Jesus coming to him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me." Prophecy was now lost in the testimony, and the prophet in the witness. In the word "Behold" John's mission culminated. The herald had done his work, the Lord would henceforth speak.

II. John in the Palace. The first three Evangelists are silent concerning John during the period between

the baptism of our Lord and the imprisonment of John. Their silence would have led us to think that the imprisonment immediately followed the baptism. From the fourth Evangelist, however, we learn that it was not so, that our Lord and the Baptist for some time worked simultaneously. The record of this period occupies a little more than two chapters. The Evangelist, having recorded the call of the disciples, the feast at Cana, the purifying of the Temple, and the interview with Nicodemus, continues—"After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judæa; and there He tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison." It was during this period that the disciples of John, moved with that envy which ever disturbs small minds, exclaimed, "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him;" to whom John—free from all petty envy, and realizing how subordinate his mission was to that of his Lord—so nobly exclaimed, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John realized that his mission was fast drawing to a close. Even now his work in the wilderness was done, and he had withdrawn to Ænon, but one or two chapters must yet be added ere the "Finis" is written to his great life. The prophet of the wilderness has attracted the attention of royalty, he finds a welcome in Herod's palace. Has he a message to deliver now? His characteristic feature in the wilderness was stern candour. Will that be his characteristic feature in the

palace? It requires greater courage to rebuke a tetrarch, than the peasants of the country round about Jordan, or even the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jerusalem. Consciousness of independence in the wilderness may have added candour to his message; but let him stand in the presence of royalty, and realize his dependence, and will he be equally candid? In the wilderness, too, he was comparatively beyond the charms of wealth; but let him face the temptations which a tetrarch's palace can present, and will he be the stern John still? Many a man has been metamorphosed by such a change. He is truly a great man who can meet the extremes of life—the wilderness and the palace—and not lose his equilibrium. What of John? It is instructive, in instances like this, to

——"Read the history of character, the
chequered story of a life."

It is a grand thing to see great principles embodied—breathing, living, conquering—in the world. How does the prophet of the wilderness stand the test of the palace? Is the forerunner of the Christ strong enough to meet Herod, and not fear? We know that bygone prophets stood before kings, and made princes tremble, but has John breathed the air which those spiritual giants breathed, and caught their heroism?

"Herod, when he heard him, did many things, and heard him gladly. But the tetrarch had been guilty of adultery—had taken to himself Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. This moment was the greatest test of John's life. Kings are *fed* by flattery—

"'Tis the fate of princes that no knowledge
Comes pure to them, but passing thro' the eyes
And ears of other men, it makes a tincture
From every channel, and still bears a relish
Of flattery or private ends."

John well knew that flattery was wont to lift up its voice in courts, that Herod would gladly avail himself of his aid to set at ease the misgivings of the people, and that he would reward him well for his services. Is John to act the part of a courtier, or of a preacher of repentance? Such was the temptation of this hour. Will he be silent, or will he speak? If he speaks, *what* will he speak? "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife," was his unwavering message. This was a glorious break upon the monotonous and sickly flattery of courtiers. John never could be unreal, nor would he compromise principle for aught on earth. Amid the flattering voices of attendants there was one voice distinct from all, having the clear ring and manly utterance "of the voice in the wilderness." *Candour*, the essential attribute of a great teacher, and *truthfulness*, the basis of all personal excellence and worth, were to John nobler things than kingship; hence—proof against those charms for which other men toiled, and bowed, and cringed—he reminded Herod that there was a Law Supreme to which kings were subject, and which he had broken. Herod, unaccustomed to such a faithful message, cast God's great prophet into prison.

III. John in Prison. With the imprisonment of John our Lord commenced working with increased vigour. "Now, after that John was cast into prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God." One teacher had been put to silence, a greater One now spoke. John did no miracle, but Jesus did. He healed the sick and restored the dead to life. "There came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us,

and that God hath visited His people." Such a deed as the raising of the dead to life had not been performed since the prophets had disappeared from the earth; and even they had not imparted life to the dead with the simple but omnipotent word, "Arise." What if these events, unprecedented even among the greatest of inspired story, be the sign of a new era as great, if not greater than that of bygone seers and prophets? Even John "did no miracle," but this Jesus of Nazareth did.

The disciples of John made known these things to him in prison. This was a gloomy moment in John's life. Was it possible that his Lord would suffer him to be in the dungeon while such things were being done without? It was hard that, after all his arduous toil to prepare the way of the Lord, he should not be permitted to witness any of His mighty works. Thus, in the gloomy prison, he became for a moment gloomily impatient, and "calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" "Am I to look for another deliverer?" asked John in bonds. When in the wilderness, he saw and calmly testified that he must decrease, but it was a hard fact to realize *now*. He was decreasing more rapidly than he had ever expected. He had scarcely anticipated that his sphere would shrink within the limits of prison walls. Hence, in prison, he exhibited a momentary wavering, sought for in vain in the John of the wilderness. Circumstances extremely adverse had, for the time being, dimmed the vision and weakened the strength of this great servant of God. He who, a little while ago, with a clear voice, exclaimed, "Behold," now, for a moment, with a

tremulous voice, asked, "Art Thou?" Another reason, somewhat connected with the foregoing, may account partly for this momentary wavering. John realized now, for the first time, that his usefulness had come to an end. His was the burden of being inactive in God's world. The heaviest trial of the greatest of men has ofttimes been to see their usefulness come to a close before they die. They would enter the grave sword and trowel in hand. It is painfully mysterious to them that they should live and be allowed to do nothing. John was of such a mould—too great to be happy in inaction.

The disciples came to Jesus and asked the question dictated by the great Forerunner. Our Lord exclaimed, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight . . . and the poor have the gospel preached to them; and blessed is he whosoever is not offended in Me." Having given them the proofs of His mission, He thus concluded, with words kindly uttered, but significant enough to the impatient and doubting enquirer—words which, doubtless, imparted to John all the comfort and assurance he required.

Various were the opinions of the multitude now concerning John. In his message to Christ, some seemed to trace *fickleness*. He was, they thought, but a reed; the least adverse wind made him bend and waver. Our Lord assured them that the great prisoner was no wavering reed. He had a doubt, but it was a doubt that would end in victory; it was the sincere struggling of faith with outward circumstances, with dispensations scarcely explicable. John had a faith which even the prison cell could not overcome, though, for a moment, it had weakened its grasp. In the darkest moment of

impatience, it was to Christ that he sent to dispel all doubt, and make the darkness bright with hope.

> "There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds.
> He fought his doubts, and gathered strength,
> He would not make his judgment blind;
> He faced the spectres of the mind
> And laid them; thus he came at length
> To find a stronger faith his own."

Others considered John to be a selfish and self-indulgent man, who, disappointed in life—being cast into a dungeon—became embittered, and questioned the divine mission of Him to whom he had formerly pointed as the Lamb of God. Our Lord taught them that other thoughts than those of disappointed pride filled John's great heart. He bade them see beneath the genuine garb the genuine man who wore it. The wilderness would not be the home, nor camel's hair the raiment, of self-indulgence. "What went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses."

Others still clung to the old belief, once so prevalent, that he was a "prophet." "Yea," exclaimed Jesus, "more than a prophet." Even those who appreciated John, appreciated him but too little. They placed him on a par with bygone prophets. He was greater than they, inasmuch as he was nearer the Christ. Astronomers tell us that as a comet approaches the sun it moves with greater speed, and burns with increasing brilliancy. John "was a burning and a shining light," so near was he to the Great Sun, whose healing rays would enlighten the world. He was the one destined, in God's wise Providence, to see prophecy vanish in realization. It

was his prerogative to prophesy, and no sooner to do so than to point to the object of all prophecy. To "*vision*" he added "*sight.*" "I *saw*," exclaimed the last and greatest of the prophets, "and bear record that this is the Son of God." *Prophecy in John made a grand and final effort, it reached its highest point.* "What went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet."

Thus did our Lord vindicate the character of John. He deeply sympathized with the great Forerunner, assailed by doubt in the gloomy prison; He overlooked his momentary wavering, and extolled the firmness of his faith, the genuineness of his character, and the superiority of his mission.

The circumstances connected with the close of John's life are briefly told. It was Herod's birthday. In imitation of the Roman Emperors he celebrated it by a feast to which he called "his lord, high-captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee." Salome, the daughter of Herodias, came and danced before them. "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee unto the half of my kingdom" exclaimed the royal voluptuary to her in a moment of unholy excitement. Having consulted her mother she returned "with haste unto the king and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by-and-by in a charger the head of John the Baptist." The hour, for which the adulterous Herodias had patiently waited, had come. To have his voice silenced would be a greater boon to her than half Herod's dominions. She vainly thought that a beheaded John would mean a silent John. Vain delusion; being dead he would yet speak. "It is John whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead," was the exclamation of the Sadducean Herod, who,

despite his former creed, saw John everywhere rise from the grave to condemn him still.

The inspired record draws a veil over the scene of murder. What John said in that important hour we know not. The details of that deed of blood are wrapped in a terrible silence. The head in the charger, however, reveals the fact that John has lost his head for his candour. His great life at first sight seems to have closed in failure. A great light is apparently quenched by daring and unholy hands. A heroic spirit seems to be baffled and crushed in its highest pursuit. The cause of adultery appears to triumph over the cause of purity and truth; and a voluptuous woman—like Jezebel of old—seems to defeat the very herald of the Christ. One keen, sharp stroke brings to a close the life of one of God's choicest servants. Yet why should we think that it is a sign of failure when a noble life is consummated in a martyrdom? No part of John's career was so noble as that in which he sealed his message with his blood. Some of God's choicest men are those upon whose brow He will at last place a martyr's crown. What army has ever been like "the noble army of martyrs," each of whom, as he falls gloriously upon the battle field, writes upon his shield, "I have conquered!"

I have dwelt somewhat fully upon the life of the great Forerunner, because it does us good to study grand consistent characters which are the product of a Divine indwelling. The artist adorns his studio with the masterpieces of the greatest artists, so that by force of association his own taste and skill may be perfected. God has not given us the record of such a life as this to be overlooked and ignored by us, but He has given

it for our instruction and encouragement. There is, too, one Divine Life recorded, by which all other lives may be measured; and in so far as they resemble it in those tender and exalted graces with which it abounded without measure, it behoves us to seek to imitate them; and where they fail, to derive warning, and to learn wisdom. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, so that it cannot accomplish to-day what it did in ancient days. Believe more in the Spirit of God as the inspirer of all that is exalted in human character in *this age*, as well as in all other ages, and to the measure you believe that, will you afford a scope for His mighty operations in your life and character, and will you become in very deed "temples of the Holy Ghost."

IX.

THE DIVINE HEALER.

"My purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart."
—JOB xvii. 11.

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."
—PSALM cxlvii. 3.

THE Book of Job, the most ancient book of the Old Testament—indeed, the world's oldest poem—dwells very fully upon the mystery of suffering. It is the book of the Old Testament which seeks to strike at the root of the whole difficulty why God permits His own to suffer, whilst the godless are spared. It is a grand protest against shallow interpretations of God's dealings with man. It represents as the greatest source of Job's suffering, not his enormous losses, or his very painful disease, but the unbearable fluency of his so-called friends—who knew nothing about affliction—in justifying the ways of God to man, and in tracing back personal suffering to personal sin. Shallow explanations will not do for the man who is tasting deeply of sorrow, mere pious cant will not satisfy the soul that has to bear its burden in loneliness and in gloom. Better not undertake to explain, if we have not a satisfactory explanation to give. The world's sorrow cannot be solved by denying its existence, or even by tracing it back to individual sin. There are Job's comforters still in the world, who will tell you, for your consolation in the hour of suffering, that you are more afflicted than others only in proportion

as you are more sinful. They can trace every calamity to a sin, from the breaking of a walking-stick to the breaking of a heart. Such were they who made this great sufferer rash and impatient, even when the calamities which had befallen him could only call forth the triumphant cry, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." False vindications of God's dealings, and false explanations of the mystery of suffering, following upon great calamities, which *in themselves* were weighty enough to bear, called forth words of dark foreboding and harsh complaint from the lips of one of the world's greatest and most patient sufferers—one whose very name has, by the mutual consent of the ages, become synonymous with patience. "I cannot find one wise man among you," are the words spoken from a heart not only pierced by sorrow, but also baffled by the cruel, though pious cant of friends, who have lost all sympathy with the sufferer in their blind zeal to explain the cause and meaning of his suffering. Then follow the words which form the first part of our text.

I. "My purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart." Taking these words away from their context, we shall give them a general application.

1. In them we read of broken purposes—"My purposes are broken off." In all ages of the world there have been men who have fathomed some of the deepest feelings of our nature—which, as a rule, lie unuttered in the silent depths of our being—and have given them utterance. Job was one of those. Giving a tongue to sorrow he made it speak in all its varied cadences. That intense grief which so often takes possession of man in the form of a dumb spirit spoke

in him. His cry on this occasion is intensely human. There is a painful conviction of failure, of non-attainment, in these words. Job has not realized that for which he had hoped or planned. This conviction is all the more painful because it comes at a time in life when every opportunity seems to have gone by: "My days are past." These are not the words of a young man foiled, who yet is full of youthful hope, and is bent on purposing again; but of one who has no heart for purposing any more. Now, when we remember how many of life's activities are sustained by the inspiration of that hope which finds expression in the purposes and plans of life, this cry will appear to us to have a deep undertone of sadness. These are words which find an echo in many hearts. How much time and brain-power are taken up in purposing and planning, and yet in the great majority of instances, the end is never gained. It would be very instructive to compare the intentions of the youth of fifteen with the realizations of the man of seventy. Yet there is nothing more surprising than the persistency with which a man will purpose throughout life, even in the face of a thousand disappointments. There are times, however, when the conviction of the fruitlessness of our purposes comes home with power to us, as it did to Job on this occasion; and it makes the heart bleed. I do not speak now of those whose *hobby* it is to purpose and plan. There are some who apparently seek to do nothing else. I have a keen recollection of a fellow-student who was always writing introductions to, and planning sketches of, sermons; but he never finished a sermon to my knowledge. His "purpose" was always "broken off" about the "firstly." And there are men in

every calling like him. But observe, they are not those who feel acutely over broken purposes. That is the lot of men who have sought patiently to *realize* their best hopes and intentions; those who are keenly dissatisfied with half-built towers, and yet who have been forced to give up building at the hour when they were most sanguine of being permitted to complete the work. To be baffled in their highest pursuit, and checked in their noblest plans, are the greatest trials of some of the world's best men and women. The most devout lives are not free from the disappointments which often come from broken purposes.

There are some, however, who cannot enter into the feeling which throbs in these sad words. They are those who have never purposed in right earnest, who have never thrown themselves into a project or plan, who do everything at random, who stumble into their duties as chance dictates, and in a very mysterious way stumble out of them. They do not know the meaning of a purpose ; they have never sustained its tension, or been kindled with its enthusiasm. Hence they cannot realize the sadness which comes from shattered hopes or broken plans.

But giving the words a more general application—Observe how many purposes in every life are broken through causes beyond our control. Death enters the family, and snatches away the bud that promised fair to open into a lovely flower. Many and bright have been the hopes which have clustered around the object of love, and numerous the purposes cherished concerning it, but in one moment all are "broken off." It is not surprising if, over the grave of that child, or youth, there will be found a broken pillar, one fragment

remaining in an upright position, the other lying at its base. This would be a fitting emblem not only of the life cut off, but also of the purposes inseparably connected with it which have been so rudely snapped. Many other disappointments, more or less severe than this, may be mentioned, which fall into our lot through causes beyond our reach.

But disappointments are not always of this kind. Many are the result of men's own folly and recklessness. We blame Providence often when we have shaped our own lot, and when the events which befall us are the direct result of our own acts. Men do not take God into their calculations often when they lay out their plans for the future. They say, "To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain;" when they "*ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." God protests against this by foiling them in their plans. He will not have them bring life down to the mean level of pounds, shillings, and pence, or make it a thing of mere scheming and planning. He will have them consult Him in all their purposes, or He will finally break those purposes off.

By these disappointments, too, God seeks to bend our self-will, which is ever asserting itself. The desire to have our own way is deeply rooted in the human heart. It is seen early in the child, and it is only by continuous discipline that it disappears in the man. God foils men in their determined pursuit in order that they may learn submission to a higher will. And, of all men, they are to be pitied most who, with all their broken projects, fail to learn the lesson of submission; blockheads in the school

of Providence, who, blinded by their tyrannic self-will, become its victims.

2. We also read of the "thoughts of the heart" broken off, or, more correctly rendered, the "*possessions*" of the heart. In these words there is expressed a keen sense of loss. To some extent this comes to all of us at a certain point in life. To those who are young it has probably not yet come. For some years God graciously cheers our young life with the pleasant consciousness of gaining, and it is only slowly that we are taught that life is not made up of unbroken gains. By and by, gradually but certainly, "friend after friend departs," cherished desires are withheld, and joys withdrawn. During the years of childhood and youth we seem to get a firmer hold upon life, and all that life has of joy and strength; but ere long the time comes when our hands begin to slacken, and one earthly idol slips out of our grasp after another. How often does God, perforce, empty our hearts of their idols? It is sad forus if we only murmur at, and do not learn from, these dispossessions. What if He is emptying the heart of all meaner objects in order that *He* may enter in if we but open the door? The means He uses in teaching us may often be severe, but what if we have refused to learn it in any other way? What if that which we have longed for most—a smooth path—has only made us more self-willed? We know that what is worth learning, as a rule, involves patience and endurance in the learning. Every boy and girl at school knows this. And very much that we have to learn further on in life must be patiently learnt in the school of affliction. Our purposes must be broken, and our hearts dispossessed of idols, before we can go to Him; and submitting our stubborn will to His, ask Him to heal the

heart that has been pierced by the thousand disappointments of our wayward career. Then such words as these, which form the second part of our text, are poured like balm into the soul.

II. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." In these words God is represented as the Healer of broken hearts. Observe the context. The words which immediately follow are, "He telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names." What has the healing of human hearts to do with the numbering of the stars! Apart from having found these words in such close contact one would hesitate to yoke them together. Men would be suspicious of one's orthodoxy, and those very clever people who have a keen scent for heresies would say, with a significant shrug of the shoulders, "Ah! he is a dangerous teacher. He no sooner speaks of broken hearts than he goes off at a tangent to the stars, and thus mocks the broken-hearted with astronomical observations." Yet the Psalmist strangely enough connects together the ideas of healing hearts, and of numbering the stars, and calling them all by their names. Nor is he alone in this among the inspired writers of the Old Testament. Compare these words with those of Isaiah (ch. xl. 26—29). The God who created the countless worlds, who brings out their host by number, and calls them by names by the greatness of His might, so that not one faileth, is He from whom the way of Israel is not hid, who gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might increaseth strength. There is, then, a connexion between God numbering the stars and healing the broken hearts of men. God's greatness and goodness are not operative in one sphere only, in the material, and not in the spiritual. He

who is omnipotent in the one is also omnipotent in the other. Telling the number of the stars and healing human hearts are alike achievements of the Divine skill.

Again, God's greatness and goodness are not only to be seen in the grand outline of His mighty work, but also in all its details. The infinitely great and the infinitely small in the Divine operations are inseparably connected. The light that beams in the infant's eye, or sends forth its varied hues from the tiny dewdrop, comes from a distance of nearly a hundred millions of miles. The hand that lit up the sun, fashions and beautifies the flower. It is hard to know which reveals most of God's wisdom, the telescope which opens to our view the distant and great works of God; or the microscope that reveals the near and the minute operations of His hand. These open up to us, however imperfectly, the two directions in the material universe in which Divine power and wisdom find infinite expression; but they leave untouched the spiritual world in which the scope and detail of the Divine working are still more grandly revealed. Both in the material and the spiritual worlds the sweep of God's operations can only be equalled by their minuteness.

The scope and detail of the Divine economy in the material and spiritual worlds are beautifully shewn and linked together by the prophet Isaiah in the chapter to which I have already referred (Isai. xl. 10-12.) The sweet promise, so expressive of shepherdly tenderness —"He shall gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom," is preceded by the words, "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him," and is succeeded by the words, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His

hands, and meted out heaven with the span?" Thus that promise which is the utterance of Divine tenderness, is beset behind and before by the assurance of Divine Omnipotence; and the verse which tells of the rich compassion of the Great Shepherd's heart, is guarded on each side by sister-verses which tell of the almighty power and boundless sweep of the Shepherd's arm, which, at the dictate of His heart, is engaged in gathering and sustaining the helpless lambs of the fold. The arm of Him who measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, is the arm that gathers into its embrace the little lambs on life's rough journey, and presses them to the bosom of the Heavenly Shepherd, where they will not feel the roughness of the way, or the force of the storm, but will have their feeble strength refreshed beneath His smile, and upon His bosom. Here we have the gentleness of resistless might, the tender folding of the Almighty arm. Thus, telling the number of the stars, and calling them all by their names, meting out heaven with the span, clothing the lily, marking the fall of the sparrow, and healing the broken in heart, are all included in the works of God; and, as "parts of His ways," help to explain each other, giving, in rich variety, different manifestations, more or less clear, of that God who is "Almighty to save."

There could be but little use in talking about hearts broken by disappointments, were we not able to speak also of Him who can heal even the *broken* heart. Our Father first probes the heart that is bruised by sin, so that all the evil may be taken away; then He binds up the wounds and heals the heart that has been broken. Have you not been impressed with the force of this figure? Earthly physicians can bind up

a wound and heal a broken limb, but who can heal a heart that is broken? This has ever been God's prerogative. He alone can heal life at its source, can purify that out of which are the issues of life. Ah! humanity suffers most from pierced and broken hearts; hearts pierced and broken through various causes. The greatest evil of all is at the *heart* of mankind. O the agony often pent up there, and none but God and the sufferer know it; and yet the sufferer will not go to the Great Physician to have it healed! "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." No sinner need die of a broken heart. A Saviour has come to give life to all who seek it. Shall He have to exclaim over *you*, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life."

My last words are these:—There is no point in life at which there should be no hope. I say this because some one present may be in need of that assurance—some one who wants to be comforted. The gaiety of the world has no longer any charm over you. You, perchance, have no heart for wonder, you do not desire to be entertained or amused. You want a balm that will heal that heart-wound of yours. You want to get out of the rush of life into the hush of God's presence, and within the reach of His healing touch. I bid you take these words and ponder them in your heart, without narrowing their meaning, or limiting their application, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

X.

GOD'S FORGIVING LOVE.

[A Sermon for the Young].

"For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

—Psalms ciii. 11, 12.

"Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

—Micah vii. 19.

GOD'S mercy is as high as the highest, broad as the broadest, and deep as the deepest. All figures of distance are exhausted here. We have height, breadth, depth. What can we have more? What as high as the heavens? what as far as the east from the west? and what as deep as the sea? God's mercy is. That is our statement to-night. All nature is here made to proclaim in highest, broadest, deepest terms, the forgiving love of God.

God's mercy is—

I. As high as the heavens.

II. As broad as the distance from east to west.

III. As deep as the sea.

I. God's mercy is as high as the heavens: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." Who can tell the height of the heavens? You may be able to tell how

many miles high the atmosphere is which encompasses this globe, or even how many millions of miles away some of those heavenly orbs are which we but faintly see with the naked eye. But who can tell the height of the heavens, or the immensity of—what we call for the want of a better word—space? Tell me that, and I may tell you how great God's mercy is toward them that fear Him. This is an infinite figure, expressive of an infinite truth; and herein consists the grandeur of the figure. It was only seldom that even inspired writers could fix upon such a figure as this. Look above, and what a sense of the infinite seems to overwhelm you! What can illustrate the boundless, like the heavens on high! What wonder that we have always associated them with God's home, and called them by the same name! Astronomers look upward and calculate distances, adding figure to figure until they arrive at millions of millions of miles, but there is a point at which they must cease, and add those words which seem to mock their calculations, *ad infinitum—to infinity*. There is an infinity still beyond, on the threshold of which they stand, but cannot go further. How grandly, in such an hour, do the words of David sound, "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him," and those other words of the inspired psalmist, "Many, O Lord, my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou has done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee: if I would declare and speak of them they are more than can be numbered." David had endeavoured to calculate, but all in vain; he did not seem to draw any the nearer to the grand total. At length he put an end to

every endeavour to reckon up God's wonderful works and thoughts, man-ward, and wrote the *ad infinitum—so on, and on, for ever.*

II. God's mercy is as broad, or extensive, as the distance from east to west. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." Who can tell how far that is? The east and west have been defined as the points where the Equator intersects the horizon; but—to use the ordinary phraseology—to those under the equinoctial line, *that line* constitutes east and west. Thus, go as far as you can eastward, you can never arrive at a point to which there is no east; so with regard to west. You can measure the distance between the extreme point on the right and the extreme point on the left of a hemisphere on the map, but these points are not east and west. East and west are *directions*, not *points*. Who can measure directions to which there are no definite ends? Who can measure that line which has infinity at both extremes? Precisely so; who can measure the distance to which God removes our sins from us when He forgives? The *arm* of Him "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His *hand*, and meted out heaven with the *span*," has placed them at a distance far beyond the scope of calculation. In this instance, as in the preceding, we have an infinite figure to illustrate an infinite truth. There is nothing defective or limited about such an illustration as this. Here we are baffled in all our attempts at calculation, and we can only adore that forgiving grace, the bounds of which we have never seen, and never can see.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain,
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

III. God's mercy is as deep as the sea. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea," or, according to the Welsh version, "Thou wilt bury all their sins in the depths of the sea." What a place to bury anything in is that great sea! If you would hide anything so that no one—not even you—could find it again, you would not dig a pit to bury it in, for that can be re-dug, but you would take it to mid-ocean, and there let it sink into the fathomless deep. It is precisely thus that God does with your sins. He buries them—as Christmas Evans, I think, says—not in the shallows, where they can be seen again, but in the depths which have never been seen. Ah, when men forgive sins they too often bury them in muddy shallows, between low water and high-water mark, so that when the tide of their affection recedes, as it often does, the sins appear again on the mud, all the more unsightly for having ever been buried. Not so with God; He buries them in the far-off deepest depths, so that His ocean of love must be dried up before a single sin will appear again; and that will never take place.

This figure was specially forcible to those to whom it was first presented. To the Jews, who were not a maritime people, but who, in common with other oriental nations, shared a dread of the sea, the very mention of the sea brought with it profound awe. They had never presumed to fathom its great depths. To them it was a mysterious, unfathomable thing, which they must look upon with dread mingled with reverence. And even to us, who are more accustomed to its wonders, there is associated with that great sea a sense of mystery and depth which is connected with nothing else in the world. When, then, in the storm our thoughts are

directed to those great abysses of ocean which have engulphed thousands, think of those depths of mercy, deeper than ocean, where all your sins may be buried and hid for ever.

My theme this evening has been God's mercy, *the* theme of Gospel preaching. I have tried to convince you of its immeasurable height, breadth, and depth. God's mercy, like all His other attributes, partakes of His own infinitude. There is nothing small or limited about Him. He pities and forgives as only God can; and His greatest glory consists in His forgiving love. Nothing is so sublime in God as His mercy. Moses said to the Lord, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Therein consisted His glory. See Him to-night in His loveliest attribute. Look at the cross, and the great sacrifice there, and see how God can love. There you see One divine enough to die for you. There is no reserve about the love you see manifested there. God Himself looks upon that exhibition of His love with profound satisfaction, and "commends" or "displays" it to us as the highest expression of His compassion. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

I have tried to impress upon you the fact that the figures presented to us in these verses are grandly expressive of Divine mercy; at the same time I would remind you that they are only figures. In them God is graciously pleased to adapt Himself to our imperfect comprehension of Divine things. He speaks to us as

we are able to bear. He condescends to utter heavenly truths in the poor language of earth. He teaches us in much the same way as we would teach little children. We know of nothing so high as the heavens; nothing so extensive as the distance of east from west; nothing so deep as the sea. God adapts Himself to our limited knowledge, and says, "So high, so broad, so deep, is my forgiving love." But even these figures only feebly convey the heavenly meaning. They give us a glimpse, however, of that compassion which is immeasurable; and He who has taught us thus far the rudiments of His love, will lead us on, if we meekly follow, to know more of Him and of the boundless wealth of His mercy in Jesus Christ. Happy are we, if, as willing disciples, we are continually led farther into the inner chamber of His fellowship, and by the intuitions of His Spirit, and the sympathies of a renewed and kindred nature, learn more than can be conveyed in words of His unutterable love. May God "grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might 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 Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

XI.

NO TEMPLE IN HEAVEN.

"And I saw no Temple therein."

—REV. xxi. 22.

IN this chapter we have a description of the heavenly Jerusalem which John saw in a vision. This was a vision specially adapted to a Jew. A holy city—a new Jerusalem—would be his highest conception of heaven. There are some details in this description, however, which would have greatly surprised a mere Jew. Among others are the words of our text. This new Jerusalem, unlike the old, has no temple. This is all the more strange because the temple was that which lent to the earthly Jerusalem its chief glory. It is true that as *a city* it was, in the days of our Lord, unsurpassed in splendour, even by Rome or Antioch. Herod had made it a city of palaces. But, apart from the temple, all this would have had but little attraction to the Jew. The history of the "Holy House" was inseparably connected with that of the "Holy City." When, in ancient times, David took the threshing floor of Araunah, he raised there an altar to God; and upon that very spot his son Solomon built the temple, which, as rebuilt by Herod the Great, surpassed in magnificence any structure of the ancient world. Standing upon its marble terraces, which rose the one above the other, and reflecting, by the gold which profusely adorned its cedar roof, the brightness of the eastern

sky, it formed the crowning glory of the city of the Great King. The effect which the sight of this "holy and beautiful house" produced upon the pilgrim throngs as it burst upon their view—especially upon those who came by the way of Olivet—must have been overwhelming. Among all the beautiful palaces of that city in the time of Herod, no building approached in splendour the house set apart for God. The highest ambition of the Emperor Justinian, 500 years after the destruction of the temple, was that he might succeed in erecting a structure to surpass it in magnificence and wealth.

It was not, however, the *magnificence* of the temple that charmed the true Jew most, as much as the *thrilling memories* connected with it. He called it not only "Our holy and beautiful house," but also the house "Where our fathers praised Thee." There was a pathos in this that touched the heart. For many centuries hundreds of thousands had come annually from all parts of the land into those gates "with thanksgiving," and into those courts "with praise." What would the history of Jerusalem be apart from the history of those solemn temple observances and gatherings, which had made the very city holy, and its dust sacred? Let the temple be taken away, and to the true Jew the glory would depart, and all the sacred associations which united the present to bygone days would vanish. Jerusalem would still have a past, but its present would be a painful blank. Jerusalem without a temple! That to the Jew would be synonymous with the saddest calamity that could befall the nation. Indeed, ever since Titus Vespasian laid low the walls of the city, and made Zion a wilderness, and Jerusalem a desolation, the bitterest of all tears have been shed over

the few stones of the ancient sanctuary which have survived the battering rams of Rome, and the wear and tear of time; and the most pathetic of all those touching utterances which they repeat over the ruins, are "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt Thou hold Thy peace and afflict us very sore?"

Now, remembering how inseparably connected the temple and Jerusalem were in the affections of the Jewish people, it is at least significant that in the vision which John had of the New Jerusalem, so soon after the destruction of the Old, he saw "no temple."

In order to understand the meaning of these words the better, we will enquire for a moment what truth the existence of the temple on earth was intended to convey. The question which Solomon asked at the dedication of the temple, "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" was a very comprehensive and opportune one. It was the question to which the temple he dedicated was a reply. In other words, the temple was the visible symbol of God's constant presence among His people—it was God's house. In the patriarchal age, God visited Abraham and other patriarchs in the form of a mysterious stranger. The truth intended to be conveyed was that God "*visited* His people." This sufficed for that particular age; but when Israel went out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and entered the wilderness to wander there for forty years, and to struggle with numerous and mighty foes, nought could make them strong but the assurance of God's *constant* presence. Hence the Lord said unto Moses, "Let them make me a

sanctuary, that *I may dwell among them.*" Thus, as long as the tabernacle remained it was a symbol to the nation of God's presence in the mysterious Sheckinah of the Holy of Holies. The Temple of Solomon symbolized precisely the same truth. It superseded the Tabernacle because it was a more costly and permanent symbol, and was accepted as such by God. Though Solomon was the one permitted to build this temple, yet David was the first to desire to build "a house of habitation" for God. The king dwelt in his palace, whilst the Lord abode in a tent. David devoutly vowed that he would not give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids until he found out a place for the Lord—a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. When at length the temple was completed, and Solomon offered his prayer of consecration to God, the closing petition, which included every other, was "Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into Thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of Thy strength." This temple upon Mount Moriah was thus set apart as a special dwelling-place for God.

The time at length arrived when this speciality ceased. Our Lord taught the world the great christian truth, for the reception of which all God's past teachings had prepared men, that God's presence was no longer confined to the Jewish Temple on Mount Moriah, or the Samaritan Sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, that all true worshippers should worship God in spirit and in truth. Christianity had made obsolete sacred places and holy mounts. Devotion would henceforth overstep all temple limits. The whole earth had become a sanctuary for God.

This teaching prepares us, as it did John, for the words of our text. We are not surprised to find that in heaven all imperfect symbols, even the temple, will vanish before

the reality. "I saw no temple therein," exclaimed John, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The Jewish temple, though it was a gorgeous symbol of God's presence among men, yet, like all other symbols, it necessarily limited the manifestation of that Holy Presence which it was intended to reveal. The temple has a prominent place in the history of God's progressive revelation of Himself, but just because the revelation of God is progressive, the temple had its day, and He who was greater than the temple remains, revealing Himself in other and superior ways; but even now the manifestations of God are limited by the conditions of our earthly existence—"We know in part, and we prophecy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The figure will not be required where the Great Reality will be seen. What need of the poor symbols of this dark world in the land of light! The Temple and temple services were given to the Jewish people as an aid to true devotion, and for the sustenance of their faith; and all the services and ordinances of the Gospel are given to us for the same end; but when, instead of seeing darkly through the medium of symbols, we shall see Him face to face, all else will vanish, He alone will absorb all our thoughts and affections. All ordinances will be superseded by the God of ordinances, and all indirect fellowship with Him through the types and symbols of this poor world, will find its consummation in the full and immediate communion of Heaven, where God will be all and in all.

Meanwhile, let us accept gratefully from our Lord the ordinances which He has given us for our good, but let

us beware of becoming more ritualistic than spiritual. In the earthly form may we trace the heavenly meaning. To some extent symbols are necessary for us here; and our Lord has provided for this necessity of our present state by instituting two ordinances in His church—Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Let us observe them implicitly, and seek to learn the great truths which they are intended to represent and convey; never assuming that we can improve upon what He has done, either by ignoring the ordinances which He has appointed as aids to our faith here, or by adding others which have never received His approval, but which we may think would be a beautiful addition. He who made us knows full well how weak we are, and how far we need visible ordinances for our spiritual enlightenment and sustenance; let us not daringly presume to know more or better than He. We need these helps to devotion here; but when through their instrumentality we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, we shall need them no longer, and we shall not have them then.

Brethren, the time is coming when even *His* ordinances, so necessary for us here, will pass away, and we shall enter that land where all will be pure devotion, unsullied by aught that is earthly. No temple (much less any cross or crucifix) will intercept our view of Him who died for us; but lifting our grateful eyes to the throne, we shall see Him "*only*" whose presence will fill all heaven.

XII.

THE ADVENT OF OUR LORD.

The First Homily.

"Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?"

—2 Chron. vi. 18.

THE blank page between the Old and New Testaments represents a silence of four hundred years—a period of breathless calm, without any prophetic voice or heavenly vision to break upon the monotony. According to the generally received chronology, the year B.C., 397, marks the latest utterance of Malachi, the last of the prophets, and witnesses the close of the Old Testament Canon. During the silence of centuries which followed the utterance of the words, "Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," it would seem as if the Lord was "slack concerning His promise," as if all communication between heaven and earth had at length ceased, and the voice of God would no longer be heard among men. This was a period when, in a pre-eminent degree "the word of God was precious" (in the sense of being *scarce*), "and there was no open vision."

In the long past there had, however, been other gaps in the history of Divine Revelation, but never of such a length as this, and hitherto the break had in every instance ushered in a fuller communication than any which had preceded it. The history of

Israel in Egypt, after the death of Joseph, was the history of a period of silence relieved by no Divine revelation. The God who had appeared in vision to the patriarchs had withdrawn His presence. Israel was under the hoof of the tyrant, and there was apparently no God to hear the cry of the oppressed people, and none to deliver. But the silence of centuries was at length broken by a voice addressing Moses from the burning bush on Horeb. Hitherto God had revealed Himself to the patriarchs in *human form*, as a mysterious stranger, in order to teach His personality—that He was a *Being*, and not a mere principle or law; *now* He revealed Himself by the symbol of fire—a fire which did not consume. Moses was thus brought face to face with the supernatural character of God; he had now to learn that God's existence was not subject to the conditions and limitations of our human life. Further, in God's presence, Moses was now commanded to put off his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. Deeply impressed with this new revelation of God, he bowed with awe in the presence of perfect holiness, and "hid his face, *for he was afraid to look upon God.*" Again, from the burning bush, God called Himself by a new name—"I AM THAT I AM"—an expansion of the incommunicable name Jehovah, denoting the *self-existence* and *permanency* of His Being. This was subsequently referred to by the Lord to Moses with emphasis. "God spake unto Moses and said unto him, 'I am the LORD (JEHOVAH); and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name of* God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.'" In the word JEHOVAH are combined the terminations and affixes of the past and

future tenses of the verb *to be*, thus intimating that with Him who bears that name there is neither a past nor a future, but all is one eternal present. Here, then, the long and profound hush was preparatory to, and immediately preceding, a sublimer revelation of God than had ever been previously given. The silence in that period when Samuel was a child, when "The word of the Lord was precious, and there was no open vision," ushered in a new era—the prophetic—an era made illustrious by the grandest succession of holy men that the world has ever known. In like manner, throughout the history of God's dealings with His chosen people, His silences in every instance prepared the way for fuller communications. What if after the utterances of Malachi, the last of the prophets, this silence of four centuries was intended to give emphasis to the message which would follow? This would be in perfect harmony with the past, and therefore faith had not altogether died out of the nation; there were a few still who lived lives of expectancy, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." And even in the great heart of humanity there was at this time a mysterious and indescribable expectation. The nations were big with hope. Never had the world's expectation been so intense as now, and yet mankind knew not why. Almost every civilized people were in a state of high tension; the whole world looked for a great event, and a great personage. When will the "desire of all nations" come? "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" At length the question of ages is answered as an angelic voice breaks upon the silence of night in the greeting to lowly shepherds, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,

which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you : ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." This message of the angel forms but the prelude to the "Gloria in Excelsis" of the angelic host who accompany Him: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." In heavenly strains is the fulfilment of all prophecy announced. The hope of the best and noblest of the past is realized, and the realization is an ample reward for all the waiting.

I have said that at this time faith had not altogether died out of the nation, notwithstanding that the last four hundred years (as far as supplying them with material for hope was concerned) had been a blank. That faith survived even this is not surprising. *All* their history had not been a blank; they had all the revelations of the past to sustain them. The Mosaic religion, too, being highly typical, and the long succession of prophetic utterances pointing forward to a great future, all these breathed a spirit of sanguine expectation into the heart of the people. It would be *strange* if, with such a history as theirs, and with such great and precious promises in their possession as those which had been given them, even four centuries of gloom would quench all the hope that four times as many more centuries of light had kindled. This expectation however, once so ardent, had lost much of its intensity. Prophets had all along spoken of the Messiah who was to appear. When would the fulfilment come to reward faith, and silence all doubt? "Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things

continue as they were?" would be the question naturally asked by the sceptical and weak in faith. To this question the exclamation of the angel, "*Behold*, I bring you good tidings of great joy," immediately succeeded by the "Gloria in Excelsis" of the heavenly host, was the Divine reply.

Prior, however, to the appearance of the angels to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, there had been two other appearances; the first to Zacharias, the priest, as he was offering incense in the temple; the second to Mary, at Nazareth.

To the aged Zacharias was given the promise of a son in whom the old prophetic character—so long departed from the nation—was to be renewed in all its ancient vigour and rugged grandeur. This son was to be "great in the sight of the Lord," was to be a Nazarite from the womb, was to "drink neither wine nor strong drink," but—invigorated with a diviner energy—was "to be filled with the Holy Ghost." He would "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God," and would "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, * * * to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This promise of a son to the aged priest was a test of faith similar to that given to Abraham long before, but it was not so great a test. Zacharias had the narrative of Abraham's life to learn from, and the fulfilment of God's promise to the patriarch recorded, with which to sustain his faith. When faith as yet was in its infancy in the world, Abraham believed *without precedent;* he "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but he was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Zacharias, *with precedent*, and all the materials for faith with which the

history of bygone ages supplied him, failed in the hour of promise to believe God at His word. "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years," was the exclamation of a man who had spent a life-time among the altars of the temple, but withal had not learnt to trust his God. The sign given—which was also a punishment for the faltering of faith, at a time when it should be strong—was an enforced silence, which would continue until the hour of the fulfilment of the promise. "The angel answering, said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

Six months later the same angel appeared unto Mary at Nazareth, and hailed her as the "highly favoured" of the Lord and "blessed among women." He announced to her that she was to be the mother of the long-looked for Messiah. Though of humble circumstances, Mary was of royal descent, and now in the dark days of adversity which had befallen her family, and dimmed its lustre, there was to be fulfilled through her the promise given in brighter days. The hope which her ancestors had cherished upon the throne was to find its fulfilment in the manger! Mary could scarcely realize her high destiny in a moment; a strange perplexity preceded her confiding acceptance of her mission. The promise to her was a far greater test of faith than the promise to Zacharias. Greater because the promise was greater, and also because the

circumstances connected with its fulfilment were still more perplexing, and any possible misgiving much more painful. Humanly speaking, Zacharias was asked to believe in the *improbable;* Mary in the *impossible.* "How shall this be?" was the question she asked, with a sincere but trembling faith – *trembling* because the overwhelming surprise brought with it a shudder, and a strange misgiving mingled with her joy. It was an announcement which would have made a weaker faith stagger. Great promises, whose fulfilment verge on the *impossible,* require great natures to receive them. Mary's faith paused over a message which seemed to demand belief in the impossible. "When she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." The angel's reply to her hesitation is full of delicacy and mysterious grandeur. He taught her that impossibility was a relative term, and lifted her to the higher elevation of faith when he exclaimed, "With God nothing shall be impossible." This had been told Abraham in a similar circumstance, and since then had been often repeated. It was a truth that needed repetition, that God's energy is not hedged in by the limitations and restrictions of human life. Mary at length believed and accepted the promise with a faith which dared believe all that God would speak, as she exclaimed, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word."

The angel departed, and Mary went "with haste" to the hill-country, whither Elizabeth had already retired. Here there is a touch of nature exquisitely beautiful. She went "with haste" to tell the news too great for one heart to contain, as well as to talk over the secret which pertained to *both* women, and which,

therefore, could be shared by them without breaking upon the confidence of heaven. In Mary's "haste" we have the impatience of a joyful and grateful spirit to express its joy and to tell its secret, as far as it was lawful. It was to her a thrilling thought that she was destined to be the recipient of the greatest privilege which heaven could bestow upon a Jewish mother, and that in her child were to be fulfilled all that the best and holiest of the past had looked forward to, and hoped for. Was there ever a mother's joy so ecstatic? Does the *haste* surprise us? Have we not thought rather, how trying the prolonged silence on the way must have been?

On her arrival she was hailed by Elizabeth as "Blessed among women." Elizabeth, at the outset, subordinated her joy to that of her kinswoman. In her greeting there was not the faintest whisper of envy. "Blessed is she that believed," were the words in which she, with beautiful delicacy, contrasted Mary's faith with the unbelief of Zacharias. In her dumb husband she saw a living testimony of how sad a thing it was to cherish a doubt when God utters His choicest promises; and in the exultant Mary, how blessed a thing it was ever to believe God at His word. In response to the greeting of Elizabeth, Mary, from the depths of an inspired heart, breathed forth her "*Magnificat*," "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour." Other holy women had sung God's praises in the past. Miriam and Deborah had been inspired with song. Another mother, too, had, ages since, sung a hymn of gratitude much like this in word and sentiment, as she consecrated *her* child of promise to the Lord. What if Hannah's song was anticipatory of

Mary's! Why should not the most exalted lyrics of the Old Dispensation, like its prophecies and ceremonies, find their highest fulfilment in the christian! Is it surprising that the Mary of the New Testament should find her prototype in the Hannah of the Old, and that the sublime song of Hannah should be sublimer still on Mary's lips!

The meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, the two honoured above all women, must have been a very touching one. Had ever two mothers met before to share such a joy as this? What wonder if at this hour Mary was lifted above the level of ordinary feeling into an atmosphere which prophets and psalmists had breathed. We recognize in Mary the woman, *only the woman*, nevertheless one whose song was an inspiration, and who, with all the tender sensitiveness of woman's nature, sang in more ecstatic strains than the inspired men of the past.

The hope which had sustained ancient saints, and had been the inspiring theme of the prophets of olden times, culminated in the thrilling song of Mary, in whose Great Son the choicest promises of God, and the most eager longings of the holiest of men would find their fulfilment. Mary's song was the climax of Jewish expectation.

So far we have referred only to hopes and events prior to the advent; in the next discourse we shall dwell upon the fulfilment of these hopes in the birth of our Lord and the circumstances connected with it.

XIII.

THE ADVENT OF OUR LORD.

The Second Homily.

"Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?"
—2 Chron. vi. 18.

"They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."
—Matthew i. 23.

PROPHECY had pointed to Bethlehem Ephratah as the birthplace of the Messiah. The circumstances which brought about the fulfilment of this prophecy are furnished by Luke in his Gospel. "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. *And* this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." (Luke ii. 1, 2.)

It is not easy to understand these words. Was this a decree to *enrol* or to *tax?* The Greek word admits of either meaning. It is scarcely probable that the word is used here in *both* meanings, as some assert—that in the first verse it refers to the *enrolment* (or *registration)* which took place about this time, and that in the second verse the same word refers to the *taxation* which we know took place eleven years later, when Quirinius, or "Cyrenius," was pro-consul of Syria, and when Judæa (on the banishment of Archelaus) became a Roman province. Again—assuming that the word bears the *same* meaning in both verses—it is impossible that "in

those days" an edict should go forth from Augustus to *tax* Judæa, as Judæa was at this time an allied state of Rome under Herod, and not a Roman province, and therefore not subject to Roman *taxation.* It is more than probable that this was a general decree for a *registration*—a decree which would not call forth the protest of allied states, but at the same time one that would prepare the way for a future taxation, at which Rome was secretly aiming. Admitting this, these verses will readily bear two constructions; the one, that the first verse refers to the *decree* for enrolment, and the second verse to the time when this decree was *fully executed* eleven years later; the other construction is, that both verses refer to the same period, and therefore to an enrolment (or *registration)* decreed and carried out at the time of our Lord's birth, when Quirinius was for the *first* time (for it is held by some that he was twice) pro-consul of Syria, and before Judæa had become a Roman province.

Whichever of these two explanations we accept, one thing seems certain, that it was in obedience to the decree of Augustus for a *registration* that Joseph—in accordance with the *Jewish* mode of taking a census—went to Bethlehem, his and Mary's ancestral city, to be enrolled. He took Mary with him, not because it was legally necessary—for the Jewish mode of registration, unlike the Roman, did *not* require the attendance of women; but probably because Mary naturally desired to accompany him on this visit to the city of her royal ancestors. Other considerations, too, peculiar to her circumstances, doubtless presented themselves. Luke continues: "It was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And

she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

This reference to an "inn," in connection with the birth of our Lord, opens to us an important chapter in Jewish history. The "inn" or khan was an ancient institution in the land. The Lord had in the Law enjoined hospitality to the stranger; as the result, during the more primitive period of the nation's history, every Jew considered it an honour, as well as a sacred duty, to entertain the stranger who sought shelter at the gate of his town. With the increase of population, however, there grew up among them an increasing demand upon their hospitality. Consequently the sheikh, or the chief, of every town or village was deputed by the inhabitants to entertain all strangers, for which he received an annual payment from the community. But even this became burdensome; finally, the chief of each town was authorized to erect a public building, and thus to provide for travellers—not food as in former times, but shelter and water free, or for a mere nominal charge. The expenses incurred were to be met by an annual tax. These "inns" differed greatly in appearance and dimensions; some were simple enclosures, and others spacious and massive structures. There can be no doubt that the "inn" of Bethlehem was one of the most important in the land. Bethlehem was the first halting place on the way from Jerusalem to Egypt, and as such must have supplied large accommodation.

We may also fairly conclude that the "inn" at Bethlehem was similar to those which still exist in Palestine, and which are variously described by

travellers as square enclosures, substantially built, and consisting within of recesses which are raised all round a few feet above the level of the enclosed yard. These recesses are occupied by travellers. In the smaller "inns" their beasts of burden occupy the enclosed area, whilst the larger "inns" are provided with stables, which, as a rule, are between the lodging apartments and the outer wall. When Joseph and Mary arrived at Bethlehem, the apartments used by travellers were all occupied—there was no room in the "inn." There was nothing left for them but to occupy, as modern travellers have often done, that part of the building originally intended for the travellers' beasts of burden. It was in such a place that the Saviour of the world was born!

Nothing of the ancient "inn" or khan of Bethlehem remains, and we can only point to the possible, or, at the utmost, the probable place of our Lord's birth. That the Church of the Nativity now occupies the site is not altogether improbable. Justin Martyr, who was born in the second century, at Nabulus, or Shechem, and who was, therefore, familiar with the traditions of the country in his day, tells us that Jesus was born in "a cave" near Bethlehem. The fervent Jerome, too, lived for years in a cave near to that which he believed to be the birthplace of his Lord. The cave in which Jerome lived is now joined by a subterraneous passage to the one beneath the Church of the Nativity. The land of Palestine abounded with caverns in the rock, and at this time those caverns were frequently used as dwelling places, and as far as we can learn, often formed a part of the khans or "inns" of the country. Whether our Lord's birthplace was one of the many caverns in the limestone rock of Bethlehem, and which

may have formed a part of the ancient khan, or not, is a question of small moment; we at least know sufficient from the history of the country to correct many of the false impressions we had in earlier days concerning the manger, with its sheep and oxen, and for that we are grateful.

The lowly birth was announced by angels to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. These shepherds had for centuries been famous. They had a history which reached back over a thousand years, as far as David the shepherd boy, who slew a lion and a bear in rescuing a lamb of his flock. With all the memories of the past to inspire them, and surrounded in their daily avocations by deep gorges, where wild beasts lurked, ever ready to pounce upon their prey—only kept back by the fear of the shepherd's staff (Psalm xxiii. 4)—and constantly beset by Arab robbers watching for every opportunity to carry away the sheep of the flock, these honest shepherds developed a courage which distinguished them. The peculiar danger of their situation rendered, too, all the more necessary the continuance of the primitive style of shepherd life, that of "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock," a custom which endeared the shepherd to his sheep, and the sheep to their shepherd. But shepherds had before now been blessed with angelic visions. The angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses "in a flame of fire," when he kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. The Lord had also chosen David His servant and taken him "from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance." Indeed, all the Old Dispensation seemed to testify how near heaven was to shepherds.

That the angels of the Lord appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem as they watched their sheep is, therefore, in sublime harmony with the preceding history of divine revelations. Nevertheless, this visit of the angels to the shepherds is full of mystery. The very fact that angels should announce a birth apparently so obscure was itself mysterious. The announcement, too, was fraught with contrasts. "The Saviour which is Christ the Lord," was a "babe in swaddling clothes"; the Anointed of heaven, whose birth was an event for the world, and important enough for angels to proclaim, was born in "a manger." Already the shepherds have to witness the paradox of that wonderful life which began in the manger, and after a career of cross-bearing, closed in the ascending cloud.

While angels announced the birth to lowly shepherds a "star"* appeared to the "wise men" of the east. In each case the revelation was adapted to the recipients—to the shepherds a vision and a song, to the Magi a star. Stars had throughout the ages been preachers of the Invisible. The heavens had declared the glory of God, and the firmament shewed His handiwork. The Lord had left no people without witness; the heavens spoke in a speech free from the distinctions of our world's dialects, and which, therefore, every nation could

* Although I am disposed to accept the theory of Kepler, so ably maintained by Dean Alford and others, that this refers to three conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces, followed by their conjunction with Mars, the subsequent spring, in the same constellation; events which took place in the year of Rome 747-8, and which seem to present in detail a remarkable coincidence with the narrative in Matthew; nevertheless, such are the difficulties connected with this theory, as with other theories propounded, that in this sermon I have thought it better to adhere to the simple wording of the text.

understand. There was no speech nor language where their voice was not heard. The "wise men" of the east saw, listened, and acknowledged the voice of stars to be divine; they recognized this star as the messenger of God, and to such faithful followers it became a guide to lead them to the Christ.

Thus the birth was announced not to the chief priests and scribes, but to those who, with hearts more sincere, watched their flocks by night, and to those who, with spirits more devout, looked up to the heavens for guidance. The shepherds were nearer heaven, and received sublimer revelations, in watching sheep, than the priests in burning incense. As many revelations, and as great, had been received in fields as in temples. Jerusalem was now destitute of the visions of the fields of Bethlehem, and the bigoted Rabbis and busy merchants were ignorant of the news which from angelic lips reached the ears of peasant shepherds. Herod, too, sought in vain the young child; while a "star" was sent to guide the sincere pilgrims from the east; those who sought after God, as best they could, according to the light given them; those disciples of Zoroaster who saw God in the stars, and the Divine in every luminary, who believed that *God was light;* and thus by earnest seeking had received a glimpse of the truth to be revealed so fully in Him whom they had now come to worship.

Very different were the agencies which brought the shepherds and the Magi to the Christ; but the result is one: shepherds bow, and the wise men place their costly offerings at the *same* feet.

Having paid their homage, the shepherds returned to the fields, and the "wise men," in obedience to the vision, "departed into their country another way," and

we hear no more of either the shepherds or the Magi. That we should hear no more of the latter is specially surprising, yet this seems to harmonize with the meagre reference made to them at the outset. Their names have not been given, nor their calling, nor even the name of the country whence they came. From other sources we find that the Magi were originally a sacerdotal body of great influence in the Persian and Babylonian Courts, but that subsequently the name was more generally applied to Eastern philosophers, especially to the disciples of Zoroaster, who, from the very nature of their religion, united with it the study of astrology. Hence, various have been the conjectures as to the exact country whence they came to Bethlehem—Arabia, Persia, Babylonia, Egypt, have all been mentioned. Parthia has been referred to by others as the most probable, because there the largest portion of the ten tribes had remained, and therefore a stronger expectation of the Messiah would exist there than in any other eastern country. All these things, however, we are left to gather from external information. The Gospels are, on these points, profoundly silent. The "wise men" are suddenly lost in the obscurity whence they only for a moment emerged. Like the star which led them, they disappear from our view. A feeling of disappointment comes over us as we lose sight of those great men who surprised us by their sudden and imposing appearance. Tradition has done its utmost to satisfy our curiosity by supplying us with the names and number of the "wise men," who, it assures us, were kings. Three skulls are still exhibited in the Roman Catholic Cathedral, at Cologne, to those whose innocence enables them to believe such things, as the veritable skulls of the

three kings, Melchior, Caspar, Belthazar, who placed each his gift—gold, frankincense, myrrh—at the feet of the Holy Child. Fortunately for the exhibitors the skulls cannot tell their own story.

No greater contrast can be presented to the elaborate details of tradition on this subject than the unbroken silence of the inspired record. It is not the aim of the Gospels to record the lives of the Magi, but the life of a Diviner One, and theirs become sufficiently interesting and instructive for a place in the sacred narrative only at that point in which they come into contact with His. This applies generally. No sooner do the angels announce His birth in song, the star lead to His feet, the "wise men" and shepherds render to Him their homage, and Simeon and Anna give to Him their testimony, than they all disappear, and we, lifting up our eyes, see "No man, save Jesus only."

With the names of Simeon and Anna is associated an event which probably took place previous to the arrival of the Magi, in Bethlehem, and which occupies a prominent position in the record of our Lord's birth and of the circumstances attending it. I refer to the service of purification and of presentation in the temple. According to the Levitical Law the mother was unclean for forty days after the birth of a son, and for eighty days after the birth of a daughter.

On the expiration of the forty days Mary appeared in the temple, and, with others who sought purification, presented herself at the gate of Nicanor, at the top of the fifteen steps, ascending which the Levites were wont to chant the fifteen Psalms of Degrees. At length one of the officiating priests would offer the sacrifice which (or the equivalent of which) Mary brought. The

ordinary offering on such occasions was a yearling lamb for a burnt offering and a young turtle dove, or pigeon, for a sin-offering; but Mary's circumstances necessitated her availing herself of the special provision made in the Levitical Law for the poor, that they should bring "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons."

This humble sacrifice having been offered, the priest, returning to her, would pronounce her clean, as he sprinkled upon her the blood of the sacrifice. Then followed another part of the service. The circumcision had already taken place on the eighth day, but now the child was to be presented to the Lord. He claimed the eldest son of every family as His own possession, in remembrance of the destroying angel sparing the first-born of Israel previous to their exodus from Egypt. (Ex. xiii. 12; xxii. 29; Num. viii. 17.) In the charge, however, given to the Levites (Num. xviii. 16), who were set apart for the service of God's house as an offering unto the Lord, instead of the eldest sons of the nation (Num. viii. 13-17), it was enjoined that each first-born son should be redeemed from the necessity of temple service by the payment of "five shekels, after the shekels of the sanctuary." This sum was equivalent to eleven shillings and sixpence of our money; silver at that time, however, being much more valuable than in our day, the relative value of this sum would be about ten times its modern value. This would be a very considerable sum for any one in Mary's circumstances, but it was intended as a substantial acknowledgment of God's great mercy toward the nation in their exodus from the land of bondage.

The "five shekels" of silver having been given by Mary for the exemption of her son from temple service,

she descended the fifteen steps of the Levites to the platform below, called Chel, and thence descended by five steps more to the Court of the Women, where the ordinary worshippers had been assembled. It was here, probably, and at the close of the morning service, that Simeon took the child into his arms. Many have been the conjectures concerning Simeon. All that we know we learn from Luke. He tells us that he was "a just and devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel," and that "the Holy Ghost was upon him." He was one of the few spiritual Israelites of his day, a just and devout man in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. He, together with Anna, Zacharias, Nicodemus, Nathanael, and a few others, presented noble exceptions to the degenerate lives of this period. We are told concerning Simeon that he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The Old Dispensation was a dispensation of waiting. Thus far was Simeon a representative of bygone worthies, but, unlike them, it was his to obtain the promise. He, the last of waiting saints, brought to a close the waiting of centuries; and, as he received the Son of Promise into his arms, offered from the depths of an inspired soul the *Nunc Dimittis* to God, "Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." *His* eyes had *seen* what generations of saints had been *looking for*. He had witnessed the consummation of Israel's hope. It is ever gratifying to see a veteran, as he totters on the verge of the grave, exult in the realization of a life-long hope, and desiring to close his eyes in the possession of it. Such was the scene in the temple when the aged Simeon, receiving into his arms the child Jesus, acknowledged this moment as the most blessed of his

life, and desired now to "depart in peace." It is also ever interesting to see childhood and old age in loving embrace—the one entering the world and the other leaving it; but *this* is a sight surpassingly interesting—the saint embraces his Saviour, and in this one embrace is realized all that the best and wisest had hoped for.

At this moment Simeon, inspired with the spirit of prophecy—so long departed from the nation—exclaimed to Mary, "Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"—words which presented a startling paradox and painful mystery to Mary and Joseph, but which Mary, at least, would learn to understand more clearly by and by; first of all during the thirty years of strange silence and obscurity, and therefore of anxious suspense, which followed this, when faith struggled hard with disappointments; then during the public period of Our Lord's life, as the shadow of His cross fell athwart her path, to become more and more distinct in its outline as the "hour" drew nigh; and finally, when she, with all the weakness and yet with all the persistency of womanhood, her heart throbbing meanwhile with a mother's love stronger than death, stood at the very foot of the cross, and upon it saw her own Son of Promise, around whom had clustered her devoutest hopes, die. It was *then* that she understood the *full* meaning of those words of the inspired old man, uttered in the temple thirty-three years previous, "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

One other person comes into prominence on this occasion—"Anna, a prophetess of the tribe of Aser,"

an obscure person belonging to the obscurest of the tribes of Israel. This one event brings into prominent relief a tribe which in the past had been distinguished for nothing very praiseworthy or noted connected with any of its number. It would seem as if the birth of Him who came to raise up the fallen, and to succour the neglected and despised, must hold a special relationship with obscure men and women. Excepting Herod, who is only introduced to us as a baffled tyrant, all who come into prominence in the inspired record of Our Lord's birth are men and women comparatively obscure; they are severally designated as "a certain priest, named Zacharias, of the course of Abia, and his wife of the daughters of Aaron, named Elizabeth;" "shepherds abiding in the field;" "wise men from the east;" "a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon;" and "one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser."

Anna, like Simeon, was aged, she was in that period of life when serving God in the temple became a welcome exercise. Her day was fast drawing to a close; her's, like Simeon's, was the eventide of life, when the heat and glare of the day are gone, when the anxious brow is cooled, and the calmness of evening soothes and matures the soul. In her devotion we trace the *persistency* of woman's faith. Unlike Simeon, who on this occasion "came by the Spirit into the temple," and thus to whom this would be a *special* visit, she "*departed not* from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Whether we understand by this that she always remained in the temple, or that she was constant at all the temple services night and day, the fact remains that her faith, though not more intense,

was more importunate than Simeon's. It is *woman's* faith as compared with *man's*. The same persistency is traceable in the fact that she "spake of Him (Jesus) to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." The woman of four score and four years of age became an active messenger for the infant Christ!

This, then, was the hour of realization to the two who had dared hope in God's promises, even when all events seemed to mock that hope. Upon the graves of bygone saints could be written but one epitaph, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off;" but these two aged saints saw with their eyes, looked upon, and their hands handled the Word of life. What wonder if on this occasion Simeon and Anna were inspired with song! There is an ecstacy of feeling which cannot be expressed in prose; only the most sacred and exalted poetry can give it utterance; hence religion has its lyrics, as well as its sermons and prayers. The New Dispensation was ushered in by song, as the Old was by thunder. And these inaugurating lyrics of the Christian Dispensation have lost none of their freshness or their beauty. The song of Anna is not recorded; but the songs of Mary, of Zacharias, of the angels, and of Simeon, have been handed down to us as the earliest of Christian psalms; and still do they form a part of sacred psalmody, and still do they express the highest aspirations, and the devoutest feelings that can throb in the human heart.

Few, however, were those whom the news of Christ's birth inspired with song. The great mass of mankind were asleep to the fact that an event so world-wide in its importance had taken place, and the great majority of even those who heard the news were moved by other

emotions than those of joy. Various and conflicting were the feelings cherished concerning this birth. While angels sang "Glory to God," and a few waiting saints in Jerusalem poured forth their gratitude to the Highest, Herod, the king, no sooner heard the question asked by the devout Magi from the East, "Where is He that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him," than "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." The phrase, "King of the Jews," filled the ambitious tyrant with alarm, and that, since alarm makes demons of tyrants, sent a terror through all the capital. Herod, calling together to his aid the chief priests and scribes—the theologians of the day, whom he had on former occasions ridiculed and set at nought, but whom he would now use as tools to further his ambitious cunning—he enquired of them the predicted place of the Messiah's birth. Their united reply was "Bethlehem Judæa." Then, calling the "wise men" aside, Herod enquired of them minutely the time the star appeared, and, hiding a cruel and deceptive spirit beneath the cloak of reverence to the new-born king, he dismissed them to Bethlehem with the words, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also."

So early in Gospel narrative do we trace in the person of Herod a deadly hatred, linked with the most contemptible hypocrisy, against Christ. He who had already, in defiance of all natural feeling, murdered the last heirs of the kings and priests of the Maccabæan dynasty, one of whom was Aristobulus, the nephew of his wife Mariamne, thus completing the downfall of that

dynasty and establishing his own, the Idumæan; now secretly planned the destruction of the young child of the royal house of David. But the confiding and unsuspicious pilgrims, "being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, departed (or *escaped)* into their own country another way." To Joseph, too, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." Thus was the child preserved from the sword of the ruthless monarch. God gave His angels charge concerning His Annointed, and, by His miraculous interposition, baffled the cruel tyrant in his diabolic cunning.

Herod, frustrated in his purpose, and suffering at this time from that fatal disease in which all that was worst in him, physical and moral, found its fullest development, ordered the massacre of all the infants of two years of age and under in Bethlehem and the neighbourhood, determined, at any cost, to slay the "King of the Jews." Josephus makes no mention of this. This fact has surprised some. It should be remembered, however, that Josephus was not a contemporary, and that this act, painful as it was, was so insignificant when compared with the far greater atrocities of Herod's reign,—for the number of children slain in so small a village *could not* have exceeded twenty-five or thirty,—that it would be easily overlooked by a historian who had before him the record of more shocking cruelties. Suffice it to say that this act is in perfect keeping with the general character of that man whose inordinate ambition could only be equalled by his cruelty, and who,

throughout his life, set at nought all the sacred feelings of kindred, friendship, and humanity. He who ascended the throne by wading his way through blood, and who during his tyrannic reign sacrificed to his cruel passions his nearest relatives, as well as his most inveterate foes, was just the man who, in a fit of anger and jealousy, would order the general massacre of the infants of Bethlehem. He who not only sacrificed the lives of brother-in-law, father-in-law, and mother-in-law; but also by mock trial condemned to death Mariamne, his wife, toward whom he professed the strongest attachment; who then destroyed the two sons she bore him, Alexander and Aristobulus; who also among the last acts of his reign sent to Rome for permission to slay his eldest son, Antipater; whose last earthly comfort was to receive such permission from Augustus only a few days before his death; and who withal could only satisfy his cruel ambition and selfishness by ordering the massacre of all the nobles of Israel—whom he had already summoned to Jericho—at the moment of his death, so that *that* day might be a day of sorrowing, and not of rejoicing, was quite capable of sending forth from his very death-bed a decree to slay all the tender infants of this obscure village. Fearful was the end of that man who, as his weakness grew upon him, became more diabolic. With terrible rapidity did he in his last days descend to the lowest depths of crime and misery. A cruel and godless life culminated in a loathsome and terrible death. The fearful retribution of his own sin overwhelmed him. To use the language of Scripture concerning another Herod, who died of the same horrible disease, "The angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." God's curse was upon him, and that was curse enough!

None of the horrors of the massacre of the infants are depicted in the sacred narrative; such things are better untold; hence the simple fact only is given. There is a quotation, however, taken from the prophecy of Jeremiah, which, on the lips of the prophet, referred to the time of the captivity, but which now received a new significance. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, whose tomb was near Bethlehem, and whose memory had for ages been highly reverenced by its women, is made to personify the sorrowing village. She is represented as "weeping for her children," and refusing to "be comforted because they are not." One harsh decree from the lips of a tyrant, reckless and diabolic even in the dying hour, has filled her with a sorrow which nought can silence. *The Holy* Child has escaped Herod's fury, but many an *innocent* one, the darling of its mother, has become a victim to the sword; and from many an aching heart in that small village there ascends to heaven the cry of motherly agony, which will not be silenced till it has reached the ear of God, and until He has poured the balm of His comfort into the spirit, to appease its sorrow and its suffering.

Thus the story of the Saviour's birth tells not only of lowly adoration and grateful praise on the part of the few who were led to His feet, but also of the bitterest hatred and the most murderous designs against the Christ on the part of others who would not receive Him. In this respect the birth was prophetic of the life that would follow.

The subject of our next discourse will be—The World's Rejection of the Incarnate Son of God.

XIV.

THE ADVENT OF OUR LORD.

[THE THIRD HOMILY.]

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

—JOHN i. 11.

IT is thus that the "beloved disciple" sums up the story of our Lord's Advent into the world and of His rejection by men. It is the summary of *the Great Refusal* told with a rich pathos. It was no unimportant thing to John that the men of his day had not received his Lord. He who spoke these words was swayed by a mighty emotion when he uttered them. It is not one of those utterances which cost the speaker nothing, or next to nothing, but an utterance in which heart force is thrown into every word. We are told that every physical effort means the combustion of certain particles of our system. What a consumption of energy did the utterance of the first eighteen verses of this chapter cost John! The zeal of the Christ seems to consume him by its very intensity. John must have felt the exhaustion consequent upon such thrilling utterances as these,—as if indeed "virtue" had gone out of him. What a grand thing to be absorbed, and to be spent, by a great theme!

But what is it that attaches such interest and meaning to these words of John, uttered eighteen hundred years ago? It is that the significance of the event referred to

is not confined to that age in which it occurred. This is the statement in a few words of a historic fact which has a message for all time. The interest of that birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, lives to-day in the world, and will never pass away from men. Everything that the Evangelists can tell of Jesus, of His utterances and life, and of the treatment He received of men, awakens the most profound interest in the hearts of men to-day in all lands and climes where His name has been proclaimed. We desire to know all that inspired men can tell us of that wonderful Advent, and of the circumstances attending it.

In our text we have one of those brief summaries of the story of the Incarnation and Life of our Lord which are to be found here and there in the Gospels. It represents the Divine and the human side of the story of the Advent. All the events of time have these two sides. The history of the past is made up of Divine and human operations—operations which are often antagonistic, but which are ever connected. God and man have been coming into contact with each other in all ages. It is the province of the historian to recognize this fact and to trace its significance. He is no true historian who *only sees man* like a huge colossus astride the gulph of time. Had the Bible been given us for no other purpose than of teaching us how history should be written, it would still be an incalculable blessing.

We have tried to shew in the two preceding discourses that in the leading events recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament, God's will was gradually revealed, and His gracious plans gradually unfolded; that in all the ages of the Old Dispensation

there was a progressiveness of Revelation—a continual approaching of the Divine to the human, until at length, and in the fulness of time, God became manifest in the flesh and tabernacled with men. During all this time the approaches of God awakened different feelings in the hearts of men, and even the Advent of Christ was not only the occasion of lowly adoration, but also of bitter hatred. We have seen that the story of His birth includes the name of Herod, who sought His life, as well as the mention of shepherds and wise men, who came to worship Him. So, in the record of the life which followed, we trace much more of hatred than of love. A few lowly men and women received Him, so that at the close of His earthly career He had a discipleship numbering one hundred and twenty. But what were these among so many? The great bulk of those who had heard Him speak the words of life rejected Him as a fanatic or an impostor: they would not go unto Him that they might have life.

We shall consider—

I. The Divine Advent.

II. The Human Rejection.

1. *The Divine Advent.* This is the record of a Divine approach; an approach surpassing in condescension everything that had been heard of before, but yet one holding a very close and sacred relationship with other Divine movements which had preceded. This was an Advent unlike every other, yet it represented no momentary impulse of Divine tenderness. It was that toward which all the ages had been moving and all the rites and prophecies of the Old Dispensation, as well as

God's providential dealings with other nations, had been preparing the way. The phraseology of the Evangelist intimates that before now God had not stood aloof from man. There are some spoken of here as "His own." Whether we accept these words as referring to the chosen race, or in the more general sense to the human family, they come to us as a great truth. If we accept these words—"His own"—in the more general sense as applying to the human family, we shall find that the history of God's dealings with mankind, previous to our Lord's Advent, illustrates how during all ages He never ceased to care for the human family, or ceased to mature the purposes of His love concerning our race. Even in that hour when God called Abram out of the Ur of the Chaldees, and when the Sacred Record ceases to speak of the human race in its entirety, but narrows the scope of its observation to a chosen man and his descendants; *then*, when the love of God would seem at first sight to shrink within narrow limits because of the ingratitude and iniquity of the race, we have only to listen to those wondrous words which God uttered to Abram in order to have all our misgivings removed. Even *then*, the aim of God was *the blessing of the whole race.* The Lord said unto Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land which I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: *And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*—(Gen. xii. 1—3.) *That* was still the end in view; and very persistently did God in the ages that followed seek to accomplish that design.

If we accept these words—"His own"—in the more limited sense, (which seems to me to be the more correct,) the whole history of God's dealings with His people from Abraham downward, illustrates to us how fully they were "His own" by virtue of His constant care and gentle forbearance of them. "God's own summary of His dealings with them is, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt . . I taught Ephraim also to go (or *to use their feet*) taking them by their arms. I drew them with cords (or *leading-strings*) of a man, with the bands of love." The history of all His dealings with them was the history of a Father seeking to endear Himself to those whom He loved by constant communications of His love, and manifestations of His solicitude for them.

I repeat, then, that while the Advent far surpassed every preceding act of condescension on the part of God, it was in perfect harmony with all that had preceded, and was itself the realization of that Divine nearness to man of which every preceding condescension has but a prophecy. The Incarnation was the great act of Divine approach toward man, which was the consummation of every preceding approach, and the pledge and promise of every succeeding one. Once believe in a Divine Incarnation, and there are no depths of Divine condescension which you cannot believe in. Refuse to accept the Incarnation, and no light can break upon the world's darkness and sorrow's night. To this all the Old Testament revelations point, and from it all the New Testament promises and assurances spring.

All restoration to God begins with *His coming to us*. The first human movement heavenward must be preceded by a Divine movement earthward. Hence, the

Gospel begins with the record of the Advent. The origin of the *possibility* of the world's redemption is there. God must come to man, because man can never by searching find out God. Thus in very deed God dwells with men on the earth. They had lost sight of Him; but He had not lost sight of them. There can be no human ascending to heaven unless there be a Divine descending to earth; therefore, "He came to His own." The sheep cannot return to the fold, but the Great Shepherd can and will go after the sheep into the wilderness "*until He find it.*" There is nothing that He will not do in order to find "His own," who have wandered far away into paths of sin and folly.

2. *The human rejection.* We have referred to God's part in the Advent—"He came unto *His own.*" We have now to dwell upon man's part—"*His own* received Him not." "*His own*" are the key-words of my text. They are those which impart to the story of the *Great Refusal*, all its intense pathos and keen rebuke. It is hard to know which speaks loudest in these words, love or condemnation. The one cannot be separated from the other. There must be condemnation in the thrilling story of infinite love rejected. To a rebellious and ungrateful race the God of love, by the very intensity of that love, becomes a consuming fire, and the story of His dealings with them becomes a sentence of condemnation. There is nothing so keen in its accusation as the pathetic story of Divine love repulsed. It tells us what a wealth of love God was willing to expend, and what a force of compassion man was able to withstand. The two parts of the story cannot be separated. The greatness of Divine love intensifies the guilt of its rejection by man. It is the first part of our text, then, that gives such a terrible

meaning to the last. Had Christ not come there would have been no condemnation; but, having come, the condemnation of those who rejected Him was complete.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not," is John's summary of our Lord's life among men and of His rejection by them; but is that all? Do the words only apply to that age? Do they not to-day extend their application to a startling extent to the ages which have followed, and even to our own age. Believe me, the story of Christ's rejection is not confined to the Gospels, or to the age and country to which they refer. It refers to our age, and to some here. All of us, as well as those who saw and heard Christ while He was among men, are called upon to decide for Him or against Him. There is no middle course. We are among those who worship Him, or those who despise His love, and ignore His claims. We cannot be as if we had never heard of Christ. His Advent holds an eternal relationship with us for good or ill. Shall the message of His love be to us a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death?

Observe, that the Evangelist's summary does not close with the story of the rejection as given in our text, that the sacred historian has not told all when he has stated the sad fact that in his age men resisted the love of the world's Redeemer. The story of the life, like the story of the birth, tells of lowly adoration as well as bitter rejection. In every period of the world's history there have been some who have responded to the pleadings of love, and the words of the Evangelist are ever true concerning such, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

XV.

OUR LORD'S ASCENSION.

"And He led them out as far as to Bethany; and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God. Amen."
—LUKE xxiv. 50—53.

AS Bethlehem is the little village which comes into special prominence in the records of our Lord's Advent, so Bethany is the little hamlet, which, in sacred narrative, is intimately associated with the closing scenes of His wondrous life. During this period it was His favourite spot for retirement after the heat and burden of the day. The *situation* of Bethany was such as to make it a favourite resort for seclusion. Barely two miles distant from Jerusalem, and yet intercepted from it by the ridge of Olivet, and the hills which on the eastern side of that ridge overhung the village, sheltered, too, among its palm, olive, pomegranate, almond, and fig trees, with a landscape opening before it, which some travellers have considered to be the most beautiful in the south of Palestine, Bethany was one of those secluded spots, found sometimes so near to centres of busy commerce, which seem to be out of the world, and yet are within sight of some of its most charming scenes. Such a place would form a paradise to Him whose spirit was so sensitive to all the beauties of His Father's world, and who ever bade men, whose sensibilities had become blunted among the altars of the

Temple, go forth and "consider the lilies of the field how they grow."

But Bethany, during this period of our Lord's life, had yet another charm for Him. John, in his Gospel, gives us the secret when He calls Bethany "the town of Mary and her sister Martha." *We* know of towns whose *chief*, if not only, charm to us is that they are the towns of those whom we love. So with our Lord it was not the natural beauty of that village of palm trees as much as the love and sympathy toward Him, which were fostered there in fond hearts and true, that gave to it a charm which made Him patiently and hopefully wend His way toward it, often with heavy heart and weary step, across Mount Olivet at eventide, gladly leaving Jerusalem until the great and absorbing duties of another day called Him thither. With what a relief do we turn from Jerusalem,—that city so rich in sacred associations, but at this time so unworthy of them,—to Bethany, unknown in history, but henceforth to be associated with some of the most hallowing scenes in the Saviour's life! In the hour of His unpopularity, when to receive Him involved no small risk there was one hearth in this little hamlet to which He was ever welcome, one home where the homeless Christ could find shelter. Thus Bethany became endeared to Him because of the few choice and loving spirits who lived in it. It was also highly honoured. Here our Lord performed His last and greatest miracle before His death; here He commenced His triumphal entry to Jerusalem; here, and apparently under the sheltering roof of Lazarus, He last slept before the crucifixion; and now it was within sight of Bethany, with the Mount of Olivet concealing Jerusalem from His view,

that with hands uplifted He ascended into heaven, breathing blessings upon His faithful few, who, in adoring wonder, gazed upon their ascending Lord.

The Evangelist writes, "He led them out as far as to Bethany." How often had He led them out of late along that well-known path which crossed the brow of Olivet! What wonder that He led them that way now on His last earthly journey! As the path crossed the valley of Jehoshaphat, they would pass very near to Gethsemane. With what feelings must our Lord have looked for the last time with mortal eyes upon that shady enclosure, which had so recently been the scene of His great conflict! He and His disciples would then ascend the steep path to the summit of Olivet, to descend on the other side, where the ungrateful and doomed city, over which He had so recently wept bitter tears, and outside the wall of which He had suffered the shame and agony of the cross, would be hidden from His view; and where the beautiful little hamlet of Bethany, in which choice spirits lived, and where He had found welcome when the world's hatred had grown most bitter, would lie within His view, amid its date palms, and olive groves—a hamlet whose sacred associations and beautiful natural surroundings vied with each other in the marvellous charms which they presented. What wonder, then, that this was the direction in which Jesus led His disciples on the last journey they would take together ere He ascended to His heaven! What wonder that, having led them as far as to Bethany—and not before—He bade them adieu! And what wonder that in leaving this world this was the last view He desired to have of it!

So much with regard to the *scene* of our Lord's ascension. We shall now consider the *manner* of it.

We read that "He lifted up His hands and blessed them," and that "while He blessed them He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." Men had always felt that saints in dying had rich blessings to bestow upon the living; hence, in all ages, good men had bidden the world farewell by blessing with uplifted hands those whom they loved, and whom they left behind. But what wondrous hands were those which were now lifted up! What hands could bless like His which bore the marks of the nails! The very sight of those would prove an inspiration to the Apostles who looked at them. What a story of love and sacrifice they told! What sacred memories they awakened! What mighty assurances they conveyed! This was not the blessing of a patriarch, prophet, or saint, but of the Saviour whose pierced and uplifted hands were unmistakeable tokens of His prerogative to bless as none other could.

While blessing them He was carried up into heaven. No sound from the heavens attended His ascension; but amid that solemn stillness which ever characterizes the highest type of power, He ascended to His throne. Thus was His wondrous life among men brought to a harmonious close. There was a harmony of mystery in it from beginning to end. Even the years of obscurity were scarcely less mysterious than those in which the Divine shone forth through the human, because of their apparent inconsistency with all that had preceded, and with all that was to follow. His life was not beset by the usual limitations, or governed by the ordinary

laws of human existence. It ever baffled human calculation and rose high above the level of ordinary lives. His statements and predictions concerning Himself, too, pointed in the same direction. He claimed to have come down from heaven, and affirmed that He would ascend thither. "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before." All this sounded like blasphemy in the ears of men. His exceptional deeds and utterances were alike perplexing, but it was just this harmony of mystery which characterized His utterances and life that made the mystery bearable even to sincere men. Let that harmony be broken, and one part fall into the level of the commonplace, and all will fall together. This at first seemed to have taken place at the cross when Jesus died between two thieves. Even to the disciples this approached a collapse with terrible nearness. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," exclaimed the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. Their hope was all but shattered at the cross, and all but dying at the grave. Nothing short of the belief—so hard at first to entertain—that Christ had risen from the grave, could quicken anew the hope of the disciples, and strengthen their faith in Him and His cause. A dead Christ would have meant a dead Christianity. The religion of the disciples would have been buried with their Master in the grave of Joseph of Arimathæa had He never risen from the dead. Then having risen, in what other way than by ascending to heaven could the Christ leave the world!

"They looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up," writes Luke in the Book of Acts; "They worshipped Him," is the statement of the same writer in the Gospel which bears his name. The former

words point to the *upward direction* given to the Apostles' faith, the latter to the *beautiful embodiment* of that faith in the first act of Christian worship.

We shall now briefly consider these—

1. The *upward direction* which our Lord's ascension gave to the Apostles' and, in general, to the Christian faith. In the account given of this closing scene in the Book of Acts, we find that immediately preceding the ascension the Apostles asked Him the question, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Their hope was still centred in an earthly restoration, and their faith fixed upon a Deliverer who, however Divine His nature, would accomplish a work which should find its highest consummation in an earthly rule. The ascension corrected their false estimate of Christ's mission, and gave an upward direction to their faith. Hope no longer dwells on the restoration of the earthly kingdom to Israel, but following in the track of the ascending Christ it fixes its gaze upon Him who has "ascended on high leading captivity captive," and who in the majesty of His risen life, bestows gifts upon the poor and needy of all lands and all climes. *Up!* far higher than they could see their Lord had gone. *Up! far yonder* He had gone to prepare a place for them. And where He was there they should be. What wonder they gazed into heaven!

2. The *beautiful embodiment* of the faith of the Apostles on this occasion in the first act of Christian worship. It is significant that the ascension of our Lord was the occasion of the Apostles' worshipping Him as they never did before. The first time we find the Apostolic band unitedly worshipping the Christ (except when

on the mountain in Galilee they worshipped their risen Lord, and when "*some doubted*") is when He was disappearing, or had disappeared, from their view. His bodily presence was a hindrance to true worship. His withdrawal was the condition of the spiritual development of His church in the world. The story of the Gospels must close in the record of the ascension before there can be a history of the Church and a development of its doctrine and life. The Gospels must precede the Acts of Apostles and the Epistles. Reflection becomes profitable to the measure that observation has been clear and complete. In every life the period of observation precedes and prepares the way for the period of reflection. It was so in the life of the early church. John having recorded our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, adds these words:—"These things understood not His disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, *then remembered they* that these things were written of Him, and that they had done those things unto Him." The period commencing with the ascension was the period for reflection and worship. All the force of the Apostles had until then been expended in observation.

"He was carried up into heaven." What a vindication this was of the Christ who had been reviled of men and had been crucified by wicked hands! Heaven received back into its bosom Him whom the world had rejected. He had come unto His own, and His own had not received Him; now the everlasting gates opened that the King of Glory might enter in. Earth's rejected One was received as Monarch of the Skies. What wonder that the Apostles "returned to Jerusalem with great joy!" Had not the opening heavens, which had previously

testified to His divinity, now vindicated more grandly than ever, in the face of the ungrateful earth, the majesty of His person and the righteousness of His claims!

Luke, in the Book of Acts, writes, "While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." They are called to a more exalted service than that of gazing into heaven. They are to "*occupy*" until He come. This "SAME" Jesus will come again—the same kind, loving Jesus, as He who leaves them. The last vision they have of Him is in human form. He will never divest Himself of His humanity, and the heavens will not take from Him aught of His tenderness; "this SAME Jesus" will "*so* come *in like manner.*" The word used in this narrative of Christ's ascension means "going on a journey." He will return again. A cloud received Him out of sight before the very eyes of His Apostles; even so, "He *cometh with clouds, and every eye* shall see Him."

To the Apostles as they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" every step was sacred with the recollections of the things that Jesus had said *here* and *there*, and which they understood better now. They had returned before now to Jerusalem without Him, and He had appeared again to them. They will once more wait, and praise God as they wait. They believe that they have not seen the last of Jesus; that He will come again.

The Church has ever since looked up for its Lord, and every blessing He bestows is a pledge of His love and a promise of His second Coming.

XVI.

THE SONG IN THE NIGHT.

"I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search."

—PSALM lxxvii. 6.

IT is marvellous what an immediate bearing one portion of life has upon another, which, in point of time, may be far distant. The memories of childhood and youth ofttimes exert a mighty influence over our declining years. There is a deal said in this Psalm about *remembrance*. "I remembered God and was troubled;" "I call to remembrance my song in the night;" "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old." We cannot separate ourselves from the past. There is much in it that we cannot forget, if we would; and more that we ought not to forget, if we could. The past has much to teach us. It often sheds a light over what otherwise would be dark and inexplicable; but it sometimes, too, adds to the weight of present sorrow. The memory of joys which are gone is not always sweet. There are seasons in life when memory becomes the source of intense bitterness. There are times when it is hard, extremely hard, to harmonize the songs of yesterday with the sighs of to-day, and when the memory of the joys which are past adds a sting to the sorrows of the present hour.

Such, *at first*, until he considered the matter more fully, was this hour in the Psalmist's experience. This Psalm seems to be the retrospect of an aged man, when under a cloud. The afternoon of life was far darker than the morning seemed to have promised. The experiences of the past, so full of joy and sunshine, were his no longer, and the sense of loss was deepened in proportion as that which was lost was precious. He remembered the time when, under the starlit sky, he sang the night out, and the day in. His whole life *then* was a song. But since then he had been struck dumb, his song had subsided into a sigh—he could not sing *now*. It was painful to remember joyous hours which were no longer his. They were gone, to be followed by sleepless nights and days of dreary silence—"Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak." It has been said by some one—I am not sure that I give the words—that the crowning point of sorrow is to remember happier days. This was the Psalmist's experience at this hour. It is surpassingly hard to remember songs in our sighing hours, even for the most devout of us. We never feel anything more keenly than the contrasts of life—the brightest lights and the darkest shadows.

But this experience was a means to an end.

1. "I commune with mine own heart." *The hour of sorrow and painful retrospect brings man back to himself.* In seasons of unbroken joy there is a growing tendency to live far from ourselves. The best of men have felt this. The monotony of pleasure allures us too often away from ourselves. Then comes the unexpected shock of grief or disappointment, and we come back to ourselves, and commune with the heart which we had so

long forgotten. To some extent the story of the Prodigal Son is repeated in every life. That parable is a mirror which more or less clearly reflects the likeness of each of us. That foolish boy never knew himself until after having rashly demanded of his father his portion of goods, he spent all in riotous living. It was then, in a distant land, hungry, lonely, and sad, vainly endeavouring to feed himself with the husks which the swine did eat, that he "came to himself," and, coming to himself, came to his father. I repeat, it is more or less thus with us all. It is in the hour of deep sorrow, when all our pet plans have disappointed us, when the music of our preceding life has apparently died away for ever, and joy has become a thing of the past, that, undone, with all the conceit dashed out of us, we come to ourselves and "commune with our own hearts." We have thus learnt through sorrow what we could not, or would not learn in any other way; we have learnt to know ourselves, which, next to knowing God, is the highest possible attainment.

That hour is a blessed hour which reveals us to ourselves, for this is a condition of every other revelation. I have said that knowing ourselves, next to knowing God, is the highest possible attainment; I would add that the former is necessary to the latter. The prodigal would not have come to his father had he not previously come to himself. It is ever thus. The Gospel insists upon revealing ourselves to us before it reveals to us our Father. And only in so far as we know ourselves do we know anything worth the knowing. The explanation of every difficulty begins here. Hence the Psalmist, from communing with his own heart, proceeds to the solution of great problems. The hour of trial which leads

to a knowledge of self, by so doing, paves the way for making plain every other mystery. But every step must be fought. A terrible conflict precedes the victory.

2. "My spirit made diligent search." *The hour of trial is the hour of diligent enquiry; the hour for asking great and solemn questions.* What weighty questions the Psalmist asks at this hour. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" The Psalmist comes face to face with a question infinite in its issues. Can God be unkind?

Such questions as these are not asked flippantly, and with a light heart. They are asked in times of mighty convulsions, when the inner citadel of a man's faith is assaulted by terrible suggestions, when all minor misgivings are lost sight of because they converge and meet in one point at the very foundation of a man's creed. There are times when even the heavens do not appear clean in man's sight, and a black shadow is cast over the very face of God. Oh, at such times, questions like these are wrung out of one by the sense of a fearful desolation. Upon the answer to them depends all else. There are some questions of minor importance, concerning which a man may have his doubts without disturbing the equilibrium of his faith; and he can postpone the answer. But when the lovingkindness of God is called into question the answer admits of no postponement. It is infinitely easier to believe in the existence of no God than to have all our faith, and hope, and affection, centred in one who has no heart to pity. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He

in anger shut up His tender mercies?" These are the questions wrung out of a heart which stakes its all upon the answer, and as such they demand an immediate reply, for every moment of waiting is a moment of in tolerable suspense.

Now, observe, what is the Psalmist's reply?—"I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Thy wonders of old." He has learnt that all the gloom arose from his own infirmity, and not from God's forgetfulness of him, much less from any unkindness. The traveller, having ascended the Brocken, is startled by a huge "spectre" which darkens the sky. He looks upon it with awe, until he learns that the gigantic form is only his own image reflected from an opposite cloud. Thus the Psalmist learnt that the dark mysterious figure cast athwart the heavens, and darkening the very light of God's countenance, was only a cloud-reflection of his own "infirmity."

He will now derive comfort and not sorrow, from the history of the past. He will repeat the story of that great deliverance at the Red Sea, and it shall be to him the pledge as well as the type of other deliverances. That deliverance came when all possibilities seemed to have vanished, and so shall his come. What though God's "way is in the sea," and His "path in the great waters," and His "footsteps are not known," suffice it that He led His "people like a flock, by the hands of Moses and Aaron;" and he thus learns to trust God, as a child trusts his father; trust Him in the darkness and in the storm; trust Him in the depths of His Providence, which are beyond finding out; trust Him where he

cannot trace Him, and when he has no longer a desire to trace Him. He knows *now* that his Father leads, that He has not "forgotten to be gracious," nor can forget; that knowledge is enough, he seeks no more. He will ask no more questions, but will place his hand in his Father's, and, as previously he sang in the natural night, he will now sing in the deeper night of suffering, bereavement, and trial; so that the joy of his youthful days becomes only a faint illustration of the joy which will fill with gladness his later years. Like the nightingale, he will pour forth his sweetest melody in the darkness of the night, when the notes of other songsters are hushed by the terror of the surrounding darkness.

Thus in this Psalm there are two voices heard; the one of dark misgiving, the other of hope. At length hope triumphs, and bursts into a loud and rapid repetition of what God has done, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. . . Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee; they were afraid, the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: Thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook." These words come forth like the rush of an impassioned eloquence; at length the voice subsides into a full and reverent testimony of the unsearchableness of divine wisdom, and the gentleness of divine leading. The Psalmist now trusts, and is calm in trusting. There is less of emotion in his words but more of strength. The sweetest and the tenderest

part of all the song is its close. The mournful tones of doubt and fear have been succeeded by the full and ecstatic utterance of a conviction which triumphs over all unbelief; then comes the crowning testimony of a calm and serene faith that is mighty in its very stillness; "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters and Thy footsteps are not known. Thou leadest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

Brethren, learn this lesson of faith in God, learn to sing to Him in the night. Learn to derive sweetness from the memories of the past, which will prepare you for the trials of the future. Learn not only to say with the Psalmist: "My tears have been my meat day and night. , . . . Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts. All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me;" but also to add the words which he added, "Yet, the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and *in the night His song shall be with me.*" (Psalm xlii. 3, 7, 8.) Learn, too, the lesson which our Divine Master—the Man of Sorrows, whose crown was a crown of thorns, whose royalty was the royalty of suffering—sought to teach His disciples in the most trying experience of all; *to enter no Gethsemane without having first "sung a hymn;"* and when we have entered it, there in the thickest darkness to exclaim, though the exclamation, like His, succeed a keen sorrow even unto death, "*Father . . . not my will but Thine be done.*"

XVII.

THE DEATH OF MOSES.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, *unto* Mount Nebo, which *is* in the land of Moab, that *is* over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession: and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people: because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet thou shalt see the land before *thee*; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel."

—DEUT. xxxii. 48—52.

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that *is* over against Jericho. . . . . So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD."

—DEUT. xxxiv. 1, 5.

HERE we find recorded the extraordinary close of an extraordinary career. There was something very exceptional about the life of Moses; there is now something very exceptional about his death. There is a harmony throughout. Here the wise man does *not* die as the fool. Fools could not die like this; only heroes could.

The circumstances connected with the death of Moses were specially trying.

1. *The nation were on the very borders of the Promised Land.* The wilderness was now behind them, and Canaan immediately before them. That for which the

people, and especially their great leader, had so long hoped, endured, toiled, and fought, was within view. Yet it was at this hour that Moses was commanded to ascend this mountain in the land of Moab, to die. Joshua, the son of Nun, and not the valiant veteran of six score years, who had guided the Lord's people through all the dangers and conflicts of the wilderness, was to lead them across the Jordan. Moses had borne the brunt of the conflict; but it was reserved for another, and a younger man, to wear the laurels of the victor. To ordinary men, to die in circumstances like these would have been peculiarly hard and mysterious. They would have preferred dying far back in the wilderness to dying here. Better, they would think, to fall early in the conflict, than suffer and toil just long enough to miss the mighty shout of triumph from the nation's heart as the Jordan was crossed, and the grand adieu which they bade the wilderness for ever.

But however trying this must have been to Moses, not a word of murmuring escaped his lips, as he ascended the mount, at God's command, to die. Meekness, that prominent characteristic of his life, now reached its crowning height. He had sadly failed in this at the foot of Sinai; he now grandly triumphed in the might of it at the foot and on the heights of Pisgah. Suffice it for him at this hour that he was to see the land which the nation was so soon to enter. How grandly consistent is this with the unconsciousness of self which distinguished his life, and which must ever distinguish the life of every true leader. Years ago, far back in the wilderness, he had desired that his own name should be blotted out, provided that the nation

should be spared; now he calmly ascended the mount to die in the wilderness, glad if he might but see the land His people were to inherit. Never did Moses appear so truly great as now. The greatest and holiest of men are never so majestic in life as in death. Perhaps the most sublime moment of every other in the past career of Moses was that in which, at God's bidding, ascending the mount upon which the Lord had descended in fire, and which no other foot dared tread, he disappeared amid the clouds and darkness which enshrouded the divine presence, and entering into that awful place where God was, spake to Him as man converses with man; or that moment when, after forty days' communion with God, he descended the mount bearing the two tables of stone, God's law to man, his countenance still reflecting some of the splendour of the divine light in which he had dwelt, so that the people "were afraid to come nigh to him." But never was he so great as now, when, with the resignation of a great sufferer, he ascended the mount, never to descend, but, on its summit to breathe out his last to God. At other times the excitement of the hour may have kindled his great soul to heroic acts. Difficulties and dangers impart an enthusiasm to great natures, and move brave spirits to noble deeds; but this was the hour in which Moses was called not so much to *act* as to *submit;* not so much to render a *great* service as a *devout* one.

Brethren, it is precisely here that courage of the highest order is required. We have seen very often how the excitement which a great and common danger brings with it, inspires even ordinary spirits with extraordinary daring. We often see how in the heat of

the fray soldiers, not the most renowned for courage, press eagerly on, charging the foe before the very mouth of the cannon and the points of a hundred bayonets, and caring little whether that will be their last charge or not. But that is not the highest proof of a great spirit. Even reckless and desperate daring can, in such terrific times, assume very much the proportions of heroism, but it is not heroism. That is true heroism when, in the calmness of a mighty resolve, man can rule his own spirit, and when, in obedience to the highest principles, and to the Supreme Will, he can submit without a murmur or a sigh; yea, lay down the rod of command with all the magnanimity and noble bearing with which he took it up. It is this kind of heroism that we recognize in the last act of this great leader's life.

2. *The prospect of separation from the people of his charge added a sting to death.* It is hard for a leader to sever the relationship between himself and his people, especially when it has been welded by the fires of care and trial. The nation had become endeared to Moses by the very anxieties they had cost him. Just as the child who has cost his parent the greatest solicitude is by reason of that solicitude more beloved than all the others, so the very cares with which the nation had burdened their great leader knit his heart so closely to theirs, that the thought of separation from them was the sharpest sting of all to the aged veteran in the hour of death.

3. *To die, too, isolated from those who loved him,* and who would gladly have ministered to him in his last hours, must have been very trying. It is natural to wish that the arm of human friendship may sustain our drooping

head when our heart is sick in death. The last view we want of this world, as it recedes from us in the dying hour, is that of loving countenances beaming over us with sympathy and compassion; and the last voice we would hear in this life, as the sounds of earth die away in the silence of death, is that of one dearer to us than all others, tenderly whispering benedictions on our head. We do not want to die alone. Yet it was just this that the great leader of God's people was now called upon to do. Even Aaron, when he ascended Mount Hor to die, did not ascend it alone. Moses, his nearest and dearest friend, accompanied him in that ascent. But on this occasion, Moses had to walk his last journey alone. No one accompanied him in that steep ascent upon whose arm he could lean; no one who would watch him breathe his last. The presence of human friends, so sustaining in that hour, was denied him. At the foot of the mount he was commanded to bid the last farewell to the people of his charge, and then alone to ascend the mount, and alone to die. Josephus, in one of the most pathetic paragraphs of his writings, has endeavoured to describe this touching scene of separation. The Scripture is silent. Such scenes cannot be fully described, and inspiration will do nothing by halves.

4. *Moses was commanded to ascend this mountain and die, because he had sinned against God at Meribah-Kadesh.* The precise sin is not known. Probably it was the sin of sympathizing with the people in their murmuring, instead of sternly rebuking them. Be that as it may, Moses *now* reaped the result of that sin. There was *one act* that made the retrospect of the past, at the close of life, a sorrowful one. Moses now accepted the

chastisement with meekness. He knew the rod was wielded by a Father's hand, and he stooped to it.

5. *He died in the strength of life.* Though a man of six score years, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." He was a hale and stalwart veteran. There are some to whom life becomes a burden almost too heavy to bear, long before they are asked to lay that burden down. Not so Moses. He had not yet arrived at that point in life when rest is more welcome than toil. Ebbing energy had not made the thought of rest in death sweet to him. He would gladly have toiled for a short time longer. And yet he obeyed the voice of God without a murmur. He ascended the mount to die at a time when it was most hard to die, when his eye was undimmed, and his natural energies unabated.

Thus died the first inspired writer, and the first deliverer of sacred story. The closing scene was withdrawn from mortal gaze; only God witnessed it. We know not the last words spoken by Moses on that summit of Pisgah. They were words spoken in God's ear. The last farewell discourse at the foot of the mount, however, is recorded. None of his past utterances can compare with this; none so tender, so sublime. Some of the ablest critics believe, too, that the 90th Psalm—"The Psalm of Moses the Man of God"—was uttered at this hour. We can easily believe that the most ancient of psalms, that which has become the Burial Psalm of all ages, and which has awakened echoes in the hearts of the bereaved of all subsequent times, was first sung by this holy man at that moment when the air of another world fanned his cheeks, and the inspiration of a heavenlier clime filled his soul. Even men and women of ordinary

spirituality have become inspired at such hours; what wonder, then, if the death-notes of this dying hero, like those of the fabled swan, were by far the sweetest.

The exact places of his death and burial are alike unknown. They are among the secrets of God. No shrine of man shall mock the burial and disfigure the resting-place of him whom God buried with His own hand. The Lord "buried him in a valley in the land of Moab over against Bethpeor, but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." He was buried, then, in the *land of Moab*, not Canaan, yet in a favourite spot chosen by God Himself. His funeral was wanting in all the usual demonstrations of pomp and greatness:

"And yet he had high honour,—the hillside for a pall,
To lie in state, while angels wait with stars for tapers tall,
And the dark rock-pines, like tossing plumes, over his bier to wave,
And God's own hand, in that lonely land, to lay him in his grave."

Learn a few lessons.

Be prepared to toil, and to let others enter into your labours.

Beware of the result of *one* sin; it may bring humiliation in the dying hour.

In all you do, like Moses, try to lead your fellow-men Canaan-ward.

XVIII.

THE PENITENT'S CRY TO GOD.

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest. . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Thou desirest not sacrifice: else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

—PSALM li. 4, 7, 16, 17.

WE turn to most of the books of the Old and New Testaments in order that we may hear *God* speak to us—whether it be by the voice of history, or by the voice of prophecy; but when we would hear the *human heart*, in return, utter its fears, or its hopes, its anguish, or its joys to God, we turn instinctively to the book of Psalms. Speaking generally, in the other books, a voice comes from heaven to earth; in this book a voice ever ascends from earth to heaven. In the former, God speaks to man in revelations and promises; in the latter, man speaks to his God in devout longings and fervent thanksgivings.

It is this that makes the Bible so precious to us—the wonderful blending of the divine and the human; the Divine mercy calling forth the human response, and that in return bringing down new blessings from God. It comforts us to know that there is an intercommunion between God and the human spirit, that angels ascend, as well as descend, the ladder which unites this world to heaven. God speaks to us in love,

and by the power of that love, if we accept it, He inspires us with the spirit of prayer and of praise. Now the Book of Psalms is intended as an aid to our devotions. Whatever devout feeling is kindled in our hearts by our being brought into contact with God, we can go to this Book, and there find expressed in words, what we had no language for, and could only utter in a cry. Thus it is that the aged, especially, whose feelings have been matured by years of consecration, upon whom the light of another world begins already to shine, and who breathe more than others of the atmosphere of devotion, love to dwell upon these words which were first of all uttered thousands of years ago, but which ever since then have found an echo in the hearts of the best and holiest on earth.

The events, however, which interpret *this* Psalm are surpassingly sad; they are those which formed the main tragedy of David's life, *i.e.*, his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and, in order to cover the reputation of himself and of the woman, his subsequent command to Joab, to set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, that he may be smitten and die—another instance of how the fear of exposure ofttimes drives men into the furthest extremity of crime. The writer of the Book of Chronicles did not refer to those facts; they and the judgments which followed them had already been recorded in the second Book of Samuel as a warning for all ages. Adultery and murder too are not to be narrated freely in detail, the narration of such crimes often brings with it a contagion to weaker natures.

One whole year had elapsed after these crimes were committed, before Nathan, the Prophet of the Lord, was

sent to bring David face to face with his sin, and thus to make the silencing of conscience no longer possible.

David, in the thirty-second Psalm, gives his experience during this period. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." There are some present who know something of the meaning of this, who know the misery of being false to the truth, of battling with convictions, of stifling the conscience for a year—for years! yea, a lifetime! The excitement of passion has long ago subsided, and even the storm which rose at the conviction of a great sin committed has perforce been suppressed, but only to be followed by a seething restlessness of agony and of pent-up remorse. These words of the Psalmist are the epitome of every man's experience who has endeavoured to hide his sin and to silence the voice of conscience. Such a silence is only surface silence; down deep in the man's soul there is the ceaseless roar of a troubled sea of conflicting thoughts and emotions. Day and night, too, the hand of God is heavy upon him. That Divine hand, which is mighty to save the penitent, rests upon the impenitent, and becomes unbearable by the very weight of the resisted and rejected love that is in it; and the intense compassion that cannot soften the impenitent man's heart, will, by its very intensity, turn his "moisture into the drought of summer." The love that cannot melt must harden. Nothing is so mighty in its power to acquit or to condemn, to soften or to consume, as the love of God. Like the Gospel which proclaims it, it is the "savour of life unto life" or "of death unto death."

The Psalmist, in the fifth verse of the thirty-second Psalm, refers to that which brought to a close this prolonged period of misery. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." David, unable to suppress his confession and tears any longer, lifted up his voice to God. The hour in which he acknowledged his sin was that which brought light and joy to his soul. It has ever been thus. In the parable of the prodigal son, the turning point in the history of the wanderer was when he said, "I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee*," *&c.* From this moment the story is one of increasing hope and brightness, until at last it closes with the record of a loving embrace, in which all that was past was forgotten, and of a feast of rejoicing, when, receiving the emblems of restored sonship, the prodigal entered once more into the full liberty and joy of the children of God.

We shall consider—

I. The Psalmist's Confession.

II. His Petitions.

III. His Offering.

I. The Psalmist's *confession*. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," &c. The whole year which preceded this confession had been a period of sad retrospect, during which the sin committed had lost the alluring charm it once had, only to appear increasingly loathsome as time passed by. The visit of Nathan, the prophet, to David, mercifully brought this state of

things to a crisis, hastened the hour of confession, and therefore of relief. This was the moment when the evil was probed, and which brought to David joy through tears. This is a *full* confession, it knows of no reserve or modification. There is no excuse, no justifying plea offered as in Eden of old, when Adam blamed Eve, and Eve the tempter. "*I* sinned," is David's cry. He has endeavoured to shield himself from conviction long enough—one whole year of that has more than sufficed—*now*, he will lay himself bare before his God, even though he has no plea but his own unworthiness and utter helplessness, linked to God's "lovingkindness" and the "multitude of His tender mercies." David now, as in another trying hour of his life, will "fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great."

"Against *Thee, Thee only* have I sinned." But it may be objected that this sin inflicted sorrow and disgrace upon others, that he had wronged humanity as well as sinned against God. We reply, "Did not the latter include the former?" He could not wrong one of God's creatures without wronging Him. David lifts up his confession to the higher standpoint. The man, too, whom he had wronged most had passed away from the earth, was beyond the reach of David's cry; but God still lived to hear and to forgive.

Nathan (2 Sam. xii.) had, in the name of God, uttered to David, in consequence of his sin, things hard to be borne. "The sword shall never depart from thine house." * * "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee, out of thine own house;" yet he made no reply save, "I have sinned against the Lord." In our text he adds to this confession, not a murmur, but a vindi-

cation of God's justice in all, "*so that Thou art justified* (the more correct rendering) when Thou speakest, and clear when Thou judgest." The heart burdened with a conviction of guilt utters no murmur against its God, do what He will.

We shall consider—

II. The Psalmist's *Petitions*. (1) "*Purge me* with hyssop, and I shall be clean." This refers to the ceremonial mode of purifying a person made unclean by touching a corpse. A clean person was to take hyssop (Numb. xix. 18) and dip it in the water with which there had been previously mixed the ashes of a burnt heifer; and sprinkle upon the unclean one. The figure is a forcible one. David realizes that he has touched *death*, and that he is defiled through and through; hence the cry is similar to that of Paul's, "Who shall deliver from the body of this death?" He not only has *done* evil, but he *is* evil. He himself is identified with his sin. He cannot separate himself from his deeds. Is he not the father of his acts? Do they not partake of his own nature? He has learnt the truth, long after this emphasized by our Lord, that "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," &c.—all the violations of the decalogue. He has learnt that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; that out of it are the issues of life; hence the burden of his prayer is, "Purge *me*." He asks that the source may be pure, that his soul may be clean. This is the petition of one who longs to be released, not only from the fearful misery which sin has brought with it, but also from sin itself. Much as he deplored the sinful act which he had committed,

he deplored more the cause of it; he felt keenly that *sinfulness* was to be dreaded more than any act of sin.

(2) "*Wash me,*" was the second petition. This word is generally applied to garments; hence there is a reference here to the ancient method of washing by beating and treading under foot. David asks that he may be clean, let the process be as trying as it may be. He longs for a conscience void of offence, and is prepared to undergo anything for that. Without it life is unbearable. Ah, this is every sinner's yearning, had he but the insight to know it, and the language to express it; he is restless, seeking everywhere for happiness, not realizing that he carries his hell *within* in the impurity of his heart.

"Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." David has unbounded confidence in the power of God to cleanse him, low as he has fallen. This is the breathing of a heart that dares hope in God, when every other hope has died away. In all ages, penitence, as distinguished from *remorse*, has breathed hope into man. The more penitent the spirit, the more its importunity—an importunity that seems to indifferent observers, who know not what penitence means, to amount to daring.

These petitions, "Purge me" and "Wash me," are not synonymous phrases strung together, and having no special meaning of their own. They express two different phases of sin, and therefore of forgiveness. This heaping up of words and phrases by the Psalmist and other inspired writers, so far from being meaningless, specially abounds with instruction. For instance, in Psalm xxvi. 2, David exclaims, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." There is no tautology here. Each of the three words

used has its own shade of meaning. The first refers to *testing* by fire, the second to *smelting*, the third to the advanced process of *removing all dross* from the melted mass. We see here how the desire to be pure becomes more and more intense as each petition is offered, until at last there is nothing left to ask for. How striking is the gradation in this prayer. David not only asks that he may be tested, but also that the metal shall be separated from the extraneous substances clinging to it, and, finally, that every atom of dross shall be removed by the Divine Refiner.

The purifying ordeals through which David was made to pass in his later days, are a sufficient proof that these prayers were heard. God never fails to answer such prayers as these; the very answer may be trying, but the end will be peace.

And now observe—

III. The Psalmist's offering. He brings not "a sacrifice" but "a broken and a contrite heart." This he brings with the assurance that God will not despise it. Blessed is that penitent who realizes that God will not disdain his poor broken heart, but will attach more value to it than to all sacrifices and burnt-offerings! David knew that the most precious thing which he could bring to God was his "broken spirit." He realizes that sacrifices have only a borrowed value from the spirit in which they are offered. Thus he rises into the higher level of devotion. With the daring of a penitent who has entered into the spirit of sacrifice, he ignores the form which it generally assumes as inadequate to present an offering for his sin, and thus without priest or burnt-offering he goes into the very presence of God

and exclaims, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

My hearers, God wants our hearts—"Son, give me thine heart!" That is what the Father wants of his wayward child. Not any portion of goods; he has spent that in riotous living; nor yet anything which he may bring from the far off country. Nothing *of that kind* which he can bring back to his father is worth the bringing; even the old garment that he wears must be put aside for a new one. But he can bring one thing which the Father will accept, "a broken and a contrite heart," and, accepting it, He will heal it—will restore within it loving trust and filial joy. My friend, you have robbed God of your heart, and He wants it back; He would lose nothing so precious. Bring it as the prodigal David brought his broken one. Yea, though shame has struck you dumb, and you have no language with which to address your father, but the piteous cry of an infant, send that up to Him out of the depths of your desolation; and through the merits of Him who has died for you, He will hear your voice and supplications, as He did David's. He will "open your lips," so that you may "shew forth His praise."

XIX.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

(Hospital Sermon).

"And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Luke x. 35.

OUR Lord originated a new era in history, that of philanthropy. "On earth peace, good will toward men," was the burden of the angelic song which announced His advent to lowly shepherds; and this was the motto of the life which followed. He came to raise men above the exclusive love of self, or clan, or sect, and to breathe into them a love toward *man*, irrespective of class or party. He sought to break down the middle wall of nationality, and proclaimed universal brotherhood among men. He taught them that all earthly distinctions are external and transient, but that our humanity is a sacred, everlasting reality.

This parable was uttered in reply to a lawyer who sought to shirk his duty toward his fellow-men, and to justify himself by a literal quibble. He had come to Christ with the greatest question of life, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and had been forced by Him to answer the question from his own lips. He was a teacher of the law, let him give the law's solution of the difficulty. "What is written in the law, how readest

thou?" exclaimed our Lord. He answering said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Jesus said, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." The man's epitome of the law's requirements was correct, let him embody these in his life and all would be well. But he, anxious to justify himself by restricting, if possible, the meaning of the law, asked, "Who is my neighbour?" This parable was our Lord's reply.

This evening it is not our purpose to dwell upon the parable as a whole, but to confine ourselves, as far as possible, to that portion of it which we have taken for a text, and from that to educe some truths which may be specially appropriate for this occasion. It may be advisable, however, to give a brief outline of the parable. A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. On his way he fell among thieves, who stripped "him of his raiment, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." By chance a priest, and after him a Levite, came that way and saw him, but passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan came and saw him and "had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

So far the Samaritan, who presents in the parable so favourable a contrast to the priest and Levite, has *personally* attended to the sufferer. In our text, the story assumes a new feature. The Samaritan has to proceed on his way, other duties call him hence, personal attention is no longer practicable. But does his duty toward the sufferer therefore cease? Many, in the circumstances, would have thought so, but the Samaritan did not. "On

the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

There is a great principle involved in this. There are times when it becomes impracticable to attend personally to the sick, and when one of three courses are open to us, *i.e.*, to leave them to their fate; or to commend them to the sympathy of others; or depute others to do the work which we can no longer perform ourselves, holding ourselves indebted to such for their services. The Samaritan chose the last. The first method would be far too cruel; the second far too unsatisfactory for a man of his feelings and sympathies; the third alone could meet the circumstances of the case. He took the sufferer to an "inn," and before he departed on the morrow, took out of his girdle two denarii, the equivalent of two days' ordinary labour, and gave them to the host, accompanying the payment with the injunction, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." The picture of philanthropy would not be complete without this. The Samaritan would have been guilty of forsaking a half-built tower, apart from this final injunction; but, acting as he did, he supplemented personal services by other means of relief, when the former were no longer possible. At this hour a new relationship arose between the Samaritan and the host. The former became now morally and legally responsible to the latter for the services which would be rendered to the wounded man.

Now let us apply this to ourselves. Much of the work of relieving human suffering, if done effectually, must be deputed to others. As population increases, human

responsibilities become more and more complicated, and it becomes impossible for us *personally* to relieve those who solicit our sympathy; but our responsibility toward them does not therefore cease. Personal effort must be supplemented, and, in many instances, substituted by the services of institutions which we are called upon to establish and sustain. In acknowledging the necessity in this age of building infirmaries and hospitals for the suffering, we acknowledge the claims of those institutions upon us. Society, in sending its sick ones to those "inns," where they will be taken care of, accepts a responsibility similar to that of the Samaritan toward the host. These institutions have a moral, if not a legal, claim upon us, and, remember, the former is higher and more sacred than the latter.

Again, Society has its duty to perform toward its thrifty workmen, as well as toward its more helpless paupers. There is a class of men who toil hard for the sustenance of their families; but when sickness overtakes them, and lays them prostrate, or when it enters their families, it cripples them in circumstances, and, in many instances, renders them utterly unable to obtain medical attendance, without plunging themselves into difficulties which they cannot surmount for years, if ever. The conscience of English society dictates that we shall provide help for such, and prompts us to build hospitals and infirmaries for their reception. It deputes men of medical skill and experience, and nurses specially adapted for this work of love, to attend to its sick, and as it takes each sufferer to these modern "inns," it repeats to the host the words of the good Samaritan, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Brethren, philanthropy in our land is fast rising into a level far above all considerations of sect or clan. Even now sailors from distant lands, prostrated by sickness and disease, and with no place to lay their heads, are received into our "Hospitals for seamen of all nations," and there have all the care and attention paid to them which are extended to our own sailors. Such institutions as these are the glory of our country and of our common humanity. They are the monuments, too, which Christianity has erected throughout our land in honour of its Great Founder, who ever "went about doing good." We glory as a people in them; we point to them with an enthusiasm which approaches pride; we speak of them as *our* hospitals and infirmaries. How much have we contributed for their maintenance? Remember, they are doing *our* work, and far more effectually than we could do it personally. The time has come when our sympathy toward the suffering portion of mankind must express itself through these charitable institutions, which we are called upon to sustain in their labour of love. The duty of expressing, in a tangible form, our sympathy toward our infirm and helpless brethren ever remains the same, even though the *method* of expressing it may constantly vary as the human family increases, and human civilization extends. The garb which philanthropy assumes may be different in different periods of its history; but philanthropy, like its Great Author, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The noble institutions throughout our land for the amelioration of human suffering and want are not intended to relieve us of individual responsibility; they are only so many channels through which our personal sympathy and goodwill may the better flow from us to our fellow-men, and bear blessings to mankind.

In conclusion. The good Samaritan in the parable has been supposed by some to represent our Lord as the Saviour of the world. I do not think that this was the immediate design of this parable; I believe that the primary purport of it all was to picture the true "neighbour." But, as there is no one who has embodied in himself the teaching of this parable as He who uttered it did, and as all that is good or tender in the human heart is the result of His inspiration, and is at best but a faint reflection of that which dwells in Him in an infinite fulness, we cannot err in accepting the good Samaritan as a type of the Saviour of mankind. He indeed is The Good Samaritan of our race. His name will ever be identified with the greatest miracle of love. It is He who has breathed into the life of man the spirit of tenderness and compassion in all its fulness. The story of His incarnation, of His life among men, and of His cross and passion, is that which through His Spirit regenerates the heart of society. Read the history of heathen antiquity and you will find numerous references to temples, amphitheatres, wars, bloody games, and oppressions of every conceivable form; but hospitals, asylums, orphanages, are of Christian birth, and on their front should be written the name of Christ their Great Founder. The Christian religion has also ennobled human language. It has given new and grander meanings to old words. In other instances it has introduced new words into the vocabulary of man. The earlier Greek and Roman words for love (ἔρως and *amor*) could not be regenerated, they were so closely intertwined with heathen associations and vices. But where the Christian faith could not reform a word it originated another; hence it introduced a word (ἀγάπη) which cannot be found

in the whole range of the ancient classics, and although the equivalent word in Latin *(caritas)* previously existed, yet the religion of Christ has given to it a meaning far sublimer than anything which was attached to it before. The law of charity, or rather Love, had to be learnt before the human vocabulary could be enriched with the word which should express it. But when our Lord, by all that He did and suffered, brought to men a new virtue, He made the existence of a word which should be expressive of it, not only a possibility, but also a necessity.

And, friends, we can learn philanthropy, love toward men, nowhere—not even in the life and teaching of our Divine Master—as we can at the foot of His cross. He there bids us love as He did. This was the highest ideal of love, and the sublimest embodiment of it. He poured forth His blood to redeem dying humanity, and the story of that great sacrifice is the mightiest of all incentives to self-denying deeds in our lives. Let us imitate Him in His love, and as far as it lies in us seek to alleviate the sufferings of mankind, and do our part "to mend the world." Thus, and thus only, shall we be "workers together with God."

XX.

PAUL SORROWING AND REJOICING.

"For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without *were* fightings, within *were* fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more."

2 Cor. vii. 5—7.

THE Epistles of Paul are valuable to us, not only on account of the important teaching they contain, but also because of the insight they give us into the heart of the great Apostle. Next to personal interview, we get nearer to a true man by his letters than by anything else. The heart speaks more freely in friendly correspondence than in any treatise or dissertation. The shackles of reserve are thrown aside, and friend speaks openly and confidingly to friend. Hence, when we desire to have a proper estimate of *the character*, rather than the mere *mental calibre*, of some great man who has passed away from the world, we read his "Life and Letters," in preference to the more formal and elaborate productions called his "Works." And even in his "Life and Letters," the "Letters" form that portion which interests us most. In the written biography *another* speaks to us, but in the "Letters" the *man himself* speaks, though dead, in the language of the living. Through them we are permitted to hear him speak

what throughout his life was only spoken to friends in the language of affection and confidence. This holds good with regard to the Epistles of Paul. In them we find the heart breathing forth its secrets as we never do in his public utterances; and thus in the reading of them we are permitted to become his *confidantes*.

The words of our text reveal—

1. An *exquisite sensitiveness of feeling* in Paul which we should scarcely have expected, judging from the narrative of his public life. We are not accustomed to think of great men as being very sensitive to any of the ordinary anxieties which trouble smaller natures. In their public life we see but one side of their character—the stern and strong. Could we have a glimpse into their private life we should see another. This is afforded us often by their letters. For instance, when we read Luther's simple and child-like letters to his little boy; or Cromwell's affectionate and devout epistles to his family from military head-quarters, we recognize the affectionate father both in the stern reformer and in the heroic warrior. We catch a glimpse of greatness which we would on no account miss, but which, estimating merely the public lives of those illustrious men, we should probably have overlooked; and we begin to learn that affectionate tenderness is in perfect harmony with the finest heroism. We must turn to Paul's *Epistles*, too, before we can see fully, beneath the daring heroism of his character, a heart sensitive as woman's to all the friendships, enmities, kindnesses, and unkindnesses of life.

Review for a moment the circumstances connected with the utterance of these words. Paul had heard some sad and depressing things concerning the Church

at Corinth. He had heard of its dissensions, its immorality, and its laxity of discipline. With a heart full of grief he wrote to them his *first* Epistle, which, whilst it was tender in its appeals, was very stern in its rebukes. No sooner had he sent the Epistle than misgivings presented themselves. Had he said to them more than they were able to bear? He waited for a reply from the Church, but no reply came. The thought of having spoken things which might prove a stumbling-block to weak natures made suspense intolerable to this great man. He sent Titus to Corinth, urging him to return speedily. His return, however, was delayed. Paul went to Troas for the purpose of meeting Titus on the way, and thus of bringing his own anxiety to a speedy close, but only to be disappointed, and to re-cross the Adriatic for Macedonia, with his heart heavy with grief. At length Titus returned. In our text Paul refers to the anxiety which weighed down his spirit on his return to Macedonia, as well as to the joy with which the return of his friend Titus, and the message which he brought with him from Corinth, filled his heart.

The elements of Paul's great anxiety were—
(a) The fear of being misunderstood by his brethren at Corinth, and thus of proving a stumbling-block to them;
(b) The long absence of Titus, his associate, from him;
(c) The dread that Titus may be sorely grieved by the inconsistencies of the Corinthian Church.

Now, it may occur to some that these are very small things indeed to fill a great man's mind with such intense anxiety as that described in our text. Can this be the man who bore the brunt of suffering and persecution, "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in

perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;" and who was moved by none of these things, neither counted his life dear unto himself? Is this wonderful sensitiveness to misunderstanding, to loneliness, and to the sensibilities of others, consistent with heroic endurance? Christianity says, "Yes;" and is thus at issue with the vulgar estimate of greatness. It presents to us the Saviour, many of whose most sublime and touching utterances were given in order to correct the misunderstanding of His followers; whose greatest trial in Gethsemane was, that His disciples could not watch with Him one hour; who, even when dying for the world, still remembered His mother with an affectionate and filial solicitude which added a glory to His cross, as He exclaimed to her, "Woman, behold thy Son," and to His beloved disciple, "Behold thy mother."

It is no doubt true that the great toils and the heavy cares of public life have a tendency to blunt the sensibilities of great men; but it is equally true that the surest evidence of greatness in man is that in the midst of arduous toils he is able to keep his heart fresh in its feelings and sympathies. Paul was able to do so. He was no less a *man*, or a *friend*, than an *apostle*. Like his Lord, he could weep the tears of sympathy and sorrow and not be ashamed of them; and like Him, he ever yearned for human affection and friendship. The word "alone" was to the Apostle as it was to his Master, a very cold word. He was a man who derived much of his strength and joy from the presence and kind consideration of friends—often obscure friends.

No one knows how much the world owes to the small kindnesses and attentions of life; how far the strength of the world's greatest apostles and heroes is sustained by those whose names never transpire, and who never come into prominence in any way, but who in silence and secrecy nourish those lives which, as the result, become mighty in the world. Paul never lost sight of these. Read the last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, as also of his Epistle to the Philippians, and see how gratefully he acknowledges the sympathies and loving services of God's silent workers. Just as the Evangelists do not overlook, but, on the contrary, mention with special emphasis, those women who performed the lowly service of ministering to Jesus of their substance, at that time when even the courage of the apostles began to fail them, and when the dark shadow of the cross was cast athwart His path; so Paul mentions with grateful love those women who laboured with him in the Gospel, and also other of his fellow labourers whose names do not transpire, but, as he assures us, are written in the Book of Life.

And we appreciate the great Apostle all the more for his exquisite sensitiveness of feeling. Only men endowed with natures rich in delicate and complex sensibilities can sympathize fully with others. Our Lord, who Himself was "a man of sorrows," had compassion on the multitude; and it is a religion of sympathy that the world wants. Men, whilst hating the cross, must love its spirit. Be not astonished that the great Apostle of the Gentiles was keenly sensitive to all those feelings of joy and sorrow which *must* be experienced by those who would sympathize with others.

2. These words, too, reveal very beautifully the *frankness* of the Apostle in his intercourse with men. He lays bare his whole heart, and tells the Corinthians that once he repented writing to them, but that now he rejoices, and why he rejoices. This is a letter to brethren, and as such there is in it no reservation, but the utmost frankness which ever springs from confidence and good will. What would life become were there more of this frankness between man and man!

3. These words reveal Paul's intense *spirituality*. He looks upon the return of Titus as God's method of comforting him. It was not Titus but *God*, "by the coming of Titus," that comforted him. Paul's mind was a mind which traced isolated facts up to general principles. In our text he traces the return of his associate up to God's mercy. It is a great attainment when we have got into the habit of tracing every blessing up to Him; when we have come to consider everything that is good in life—friends, joys, visits of consolation, and all the minor blessings of life, as well as the greater—as the gifts of our Father in Heaven.

"God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us." It is thus that the Apostle spoke of his God. He could say nothing better of Him than that He comforts those that are cast down, and that He comforted *him*. What so essential as that He in whom we trust can comfort sorrowing humanity. The religion that will win the heart of man must be a religion for the sorrowing. Paul spoke of God as he had found Him. There was no cant here. The man who at the outset of his Christian career was "shewn how great things he must suffer," could best speak of God as the "God of all comfort." He had found Him to be so. Thus it is that the

individual experiences of holy men develope their noblest conceptions of God. What a grand thing it is, like Paul, to have an experimental creed!

4. These words express a grateful and affectionate recognition of God. These are not the words of cold repetition—they are warm from the heart. There is nothing said of the suspense of waiting, but all of Titus' coming. The grateful heart murmurs not at delays, but joyfully accepts God's blessings in God's own time. Paul's Epistles abound with thanksgiving; every blessing is made an occasion for gratitude. Like the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, the Epistles of Paul in the New, abound more with thanks to God than any other portion of the Inspired Volume.

One word more. Observe that the return of Titus to Paul, after long absence, and the message of good will which he brings with him from Corinth, as well as the comfort with which his visit has filled his heart, are the occasions of all this rejoicing and gratitude, on the part of the Apostle. It does not require great events and startling interpositions of Providence to inspire the heart of the Christian with praise. There are always occasions mercifully afforded for gratitude, and happy is he who avails himself of them. May we learn to trace the love of God in the smaller events of our life, as well as in the more startling revelations of that love. May we look upon life in the light which streams from the cross, and we shall learn that "God is love," not only in that wonderful sacrifice which is the sure pledge and promise of His mercy, but also in all the smaller blessings with which He crowns our life. Then shall we, like the Apostle, never mention the name of God except with feelings of intense affection and gratitude.

XXI.

THE SON OF CONSOLATION.

"And Joses, who by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite."

—ACTS iv. 35.

THIS disciple bore two names. The one was probably given to him by his parents, the other by the Apostles. Names should be descriptive of character. So the Apostles felt. Hence, dissatisfied with the name which his parents had given him, before his true character had unfolded and developed, they gave him another name, which should the better describe the man.

Joses was a "*Levite*." You will remember the meaning of that word—"one who unites." The Levites were a tribe of the Jewish nation set apart for the service of God. They were the representatives of the national faith, and, as such, they were the bond of union among the other tribes. Barnabas was a Levite of a truth, worthy of the sacred name he bore. We have read of another Levite in the Gospel, who, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, forgot the sacredness of that name, and seeing a poor man wounded by the way, poured no oil into his wounds, but passed by on the other side. An ignoble man bearing a noble name! Not so Joses. To the name which his parents had given him, and the name which he shared in common with his tribe, the Apostles added another and a nobler.

The ordinary meaning of the Hebrew word "Barnabas" is "son of exhortation," but the Greek translation of it, given by Luke in our text, primarily includes the meaning of "a call to one's aid;" hence may be rendered "son of consolation" or "son of exhortation." Had Luke desired to convey the latter meaning he would have used a well known Greek word, which more clearly and fully expressed it. It is evident therefore that though the Greek translation may include the idea of exhortation, yet that the emphasis is laid not on the gift of exhortation, which Joses probably possessed, but rather on the *consolation*, which he, in the exercise of this gift, was so eminently qualified to extend to those in need of it.

We have already met with surnames in the history of the twelve Apostles—Simon, surnamed Peter; Lebbæus, surnamed Thaddeus; and James and John, surnamed Boanerges, "The sons of thunder." Here we meet with a surname essentially different in meaning from any of the others—Barnabas, "The son of *consolation*."

Various were the types of character in the infant church, but each had its particular sphere, its special work to do; and each was necessary for the completeness of that church. Not the least necessary and valuable was this type of character, "The son of consolation." As long as there is sorrow in the world there will be need of sons and daughters of consolation. Hearts sorely riven, and spirits weary and sad, ever seek after such, if haply they may find them.

Blessed is that family which has an angel of consolation in it. It may be found in the loving child who, at eventide, climbs up the knee of that father, who is weary,

sad, and perhaps bitter, with the cares and disappointments of the day's toil, and planting upon his aching brow a warm, tender, and loving kiss, convinces him that there is more of love, tenderness, and sincerity in the world than he had been disposed to think, and that much of it, after all, is bestowed upon himself. Brethren, deem not this ministry of love a trivial one. Placed in the circumstances of that father I know you would not. At such an hour that loving child would seem to you to be a messenger of consolation from the very presence of God. Or, it may be, that the messenger of consolation will be found in the loving mother who watches patiently day and night by the bedside of her dying child, and treads that room not as others tread it, but so silently as if an angel had come from heaven to minister to the dying child; and places her tender hand upon that cold brow with a touch of tenderness that is only felt by the warmth it imparts; and whispers a word of cheer and of love in such heavenly tones as if it were the whisper of a guardian spirit—or, indeed, of the very Christ come to that room. Say not that such a service is insignificant, or second to aught that man or woman can render. The dying do not think so. It is the best that earth can give ere the spirit departs for heaven.

Blessed, too, is that church that has in it the "son of consolation." All the sorrowing will be drawn to him. Like his Master, he cannot be hid. (Mark vii. 24). The needy and sorowful will find him out, and by contact with him their sorrow will be turned to joy, and their sighs into songs.

Remember there is no service in this world of ours which we can make so sublime as this. To heal broken

hearts, and gladden sorrowing spirits, is the divinest work in which we can engage on earth. It is the work nearest akin to our Master's. He could not call the Holy Spirit by any sweeter name than "Comforter," and among the richest of His legacies to His Church was His promise to send the "Comforter" to them, who should guide them into all truth. Think not that the work of comforting, or consoling men is a trifling work.

How numerous and how varied are the services rendered by the sons and daughters of consolation, who are ever filling our homes with brightness and with love! We do not know the worth of those tender hearts until we are in trouble, and even then not fully. We only know their full value when they are missed. Until they have passed away we never know how much of music there was in their voice, and of heaven in their smile; not until then do we learn the lesson that has as much of regret in it as of joy, that for weeks and months and years we have been entertaining angels unawares; angels never to return to earth again.

But in order to be sons of consolation—

1. *We must know something of the meaning of sorrow.* It is this that gives us such loving confidence in Jesus, that *He* knows what sorrows mean. How should we go to Him apart from the assurance that He, too, was once a "Man of Sorrows?" With what feelings should we tell Him all the story of our grief and suffering, had He not entered His dark Gethsemane, borne His heavy cross, and worn the crown of thorns! It is that thorny crown, though placed upon His sacred brow by wicked hands, that we accept as the token of His royalty over sorrowing men and women. And every one who would comfort the sorrowing must, to

some extent, like the Master, be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He must be able to sit down by the sorrowing one, and say, "Give me your hand, I have a fellowship with you in suffering; I, too, have tasted of sorrow and know how bitter it is. I, too, have entered the Gethsemane of anguish, and know how difficult it is, amid the shades of that garden, to pray, and say, 'Father, Thy will be done.' But I have been upheld in all, and now see that He who led me there, led me by the right way, and 'hath done all things well.' The way was very dark, but He led me through the darkness into the light. 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me and heard my cry . . . and He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.' Be comforted at heart, He will not fail you. 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' I have found it so, and you will too." Brethren, words like these, uttered with such tender tones as come from tasting deeply and patiently of sorrow, cannot be uttered in vain, and he who utters them has, by the utterance, become a "son of consolation" to the afflicted one.

2. *We must be sensitive to the sufferings and sorrows of others.* This is an essential attribute of every true "son of consolation." He who would comfort others must be a man of very tender sensibilities. Occasionally, we find men and women who are naturally endowed with exquisite tenderness of feeling towards others who are in sorrow. By others, this sensitiveness is very often gained through the discipline of suffering. Hardships and sorrows frequently exert a softening influence over men and make them more sympathetic. But it is at the foot of the Redeemer's cross, and there only, that the

lesson of sympathy can be fully learnt. The world's greatest sons and daughters of consolation, who sympathize most with suffering and sorrowing humanity, are those who have learnt of the Crucified One how to enter into the sorrows and help to bear the burdens of their fellow-men.

3. *We must possess much tact* in order to become sons of consolation. It is easy to utter an unkind word or a cruel insinuation, which will leave a sting behind; but it requires a dexterous hand and a delicate touch to extract that sting from the quivering heart, and to staunch the bleeding wound which it has inflicted. In the work of consoling those whose spirits are pierced with grief, a tone of the voice, or an expression of the countenance, a momentary gesture, or movement, may make all the difference between healing and aggravating the wound; and yet this tact cannot be learnt by any course of lessons in etiquette. In order to be comforters to the sorrowing we need a refinement of manner which cannot be learnt in any school save Christ's, a delicate culture of the heart which cannot be embodied in any rules of conduct, a tact which can only be gained by our entering into very intimate sympathy with the sufferer. There is no tact like that of love. Hence, that which I have already described as a sensitiveness to the sufferings and sorrows of others, and which I said can only be fully learnt at the foot of Christ's cross, is one essential condition of possessing that tact, without which we cannot be sons of consolation.

The world has great need of men like Barnabas. How many of us might become sons of consolation in our various spheres if we but desired it. It is a

glorious work to console the sorrowing; we cannot aspire to anything higher. How much of our Lord's life was devoted to this work! What a large portion of His recorded utterances are words of consolation! Rob our Lord's utterances and life-work of the consolation which they were intended to impart, and you rob them of their chief glory. Above all, rob the cross of its consoling power, and what have you left! It may be human to grieve others; it is divine to console. The whole Gospel narrative is a record of a grand ministry of consolation. If we would be like our Master, we must do our utmost to heal wounded hearts, and to make it easier for men to sing, and more difficult for them to sigh. And when, at last, we shall draw near to the close of life, and review all its deeds, it shall not be ours to exclaim in sadness over lost opportunities never to return.

> "The wounds I might have healed,
> The human sorrow and smart;
> But evil is wrought by want of thought,
> As well as want of heart."

But that voice which called us forth to duty will bid us rest from our life-long toil, and will comfort us with the assurance that every service rendered to the weak and sorrowing has been a service rendered to our Lord—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . . Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

XXII.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.

"And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment."

—LUKE vii. 36—38.

A PHARISEE invited Jesus to dine with him. That is the first surprise we meet with in our text. It was a customary thing for "publicans and sinners" to receive Him as guest; but this is the first of the three instances on record in which a Pharisee extended his hospitality to Him. The narrative introduces a new element into the recorded Life of Jesus. *Jesus of Nazareth is invited to a Pharisee's table!*

This surprise is followed by another quite as startling. *At the Pharisee's table Jesus receives the grateful homage of a woman from the city, who was a sinner.* That a woman who was a "sinner" should meet Christ in Simon's house was a very exceptional event. "Sinners," so-called, were seldom found in Pharisees' houses. That "sinners" should have met our Lord a little previous to this at Matthew's table was just what might be expected; but not so here. We learn, however, that this woman had come uninvited. Although the doors of Simon's house, according to custom, were

thrown wide open, so that all who desired might enter, yet her presence was unwelcome. "Sinners" rarely dared enter even on such occasions. This woman entered and stooped at Jesus' feet. Her's was the daring act of a heart intensely earnest.

There are times when earnest souls feel all the bounds of custom too narrow, and they are compelled to overstep them in the performance of a pressing duty; times when the irrepressible energy of one heart overrides this or that form of human restriction, and obeys a higher law, for which ordinary human regulations have made no provision. Such was this hour in the life of this woman. "When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house," she "brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment." She was a "fallen" woman; and how often woman fallen is fallen for ever! Her's was a sin from the ignominy of which society scarcely permits a return. For her there was scarcely a retreat; the door had shut after her, and who would open it! Society pronounced it impassable; so, too, the fallen one thought it to be. Oh, the sadness of living in the world unloved, unbefriended, only to be despised; and to bear the awful burden, unshared, of a lost name! To such, life is a cold, cruel thing. The heart broods in silence over its self-wrought anguish. Seldom such sorrow speaks; when it speaks, it speaks in tears; but only to those whose sympathy has encouraged the utterance. Half the world's sorrow has never been expressed, because there are so few who will hear it. How often does suffering

in this world of ours become a dumb spirit, just because the selfishness that is in it is a deaf one.

"O hearts that break and give no sign
Save whitening lips, and fading tresses,
Till death pours out his cordial wine
Slow-dropp'd from misery's crushing presses,
If singing breath or echoing chord
To every hidden pang were given,
What endless melodies were pour'd
As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven."

Jesus, at this hour, unsealed a spring of emotion in the woman which had been concealed for years. In His presence the over-fraught heart unburdened itself in sobs and tears. Tears relieve hidden sorrow, and are often the safety-valve of the burdened spirit. This poor woman now gave vent to that pent-up emotion of the heart which had hitherto been borne in loneliness and in silence; and, to her, this was a blessed hour.

Jesus had said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This was an invitation which breathed a bright hope into the saddest heart that heard it. It was a call to those who, exhausted with toil and heavy burdens, wearily leaned on life's broken staff, and sighed. Encouraged by this, the poor woman came, and came even to Simon's house, so that she might but meet the Christ. "She stood at His feet behind Him weeping." She was one of whom the world would be disposed to think that all womanhood had been battered out of her by her own past reckless career, and the consequent sneers of "righteous" men; and that the "woman" was lost in the "sinner." But it was not so. She was a "fallen" woman, but a *woman* withal. The remnants of her former glory were still there. She

had not altogether forgotten her womanhood, for she gave expression to her penitence in a way which only woman could. With that modesty peculiarly woman's she *stood at His feet behind Him weeping*," and thus gave a touching illustration of the truth which the poet expresses so beautifully.

"I believe
That woman, in her deepest degradation,
Holds something sacred, something undefiled,
Some pledge and keepsake of her higher nature;
And like a diamond in the dark, retains
Some quenchless gleam of the celestial light."

She, "whose features wore deep traces of sorrow, and patience as great as her sorrow," thus appealed to the Christ for sympathy. She stood—the representative of the world's despised ones, of its so-called "sinners"—seeking the blessing which Simon, and other "righteous" men, despised. She stood at Jesus' feet behind Him weeping, bringing the alabaster box of ointment, her most costly offering, to her Saviour. Nothing could withstand the might of her faith. The cold scrutiny of the Pharisee, as she daringly entered his house, could no longer check the outflow of her penitent and trustful heart. At any and every cost she was determined to lay all her sin, as well as her grateful homage, at Jesus' feet. No blessing could be withheld from such a suppliant. Her faith had in it the elements of certain triumph. There are hours in life which form pre-eminently a test of character—hours which bring into active exercise all the energies of the soul, when those, in whom there is generally nought that is gentle or noble, rise above the common-place, and reveal much that is surpassingly beautiful, and even heroic. Such was this hour in the life of this

woman. The record of her faith and loving homage is a beautiful picture on a very dark background.

All that took place on this occasion was unintelligible to Simon. His Pharisaic eye could see nothing beautiful in the tears of penitence, and in the homage of grateful love. When he "saw it, he spake within himself, saying, this man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner." Jesus replied in a parable, teaching him that those who were despised were not the farthest from God. This woman had surpassed her accuser. Simon had been wanting in ordinary courtesy toward an invited guest; the woman had come to pay the humble homage of a grateful heart to the world's Benefactor. Grateful love opens the hand of Mercy, whilst the stinted services of an ungrateful heart make even that generous angel close-fisted. The woman loved much—her's was forgiveness; the Pharisee loved little—his was rebuke. Jesus said to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . . Thy faith hath saved Thee, go in peace." His last words to her were words of peace. He dismissed her with heaven's benediction.

This is one of the many bold departures on the part of our Lord from the orthodox customs of His day. Self-righteous men were startled; the sanctity of caste was violated. "When the Scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto His disciples, how is it that He eateth with publicans and sinners?" Jesus replied, "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." The world had always sheltered its self-righteous men and women; Christ came to shelter its "sinners." He sat

down with those who were shut out from all sympathy and aid, whose path in life was hard and rough, and in whose experience suffering was the preponderating element. He welcomed into His presence, too, those who had lost a good name, at whom self-righteous men and women looked askance, and whom they kept at a distance from them. "*Odi profanum vulgus et arceo*"—"I hate the profane vulgar and drive them off"—exclaimed the Roman poet; "The people which know not the law are cursed," said the Jewish Rabbis; and polite society in every age has repeated the sentiment; but One greater than all exclaimed, eighteen centuries ago, and the words He spoke have come down from age to age, and on their way, like a river of life, have cheered the weary, and filled the hearts of the dejected with hope immortal —"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."

Our Lord's life among men was one grand exposition of these words. He had no message for self-righteous men, save one of rebuke, but for the world's "sinners" He ever had words of melting tenderness. In the inspired record of His utterances we miss the gentle tones of His voice, the mild radiance of His countenance, and the tender grace of His presence, all of which must have imparted rich pathos to the words which He uttered to the neglected and despised children of men. These are things which cannot be committed to print. Even inspired utterances lose much of their inspiration when printed. His sayings, too, have undergone the stiffening and cooling process of translation before they reach our ears. The evangelists probably translated them, and their renderings have to be

translated to our tongue ere the truths which He spoke to the multitudes can be reproduced. Hence, the delicate shades of meaning, which His words conveyed to those who heard them from His lips, lose their distinctness, and the varied cadences of His love and tenderness, with which His message was harmonious, are indistinct by reason of the distance at which the imperfect medium of translation places the Living Speaker from us. Many a word is pulseless to us as we first of all read it, whose equivalent, when it fell from those Divine lips, throbbed with an infinite affection.

I do not overlook for a moment that rich provision which our Lord has made for this drawback by the gift of that Holy Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us. Without that Comforter we should be "comfortless" indeed—poor "orphans," with only printed statements of a Father's love and of a Saviour's compassion! Hence it is that I point to this as one of the great necessities for the gift of the Holy Ghost. When the Christ withdrew His personal presence it became a supreme necessity that the Spirit should be sent. When He was on earth there was a wealth of pathos in His utterances, which is now missed in the printed reproduction of them, and which can only be supplied by the Holy Spirit breathing into them anew the heavenly meaning and fervour.

Thus, when Jesus spoke to the world's outcasts, and told them in the tenderest accents that much thought was spent in heaven over them, that, though human love had been exhausted, the Divine compassion had not, they were drawn by the silken cords of sympathy and love to His feet, to shed the tears of penitence and to present their offering of love. Hope was quickened

in hearts which had for years been strangers to it, and through men's very tears there appeared that beautiful arc which is the offspring of the storm and sunshine—the rainbow of Divine forbearance—spanning their sky with the rich hues of a heavenly light.

What wonder that when chief priests and scribes, and other righteous men, renounced the Christ, that the world's sufferers and "sinners" ever sought Him! And what wonder, that, to-day, those who have lost hope in every other direction find a release from all their sins, a satisfaction for all their yearnings, a rest from all their troubles, and a scope for all their gratitude, at their Saviour's feet!

Those feet *now* bear the marks of the nails, and tell the story of an infinite Sacrifice. Like the Centurion of old, sorrowing ones see in that Divine Sufferer a greater than Cæsar—"Truly this is the Son of God"—and One who is now exalted, by virtue of His sufferings, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. At His feet they bow, and like the woman of ancient days, pay their grateful homage there.

XXIII.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TOWARD ITS YOUNG MEMBERS.

"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

—LUKE xxii. 32.

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

—ROMANS xv. 1.

THESE words present to us one of the social aspects of the Christian religion, *i.e.*, the duty of the strong toward the weak. Brotherhood has its responsibilities as well as its privileges. The Church of Christ is a brotherhood, and as such, presents a net-work of privileges and obligations. I shall now give to these words, which enjoin upon the strong the duty of helping the weak, a special application, and take as my subject—

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TOWARD ITS YOUNG MEMBERS.

In virtue of their admission to the church there arises a new relationship between them and ourselves, not only that of individual Christians to individual Christians—*that* has existed since the moment of their conversion—but a relationship between them and ourselves as members of the same religious community, of a Christian brotherhood. Our Lord, by the formation of the Christian Church in the world, has furnished a new source of relationship. The church is spoken of by Paul as a "family," and as members of this family we are

reminded by him of special obligations toward the "household of faith." A glance at the meagre record we have of the early church may add force to the figure used. As a matter of fact one of the leading features of that church was its *family* character. While our Lord was with His disciples they had but one purse and one table. The last supper was surrounded by all the sweet and hallowing associations of the family circle. The Apostolic Church sought as far as practicable to retain this idea of a family in all its services. Every day, at the usual hour for the principal meal in Jewish families, the disciples met together at table, and closed the meal with the eucharistic commemoration, which they recognized as the pledge of their union one with another, and of all with their Lord. This meal, accompanied with words of counsel and the singing of psalms, constituted, as far as we can gather, their service. The idea of a family was the prominent feature of their meetings. The Corinthian Agapæ, or Feasts of Charity, were also intended to teach the same fact—that the Christian Church was "*a family*." Paul was thus only using a figure very familiar to the early Christians when he called the church by that name.

As a community, then, united together in closest relationship, the church has its duties to perform toward its members, especially its young members. When young life enters the family, with it there comes to the older members of the household a conviction of new responsibilities, and to the mother, in a very special sense, there comes the *desire* and the *capacity* to sustain and develope that life. This is true even of the inferior animals. What chapter in animal history is so interesting and instructive, even with regard to the most ferocious creatures, as that

which treats of their affection and care for their young? Among them parental love and the capacity to sustain young life accompany the gift of offspring. That the Church of Christ—the spiritual family—should be blessed with young, and yet that it should have neither the desire nor the capacity to nourish and develope them is a monstrosity in God's world! This bold figure is not mine, it is given in Inspired Writ—"Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones; the daughter of my people is become cruel."

Again, all the circumstances surrounding young life in this world are, as a rule, conducive to the development of that life. This is a truth so general that I need not particularize.

Thus, God ordains that animal life, and especially human life, should, in its infancy, be perpetuated and developed by parental love and care, and that it should be surrounded by circumstances favourable to *that end*. It is this that I wish to bring home to you to-day. I desire you to remember that the Christian Church, in this respect, should not be an exception; hence, that with the gift of young members, and *in virtue* of that gift, there comes a responsibility toward them which the church can only overlook at its own cost.

I would remind you—

1. That young life is *an essential element of every prosperous community*, and thus no community can afford to overlook or neglect its young. They represent the measure of its hope. They represent its *growing* life as the old do its *ebbing* energy. No people can be great who overlook this. We have read of the Roman *Imperator*, who, on a festive day, witnessed a grand

procession in the streets of Rome. The veterans passed by, bearing on their breasts the scars of many a conflict, and shouted hoarsely, "We *have been* brave." The aged man heaved a deep sigh and exclaimed, "When they can no longer go forth to battle who will then take care of my country?" Then came stalwart men in the prime of life, shouting lustily, "We *are* brave." Again the venerable man sighed and answered, "These too will pass away, and who will then take care of my country?" Then came the children and youths of Rome; the old man leaned upon his staff to hear their shout, and it fell upon his ear with the ring of sincerity and joyous hope, "We *will be* brave." "Enough," exclaimed he, as his countenance kindled with unwonted light, "My country is safe."

2. The church can ill afford to overlook its young members, *because they have a mission to fulfil within the church, i.e.*, to develope love in older natures and thus add a sweetness and heavenliness to their lives. They preserve the old from selfishness and from a low ideal of life. The ennobling influence which they exert over the church—as in ordinary life they do over the family and the community—by their very *dependence* upon the sympathy of the strong, is incalculable. Their *helplessness* is an antidote to the church's selfishness.

3. The church can ill afford to overlook its young members because *they have an experience, peculiarly their own, which the church needs.* In the young there is *naturally* a feeling of great nearness to the spiritual world, a consciousness of an Invisible Presence, the same as that which Wordsworth tells us came over him when a boy, nutting, "That there is a Spirit in the wood." This exquisite sensitiveness of youth may be

misguided, and generally is; it may express itself rudely enough in the language of superstition, but still there it is, feeling truths which we so seldom realize as we should—that there is an Invisible Presence everywhere, and that heaven is very near to earth. This is beautifully expressed by Thomas Hood.

> "I remember, I remember,
> The fir trees, dark, and high,
> I used to think their slender tops
> Were close against the sky:
> It was a childish ignorance,
> But now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm further off from heaven
> Than when I was boy."

God graciously provides for the lack of mental and spiritual development by giving to children a nature exquisitely sensitive, to enable them to feel out a truth which they cannot trace, and which they can utter only in broken sentences full of pauses, queries, and exclamations. With their "conversion" this feeling becomes intelligible. The Saviour has all along been speaking to them, they felt *a* presence, but until now they knew not that it was *He*. The nearness becomes now an affectionate one. Love has taken the place of awe. They understand now the sacred meaning of such words as these, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake;" and "because ye have known the Father." As members of Christ's flock theirs is a special nearness to the Great Shepherd: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. *He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.*" There is a special tenderness shown toward the *lambs* of the flock. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep the

Shepherd is represented as going after it into the wilderness, and bringing it back again, but it is "on His shoulders" that He lays it. It is the prerogative of the "lambs" to be carried in His "bosom" and to be encircled by the everlasting "arms." This is an experience which those who come to the Saviour late in life know little of, and an experience which the church can ill afford to miss.

Thus, whilst as a Christian community, we are called upon to do our duty toward the young who are in fellowship with us, we are also permitted to receive much that is beneficial from them in return. The responsibility is inseparably connected with the privilege, and the performance of this duty becomes an element of the church's well-being.

Now, *the congregational character of our church polity is in itself helpful to the realization of our responsibility the one toward the other.* In Christendom we find two churches; the one governs by authority, the other by mutual help. It is the latter that we recognize as the true model of a Christian church—a brotherhood having its mutual claims, privileges, and responsibilities. It is in such a church that the claims of the young become evident. We have already spoken of the church as a *family;* to return to the same figure, the first and most momentous question which can present itself to us as ministers and churches is, "What is the suitable food for the nourishment and development of these young lives, so graciously committed by our Lord to our trust? What are we to understand by the 'milk of the word,' which we are directed to furnish those 'new born babes' with 'that they may grow thereby?'" To speak briefly, this surely means that we should bring

prominently before them, and as *simply* as possible, the truths which they should know as *Christians;* for instance, the Divine Fatherhood and Love as revealed in Jesus Christ, the power of prayer with God, the nearness of the Saviour to all His disciples, the responsibilities as well as privileges which such a nearness entails, and the all-sufficiency of Christ to sustain them by His Spirit, and to prepare them for a closer fellowship in heaven.

1. In order to become helpful to young disciples *we should enter into hearty sympathy with them.* There must be an absence of all intolerance and prejudice on our part. Nothing will snap the bond that unites them to us like these; and nothing else will so effectually sap the energy of their young life. Beneath the blighting influence of general intolerance and suspicion, some of the best characters within the church have become dwarfed in their youth. If we would aid the young, we must sympathize with them in their peculiar difficulties and trials, be ready to make allowance for youthful inexperience and rashness, remembering that the very consciousness of new responsibilities perplexes the weak, and that it is a difficult thing at once to use a new power aright, or sustain a new name worthily. Thus, it behoves us in regard to them to have a charity which "suffereth long and is kind," which "envieth not," and "is not easily provoked;" and "it shall cover a multitude of sins."

2. We must remember that *youth is a period of gradual growth and not of fruit-bearing.* The best fruit trees produce little or no fruit for years, their *earliest* energy is expended in developing their resources, in sending forth roots and branches; the fruit will come by and by in rich profusion. Give young natures time for growth,

and in due season you will be rewarded with ripe fruit. If the parable of the seed growing secretly and manifesting "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," may be applied to individual cases—and why not?—it certainly teaches us that the earliest period of Christian life is a period of growth, followed by that of gradual development, which, in turn, is followed by the period of ripeness and maturity. Maturity must not be expected too soon. There is a beauty peculiar to the blade as well as to the ear of corn; each is beautiful in its season. Nor must we expect too rapid growth. According to the Parable of the Sower, the seed which "fell on stony ground" was that which "immediately sprang up," "because it had no depth of earth." The strength which ought to have been expended in root was expended in blade and stalk: the result is self-evident; when the sun arose it soon "withered away because it had no root." Men of small natures, of no depth of character, are those who luxuriate so miraculously at once, and one dreads the hour of collapse, when they will disappoint all expectations by disappearing with greater rapidity than that with which they appeared. Brethren, the developing of a Christian character in such a world as this is not the work of a day—it is the task of a life time. Let us not force the spiritual growth of young converts; there is a weakness connected with all forced growth; forced plants cannot stand the easterlies of life; let us give the young time, and let us wait patiently, and we shall not be disappointed in the result.

3. We should remember that there is a *cheerfulness and hopefulness natural to youth* which we should not be too ready to check. The day of life has its bright

morning with its singing of birds, as well as its evening with its mellower light and sacred hush, and *each* is necessary for the day, and *each* beautiful to God. Cheerfulness and hopefulness are essential elements of growing life. The young are blessed with an overflowing animation and an unfaltering hope which light up the world, and in a sense transfigure it to them. *Inflict* your seriousness upon these joyous spirits, and in them, because introduced too soon, it will degenerate into a gloomy, morbid disposition, which will becloud the remainder of their day. Let us beware of drawing the young out of their own youthful way of serving God with cheerfulness of heart. The ruthless hand of time, and the rude buffettings of life, will soon enough modify the high tone of the heart; meanwhile let the soul express its gratitude in the freshness of its youth, for God accepts it all for praise; "Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" Let them, then, shout their Hosannas to the Son of David with their clear silvery voices in their own natural way, and let no pious chief priest, or scribe, or elder, dare to break upon the harmony with one jarring word of reproof.

At the same time there are errors into which young Christians are apt to fall, and against which it is our duty and privilege to caution them.

1. We should caution them against *a misconception of the nature of the service into which they have entered.* Many young converts seem to have a vague idea that when baptized and admitted into the church, all that is to be done has been done, and that now nothing remains for them but to take a spiritual lounge and be at ease. We should lose no opportunity to remind such that by their

baptism they have professedly entered into a life-long service—a service which involves much toil and self-denial. The ordinances of Baptism and of our Lord's Supper are called "Sacraments" by our Episcopalian brethren. The word is in itself very expressive. *Sacramentum* in its *secondary* meaning (which was the meaning generally attached to it in the first centuries of the Christian era) was the threefold vow which soldiers took when enlisting in the Roman army—(*a*) Never to desert the standard. (*b*) Never to turn their back upon the foe. (*c*) Never to forsake their commander. The early Fathers of the Church transferred the word from the Roman Camp to the Christian Church. It was a grand word. There was a military element about it which charmed those heroic men. To them, whilst it became expressive *in general* of *every* sacred vow or act, it became *peculiarly* expressive of *the* vow which they had taken on entering a more illustrious warfare than that which bore the Roman name—that they would never desert their standard, never turn their back upon the foe, and never forsake their commander. They realized that all was not done when they entered the church, and received its "sacraments," that thereby they were pledging themselves to new responsibilities, and entering upon new conflicts.

Does not the Life of our Lord very beautifully teach us the same truth? We have, in another discourse, called attention to the fact that the record of our Lord's Baptism is immediately followed by that of the Temptation. The Spirit who, descending from heaven, rested upon Him as He "went up out of the water," forthwith led Him up "into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." The *consecration* was

immediately followed by the *conflict.* It is ever thus. As with the Master, so with the disciple. There is a *struggle* upon the threshold of every consecrated life. Let us seek to impress upon young Christians this great truth—that with their conversion the contest but begins, and that if they would be loyal and true they must be prepared to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ" until their dying day. "For" they "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." "Wherefore" they must "take unto" themselves "the whole armour of God that" they "may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand." *To withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand!* They have much to *withstand,* much to *do.* "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." *Daily* cross-bearing is to be a life-long repetition.

Christ never told His disciples (what is sometimes told young Christians without any explanation or qualification) that they had nothing to do because He Himself had done all. He called them by great names—"salt of the earth," "lights of the world"—and thus prepared them for a great work. He impressed upon them a sense of their responsibility, and thus made heroes of them. Man, if he be a Christian, is ennobled and made strong by being impressed with the greatness of his mission. The consciousness of a high vocation in the world imparts a most marvellous inspiration to a life—a heroism which no danger can intimidate. Boswell gives an instance in his life of how even a *mistaken* conviction of responsibility raised him above the terrors

of a storm. He was at sea; a gale came on; in his trepidation he began to walk the ship from bow to stern, questioning every sailor as to the prospects of the hour. At last an old salt put a rope in his hand, saying, "We are in danger, and the safety of the vessel depends upon this being held with great force." Boswell forgot his fears, and at length the storm passed. When all was over he found, to his amazement, that he had been holding with all the energies of his being a useless rope. It mattered not, Boswell did not know that when the storm raged; he had *then* the conviction that he was performing an important duty, and that made a man of him, when, apart from that conviction, he would have subsided into a coward. If this be true, how true of those who *know* that they have a yet higher duty to perform, a life-long duty which God has given them, and for the performance of which He has promised all necessary strength.

We cannot remind the young members of our churches too often that they have taken a vow of unreserved obedience to their Lord, that therefore absolute fidelity to Him must be the constant aim of their life, if they would be true to their profession. We should very earnestly bid them beware of the first deceptive or dishonourable act, be true to their principle, so as to be beyond an equivocation or a lie. How often is this overlooked by Christian professors! Competition is rife, the love of style is a mighty power in this age, and Christian men and women sacrifice integrity and sense of honour in the struggle. How often has the tale of the Catholic money-lender, who, when he was about to cheat his customers, drew a veil over the picture of his favourite saint, been repeated in the lives of

Protestant Christians. There is a great laxity in this direction among business men. It is a recognized thing among many, though vaguely expressed, that it is impossible to be strictly conscientious in business. An impression exists that Christian principle must be modified in certain circumstances, the competition of the day rendering it necessary; thus so-called Christian men begin to consider insincerities as inevitable, and they become satisfied with something less than a straight course in life. Let us lose no opportunity of warning our young brethren against the fatal result of once letting go the moorings in this respect.

2. We should warn them against *affecting a stereotype religious phraseology*—a great danger connected with the religious life of to-day—against repeating phrases which they have never understood themselves, but which they suppose some one else does, or once did; phrases which, if omitted by another, give rise to very serious insinuations of heterodoxy, but which, as used by themselves, are like so many blocks of marble, the petrifactions of lives that once did exist, but which have long passed away from the world. Few things undermine true spirituality of character like cant. Let us ourselves beware of *speaking* more piously than we *feel*, and beware of encouraging others to do so.

3. We should caution them against *attaching too much value to impulsive and transitory feelings.* We have seen young Christians, who, for months, after being admitted into church fellowship, have been in a constant state of spiritual tension; never happy except in going the whole round of revival services. They had an intense craving after religious excitement. This, of course, did not last, they could not long sustain the

strain, the excitement gradually died away, but it left behind a feeling of exhaustion which ended in a relapse. There is nothing new in this; it is the old story of mere excitement bringing down the moral tone of the heart. "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee yet will I never be offended," exclaimed Peter to his Lord in the white heat of feeling. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," exclaimed Jesus, "that this night before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice." There was as much *in*sight as *fore*sight in this announcement. Our Lord well knew that such a glow of excitement could not last through the night. "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," exclaimed the enthusiastic scribe, but such an enthusiasm must be tested before it can be trusted. Our Lord replied, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head;" and we hear no more of the scribe's enthusiasm.. Let there be among young Christians in our churches something far deeper and more enduring than mere excitement. Ecstatic moments will come to the Christian—times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. There are times in his experience when devotion can only speak in sighs, and sobs, and broken utterances; but there are times also when it speaks in the calm language of a soul that lives in the serenity of God. The measure of a heart's devotion does not depend upon the measure of its excitement.

4. We should caution them *with regard to the formation of habits*, since those habits which govern a life are, *as a rule*, contracted in its early days, and since, of all habits formed, those strike deepest root which have been formed at the commencement of a Christian

career. We should point out to them how the apparently insignificant acts of youth, when often repeated, grow into habits which to a marvellous extent will mould their character and determine their destiny. We all know this to be true. Every act, first of all, involves conscious effort, but gradually, as the act is repeated, this is less felt. This applies to good and evil acts. In performing a *good* deed for the first time we are conscious of an effort, but the oftener the deed is performed the more easy does it become, until at last it involves no effort at all, and we know something of that pleasure and ease in doing good which our Master experienced when He exclaimed, "My *meat* is to do my Father's will." So with an *evil* act. We have first of all to struggle with convictions of right, but every violation of such convictions lessens the force of the struggle until at last evil becomes easy and pleasant. It becomes a part of our character, because by repetition it has become a habit, and character is made of habits. How true is the maxim of the old Cynic philosopher, "Habit is second nature."

Again, we should caution them against what, as a rule, is a characteristic of youth, and which I will call *love of danger.* Children love to play with fire when they know it is dangerous to do so, and *because* they know there is danger in so doing. If you have ever accompanied a boy or girl on foot along the top of a cliff, where there are two paths, you have noticed that the child is almost sure to choose the path nearer to the precipice. The aim of young folk seems to be, to go as near as possible to danger and be safe. Have we not seen the same tendency in the conduct of young converts. Their question is *not*, "How far can I keep

away from danger?" but, "How near can I be to danger without being *too* near?" They love to tread upon the very edge of peril. "May I go to the ball, the fête, the circus, the theatre?" &c. In other words, "How near to evil can I go without becoming its victim?" More young members of our Christian Churches have fallen by playing *knowingly* with danger than by any other means we can think of.

5. *Our example should harmonize with all our admonitions and exhortations* to them. "Example," exclaimed Burke, "is the school of mankind, and they will learn at no other." Men, as a rule, cannot recognize the presence of a principle until it is embodied in a life. Life alone can give an impetus to a life. Brethren, it is this that tells upon the world, and it is this that will exert the mightiest influence over the younger members of our churches, who look to our example in preference to our talk for instruction and guidance.

But what organized movement can the churches set on foot for the well-being of its young members? We hesitate to make suggestions here. This is a question upon which local considerations should be brought to bear. We have a dread of prescribed rules and an elaborate plan of action for all. What we seek is, that the churches may realize the greatness of their responsibility in regard to young Christians; then we doubt not each church will do its duty toward them in its own way. There is one suggestion which we would make, however, *i.e., That, whenever practicable, meetings should be held expressly for young converts.* We know that this is not always possible, especially in the case of small churches. The number of converts may be very few and even they may not all be able to attend at the

same time. When practicable, however, it is certainly beneficial that young christians should be brought into personal contact the one with the other. There is an inspiration gained by fellowship with others of kindred feelings and sympathies.

But, one word of caution —*Let no organized movement on the part of the church be accepted by you as a substitute for your own individual effort.* This, whilst it applies to all, applies with special emphasis to those whom God has blessed with exceptional power to influence their fellows by their example. There are men who seem to carry others with them; the Peters of the church who exclaim, "I go," and others almost involuntarily reply, "We will go with thee." They are men specially sent to this world to exert an influence. Their conduct acts as an inspiration on smaller natures. How great their responsibility when such a power has not been exercised, or, if exercised, has been misdirected! To such men we say, use your *personal* influence for good; come into individual contact with those who need your counsel and example. A new direction and a mighty impulse may be given to a life by a timely suggestion or a kind warning from *you*. No organization can make up for the lack of that. The church can never compensate for your personal neglect.

XXIV.

THE PSALMIST AND HIS SONG.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto Thee, O LORD, will I sing."

—PSALM ci. 1.

A difficulty confronts us at the very outset. In these words the Psalmist announces his intention of singing of mercy and judgment unto God. This he does not do in this Psalm, nor, indeed, in the following. Not until we read the ciii. Psalm do we find the words of our text verified. *That* Psalm is in a very *special* sense a Psalm of praise. It has been accepted as such in every age. It is, then, only in so far as we view this, and the following Psalm, as leading up to the sentiment which throbs in every verse of the ciii., that the words of our text become intelligible. David, in that Psalm, *does* what he announces as his intention in our text—"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless His holy name," &c.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment." This announcement of the Hebrew poet presents a significant contrast to that of Homer and of Virgil in the opening lines of their poems. Homer begins thus:—"Sing, muse (goddess), the destructive wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus, which brought innumerable sufferings upon the Greeks, and hurled to Hades many valiant souls of heroes," &c. Virgil begins with these words:—"I sing of arms, and the man, who, a wanderer by fate, was the first that came from the coasts of Troy to Italy and the

Lavinean shore, much was he tossed about, both on land and on the deep, through the unrelenting anger of the fierce Juno," &c. Thus the greatest of Greek and Roman poets sang of the wrath and the arms of men, and the unrelenting anger of the gods; but the Hebrew poet sang of "mercy and judgment." They sang to posterity; he sang to God—"Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing."

What can account for this difference? Let us see at what point in history Hebrew song began. That a kind of music existed before the days of Abraham is evident. Jubal, the son of Lamech, is spoken of (Gen. iv. 21) as "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ;" and, in the record of the patriarchal age, Laban is represented as speaking of "songs," of the "tabret," and of the "harp." That, however, is all. We do not read of the patriarchs as singing. They meditated, built altars, offered sacrifices, communed with God; but in all we have no record of song. We must pass on, until that period when the Israelites from being a servile people became a free nation; when, at the starting-point of their national history, they saw their tyrants—the sight of whom, but a few hours before, on the distant hills, in swift pursuit, had filled their heart with dread—now buried beneath the waves of the Red Sea. It is now that for the first time we read of a song of praise ascending from human lips to God. The very birthplace of the Hebrew nation becomes the birthplace of Hebrew psalmody; and this first of national songs is a song of praise to God—a song of "mercy and judgment"—"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously:

the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea," &c. (Exod. xv. 1—21.) The nation could not forbear to sing in such an hour as this. This was the grateful shout of a people at the first thrill of freedom, and a freedom marvellously wrought. This was an occasion when a discourse or an address on the goodness and mercy of God would have been simply intolerable. The one deep, unutterable feeling which throbbed in the great heart of the nation must burst into a song, and a song to God, for it was He that had redeemed them, and brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage—"I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously." There could be no mistake about their deliverance. They had not wrought it; but God. This was the overpowering conviction of the nation at the very starting-point of their history, and far as the nation wandered subsequently, they but very seldom forgot that the Lord fought for them and delivered them. Their review of the great past of their national history, unlike that of the Greeks and Romans, was a devout recognition of *divine* mercy and judgment. They never—and we see this most strikingly in the Book of Psalms—forgot the commencement of their national history. This event was that which gave a tone to all that succeeded, and the song "of mercy and judgment" which their ancestors sang on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, on that memorable morning suceeeding so marvellous and terrible a night, never seems to have died away, but was repeated in some form or other by inspired lips, over every deliverance, individual and national, because that first deliverance was accepted as the pledge and type of all succeeding ones. The theme of the nation's first song is the theme of David in our

text, but is essentially different from that of Greek or Roman poet.

"I will sing"—David was a marvellous man for song. How much of his life must have been taken up by it! What a sublime harmony must have been in that soul which could breathe these Psalms; for the music which found utterance, sweet as it was, was but faint when compared with that which could not be expressed. Handel's "Messiah" tells us of a still deeper, grander music which dwelt in that breast, and which remained for ever unsung—at least on earth. This, too, is the teaching of the Psalms of David.

David sang of mercy, of judgment, of power, and of the honour of God's name. He sang of God as his tower of defence, his buckler, the rock of his salvation, &c. He sang with the voice, with the harp, with the psaltery, &c. He sang his duty, for he sang God's commandments—"Thy statutes have been my song in the days of my pilgrimage." He sang in the morning his song to God, and thus gave the key-note to the day's harmonies; he sang, too, in the night, when every thing seemed to mock his song—"I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning." (Psalm lix. 16). "And in the night His song shall be with me." (Psalms xlii. 8). The morning song had an inspiration of its own. It was the song of returning consciousness; the song over a new day born into the world, when the darkness was gone, when the light once more streamed from the opening heavens, and when all things were bathed in the morning dew and sunshine. This song partook of the freshness of the early dew, and the glow of the rising sun. His evening song, too, had a sweetness of its own. It was a song that had lasted throughout the day,

and now, from the calmness of the evening, drew a richer melody than it possibly could from the turmoil of the day's scenes. The nightingale sings in the day as well as in the night; but what gives special sweetness to that song, which is in itself so charming, is, that it lasts longer than any other. It enters far into the night; and darkness seems only to deepen its harmony. It is a grand thing if the buffettings of the day are unable to dash all the music out of us; but, on the contrary, only awaken within us fuller symphonies which shall find expression in songs in the night—songs gleesome and stirring, though, like the nightingale's, sung in so much loneliness, and shade, and gloom.

What have we to say, when we think of this Psalmist, who was unable to abstain from singing God's praises far back in the dim dawn of this world's day, in the full splendour of which we live and yet sing so little?

Those were choice men who sang God's praises in ancient days. They knew the sorrows of human life; but they also knew the joys of the Divine indwelling. Their very trials became the occasions of their songs. As the brook owes its music to the pebbles which present a resistance to its onward course; so in their lives every resisting force called forth sweet harmonies. To use another figure, as the Æolian harp makes every breeze that passes through it harmonious; so in the lives of Israel's psalmists, each gust of trial drew forth from their spirits, in a rich variety of vibrations, a heavenly music which had not been heard in calmer days. What songs can compare with the songs of Zion! Our Lord and His disciples sang one of the Passover Psalms at the last supper, and thrice upon the cross He repeated words from these ancient songs. And to-day, wherever

the word of God is received, these psalms are adopted as the highest expression of the heart's devotion and praise. The Church of God, the wide world over, divided as it is in other respects, is at one in its profound reverence for these inspired utterances of the human soul to God.

"*Unto Thee*, O Lord, will I sing." Some of the Psalms are Psalms *concerning* God, but sung *to* men. This Psalm is sung *to* God. David now sings as the bird sings in solitude, when no ear hears the song save God's; sings like the lark as it rises from its lowly nest, and, ascending in ever widening circles toward the heavens, pours forth a fuller and a sweeter song, until at last the sweetest of all the strains are lost to man, and are poured in all the fulness of their melody into the ear of God. Thus, I say, David sings on this occasion; and, as he sings, he becomes more and more desirous that the song should be more melodious, more full, than anything he had yet sung, until at last he invites a chorus of God's sweetest singers to his aid—"Bless the Lord, ye His angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul."

O that some echo of our text may be called forth in our hearts to-day; that we could sing as David did, of mercy, and also of judgment! Brethren, our theme is more inspiring than David's ever was. Think of the Great Redemption which was only *symbolized* by that deliverance concerning which Hebrew poets sang so much and so gratefully. Think of it as the highest

manifestation of divine mercy and judgment; and with your heart made tuneful with the inspiration of grateful love, may each exclaim—

"I sing my Saviour's wondrous death;
He conquered when He fell:
'Tis finished!' said His dying breath,
And shook the gates of hell.

'Tis finished!' our Immanuel cries;
The dreadful work is done:
Hence shall His sovereign throne arise,
His kingdom is begun.

His cross, a sure foundation laid
For glory and renown,
When, through the region of the dead,
He passed to reach His crown."

Review your lives to-day, and remember how that Great Redemption has been to you the pledge and medium of constant deliverances and mercies. Remember how goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life. Then you will no longer be silent, but from the depths of a heart which cannot contain its grateful joy, you will sing, "My tongue shall sing aloud Thy righteousness. O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." Amen.

XXV.

OUR LORD'S PARABOLIC TEACHING.

"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them."

—MATT. xiii. 34.

HITHERTO our Lord had taught the multitude without parables; *now* He spake to them "in parables, and without a parable spake He not unto them." At the close of the first parable recorded by the Evangelists, and probably the first uttered by our Lord —that of the Sower and the Seed—the disciples, astonished, asked, "Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?" They were astonished for two reasons. It was a new feature of our Lord's teaching; it was also the mode by which the Jewish Rabbis spoke to their *disciples only*, and not to the multitude.

Our Lord's reply is, to us, difficult to understand— "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross and

their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

In explanation of this reply, it is scarcely enough to say that our Lord chose the parabolic method of teaching the multitude because it was a more disguised form of teaching the truth to a bigotted people, and therefore less open to rejection than the direct method. That is, doubtless, true, but it is scarcely all the truth conveyed in our Lord's emphatic reply. Nor can these parables be considered as a judgment upon the ignorant, sealing their doom. That would introduce a harsh discord into an otherwise harmonious life. One thing, however, is evident, and this seems to form an important part of our Lord's reply, that whilst the parable is the most lucid method of teaching to those whose spiritual perceptions are dim, *but who desire to be taught*, and has a firmer hold upon their memory than any other; at the same time, *to those who willingly close their eyes and their ears, and harden their heart*, "lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted," the parable is the darkest of all sayings. The emphasis with which our Lord concludes the Parable of the Sower, as also other parables—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—confirms this view. *The parable was given as a test; it awakened enquiry only in the attentive hearer.*

The parable in itself was nothing new to the disciples, but our Lord's method of dealing with it was. The Old Dispensation was pre-eminently parabolic; it was

a parable in itself. The Jewish ceremonies were the shadows of the good things to come. The parable was an essential feature of Mosaic teaching; but the Rabbis, as we have already intimated, had confined it to the teaching of their disciples. It was a new thing to teach the *multitude* in parables. Whatever our Lord touched He beautified and ennobled; He did so with parables; in His hands they became channels of greater truths than they ever had been before, and not to a *few*, but to the multitudes of the world.

The great truth underlying our Lord's parabolic teaching, and without which it would be meaningless, was—*The very close connexion existing between the two worlds, the material and the spiritual.* He taught His hearers that both worlds were the handiwork of the same Master-Spirit, and thus that a grand harmony existed between them. He never depreciated this world; He represented it as a world of which its Maker was not ashamed, and which, if but viewed aright, revealed eternal truths. He taught them that nature, to a marvellous extent, was the embodiment of God's thought, on the principle that every handiwork is an expression of the thought of the artificer.

Thus as the sculptor chisels in stone, or the painter throws on canvas the great idea which he cannot express in words, and thus makes the material the recognized, and, to him, the highest *possible* representation of his deepest thoughts, so—only in a sense infinitely higher—is nature an embodiment of God's thought, which He Himself has pronounced to be "very good." Hence, if we would know more of God we must not forget to commune with nature. They who worship nature sadly err, and they, too, who

receive it as the only revealer of God; but we err also if, going forth beneath the high canopy of heaven into the woods and fields, we do not realize that we are in the presence of Deity, and that this world, and worlds above, marvellously abound in parabolic teaching concerning the spiritual and the eternal. Christ attached a sacredness to everything God made, calling nothing common or unclean, but pointing to them all as to so many preachers of the Invisible.

Thus did our Lord teach the oneness of creation. This truth which underlies our Lord's parabolic teaching had been previously taught in another form in the sermon on the Mount. Man, sparrow, and lily, were represented as being fed and clothed by the same gracious hand. Jesus taught men that nothing in God's world was overlooked, and how could man be? He made of the smallest objects of God's care so many messengers of hope and loving trust to man. By all this He taught men that this world is a vast school, where the greatest can learn from the least, and where the great theme of all is God and His Love. He taught that—

"Thinking of the hand that made you,
Makes and keeps you so divine;
Every stone becomes an altar,
Every blade of grass a shrine.

"Worlds of art in every insect,
Miracles in every clod;
Far beyond man's masterpieces
Is the simplest work of God."

Other teachers would have pointed to the stars, the mighty eagle, or majestic cedar. Christ stooped to the sparrow, and the lily, and made them the exponents of life's sublimest lessons. David "considered the

heavens," the work of God's hand, and drew from them lessons of humble gratitude. Jesus bade men look nearer and "consider the lilies of the field," the work of the same hand, and from them learn lessons of unwavering faith and ceaseless gratitude; learn that God *does* care for man, that above us all there is a loving Providence supplying our every need. From everything around He derived materials for His mighty discourses; this world, and its various scenes, formed one grand volume which He presented to men, and bade them read it in the light of God's love, and thus—

> "Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

What a world of similitudes did Christ thus open up to men in His teaching! And not only nature, but also daily life was made the teacher of sublime truths. The various forms of human economy were made to represent the Divine. How comprehensive in this respect were the parables of our Lord! They embraced almost every kind of human industry existing at that time in Palestine. To husbandmen, our Lord spoke of the sower, the tares, of the seed growing secretly, and the rich fool. To women, He spoke of the leaven in the meal, and the lost piece of silver. To merchantmen, of the pearl of great price. To fishermen, of the draw-net. To vinedressers, &c., of labourers in the vineyard, the wicked husbandmen, and the barren fig tree. To commercial men, of talents, and of creditors and debtors. To shepherds, of the lost sheep. To masters and employed, of the unjust steward, and the unprofitable servant. And thus, in each of our Lord's parables, we have an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

And be it remembered that each of these earthly stories had a heavenly meaning peculiarly its own. It is more true than some of us are apt to think, that material things have spiritual counterparts. I know how this statement may be abused and sadly exaggerated, but let us not, therefore, deny that which is true in it. These parables of our Lord were not arbitrary illustrations. In them we have the objects and facts of this life presented in the light of the spiritual world—that light in which alone they can be fully seen and understood. Nature and human society are alike instruments of the Divine thought. In Christ we find the Divine One take these instruments into His own hands and make them vocal with the great lessons which they were adapted to convey. By His parables He taught men how to read God's highest thoughts and most gracious purposes in the rude hieroglyphics of earth. He taught men that all that was tender in the human heart existed in an infinite fulness in the Divine, and that aught of beauty that was found on earth was to be found in richer combinations in heaven. Did the earthly shepherd go to the wilderness to seek the wandering sheep until he found it, and would the Heavenly Shepherd fail in this crowning act of shepherdliness! Would there be less rejoicing in heaven over the return of the poor wanderer than there is on earth when the sheep is carried back upon the shoulder of its shepherd to the fold! Again, would the Divine Fatherhood fail at the point where human fatherhood triumphed! Would there be less joy in the heart of God over the return of His wandering child than there is in the heart of a human parent when the prodigal boy returns! Oh, nay! It was thus—by comparing

heavenly things with earthly things—that our Lord brought the greatest truths of His Gospel within the range of ordinary human comprehension, and thrilled the hearts of men with their simplicity and pathos.

Men and women who were engaged in the numerous industries referred to in the parables which they heard from our Lord's lips, could not go to their homes and engage again in their daily callings without remembering His marvellous expositions of them, and without having lofty conceptions of what hitherto had a hidden meaning. Their obscure callings must have appeared ever after less prosaic and earthly, and more sublime and heavenly. Our Lord cast a halo of wondrous grace around what they had been accustomed to view as commonplace; and human life and the world around, henceforth, became transfigured with a Divine light.

As I have already intimated, there were some upon whom these sublime teachings were lost. Like children, they listened to the story, but forgot the moral. To them our Lord's parables were like so many idle tales. They were interested, but not instructed. But to those who yearned for consolation and guidance the parables brought heaven very near to their homes, and God to their hearts.

How marvellous the condescension of the Son of God in speaking to men in the days of His flesh as they were able to bear, and in so adapting His teaching to the limited comprehension and the artless phraseology of those poor peasants who thronged to hear Him, as to charm them by its homely simplicity and tender force! And to-day, now that eighteen hundred years have passed away, those charming epitomes of the Gospel,

which our Lord gave in the form of parables to the assembled multitudes, are read by simple-hearted men and women with keen and unfaltering interest, because, as of old, they present to their unsophisticated hearts in the simple dialect of their home life, those mysteries of Divine Love which fill angels with adoring wonder.

Would that the servants had more of the simplicity and pathos of the Master in telling their fellow-men of the love and compassion of their Father in heaven!

"How sweetly flowed the Gospel's sound
From lips of gentleness and grace,
When listening thousands gathered round,
And joy and reverence filled the place.

From heaven He came, of heaven He spoke,
To heaven He led His followers' way;
Dark clouds of gloomy night He broke,
Unveiling an immortal day.

'Come, wanderers, to My Father's home;
Come, all ye weary ones, and rest;'
Yes! Sacred Teacher, we will come;
Obey Thee, love Thee, and be blest!

Decay, then, tenements of dust!
Pillars of earthly pride decay!
A nobler mansion waits the just,
And Jesus has prepared the way."

XXVI.

THE BURNING BUSH.

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." —Exod. iii. 2—5.

IN our treatment of the words of our text we shall at once proceed to consider—

I. The historic interest which they possess.

II. The spiritual teaching which they impart.

I. These words are full of historic interest.

This was a great hour (1) in the life of Moses; (2) in the history of the Jewish people; and (3) in the history of Divine Revelation.

1. It was a great hour in *the life of Moses*. It was now that he was brought face to face with his mission in the world. That is an important moment in every man's life, when he realizes for the first time what his calling is. Every man remembers, throughout life, the hour of his apprenticeship; that was *the event* of his early days. It was then that he realized, for the first time, that he had a work of his own to do, and a personal responsi-

bility to bear; in other words, that he had a *calling* in the world. In a far higher sense this was to Moses *the* event of life. Eighty years of gradual preparation had preceded it. The forty years spent in Egypt as the son of Pharoah's daughter were followed by the forty years of shepherd life in the land of Midian. At that time, when two-thirds of the life of Moses had passed, it would seem as if God had called him to be a shepherd, and nothing more. So far everything favoured that belief. It did not seem reasonable that two-thirds of a life would be taken up in preparation for the remaining third! It was left for this hour to put an end to all such doubts, and to correct all false estimates of that man who had been prepared, by leading sheep, to lead a people, through the Arabian desert. The forty years of quiet toil among the solitudes of Horeb, represented a period of preparation for a mighty task. We now reach the culminating point when God summoned Moses to the undertaking, for which he had been equipped unawares to the world, and unawares to himself. The Divine call surprised Moses by its very abruptness. It came to him as he was watching his flock. How could a poor shepherd become the deliverer of a people? The hesitation of Moses on this occasion shows how contrary to all his expectations was the import of this call. He had now settled down in life, and had apparently become reconciled to his obscure calling. But at this moment the whole aspect of his life became changed. Never after this did it appear to him in the same light as it did before. It had now become a grander, a diviner thing. Old things had passed away, and all things had become new. This hour, then, was a most important one in the history of Moses; it was the turning point of his life.

2. It was an important hour, too, in *the history of the Israelites*. As yet, they had never been an independent people; they had no national existence; and for ages they had been under the hoof of the Egyptian tyrant. It would seem as if there were no hope of deliverance for them. The cry of their agony had ascended to heaven, but apparently in vain. The heavens were like brass, and nought seemed to move the heart of God. This event on Mount Horeb is the first welcome break upon that mysterious silence. God at length *speaks*, and speaks in mercy—"I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, and know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." This was the first promise of a national emancipation from the "house of bondage." It was at this moment that the first ray of light—in the form of a promise of deliverance to the Jewish people—was shot across the darkness of centuries. This hour was the beginning of a new era in the history of God's chosen people.

3. This, too, was an important hour in *the history of Divine Revelation*. Here God, for the first time, revealed Himself by *symbol*. Hitherto He had appeared in the form of a *man*, and as a mysterious stranger—thus teaching His personality; at this time He appeared in a flame of living fire. This presents a new chapter in the history of Divine manifestations. Here we have the first intimation of all the symbolism of the Jewish religion. The burning bush was a prelude to the Sheckinah, and the holy ground on Mount Horeb an

anticipation of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of God.

For these reasons this moment was a very important one, and, as such, should be approached with profound solemnity. How did Moses approach it? Let us briefly review the circumstances. Moses took his flock to Horeb, "*and the angel of the Lord appeared unto him out of the bush.*" So wrote Moses himself subsequently, but at the time he little knew what that bush, burning and yet not consumed, could mean. It startled him. He said to himself, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." He sought to approach it with the eye of scrutiny. He recognized the mysterious, but not the Divine, in that bush. "When the Lord saw that he turned *to see*, God called unto him, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

But—

II. These words abound with spiritual teaching.

1. Our text teaches us in what spirit we should approach *all that is mysterious in life.*

(a) The natural world abounds in mystery. How are we to approach it? Not with the scrutinizing eye of a critic, but with the reverent steps of a worshipper. There are regions in nature where man has no footing; spheres in which he vainly asks questions; and many things concerning which, for the present, he must be profoundly ignorant. There are mysteries for which science has no key, and to which human discovery can supply no clue; hence, they demand silence and reverence of us. And there are some mysteries, like

the burning bush, which, even with shoes off, we must not approach too near, because of God's over-powering presence. It is this that men forget so often; they scrutinize God until, like the sun, He blinds them with His glory. Like Moses, on this occasion, we are apt to be startled by the mysterious, forgetting that God is there! In this beautiful world, every bush, in one sense, is aflame with mystery, and men draw aside, like Moses, to see a "great sight," but it seldom occurs to them that the Divine presence is the secret of all. Have you ever thought how much atheism may lurk even beneath the most ecstatic admiration of nature? Brethren, join to your admiration of God's world a reverence toward Him who made it, and if you would learn aught from the mysteries which in the natural world throng upon you on every side, draw not nigh in the pride of your heart to scrutinize and to criticize, but with profound reverence stand at a distance; and out of every bush of mystery there will come to you the voice of God, inspiring you with reverence, and at the same time filling your soul with joy. Yea, out of the burning bush, God will speak to you His name, and teach you your mission.

(b) God's dealings with us in life often abound in mystery. We cannot understand why many things should be as they are, and there is a restless desire in our hearts to find out the *why*. We stand and strain our eyes in endeavouring to solve the mysterious problem. Why should there be so many fiery trials in life, and, apparently, to such little purpose? Some of the cares of life are, as we think, severe enough to consume our spirit, and yet they are not permitted to do so. They burn and pain, and yet they do not destroy. There

is a wonderful preservation in the midst of the flame. But the impatient heart asks, why, when there is so little of judgment, there should be so much of fire! These trials do not mean wrath, for they do not destroy; but can they only mean mercy? Thus, some seek to find out the mystery by scrutinizing, by balancing the *why* and the *why not*. But the reverent worshipper, in the *severest trial*, takes "off his shoes." He believes that in that very mystery which perplexes him God is; he bows, he reveres, he listens; and the Lord, out of the very fire, speaks comfort to his heart. He teaches him that His name is Love, and that all the fiery tests of life have a purifying mission. Thus "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

(c) There are many things that are mysterious in *the Word of God*. Need I say that these should be approached in a reverent and devout spirit? We have seen that the natural world and Providence abound alike in mysteries. It would indeed be strange if the spiritual world had nothing mysterious, and if that Book which speaks of God and of unseen realities had no statement which we could not understand, and no problem which we could not solve. It is a necessity that the Infinite God should ever present mysteries as well as revelations to finite minds. Indeed, every new revelation, while it makes known what hitherto has been hidden, also widens the scope of our vision, and thus presents to us new, and often greater mysteries. As the telescope, in helping us to discover new worlds, teaches us that there is still far more undiscovered than ever we had thought of, so this Word of God, in revealing to us so much of His wisdom, overpowers us with a sense of its boundlessness. "O, the depth of

the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" exclaimed the apostle who knew most about them. There is a combination of light and shadow in all God's revelations to us. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and that which is concealed is all the more marked because so much is revealed. Hence it is that the mysteries in God's Word are more observed than those in nature. "The strongest light casts deepest shade," and the greatest revelation of God's love and wisdom brings into most prominent relief those mysteries of grace which are yet to be revealed. Suffice it for us, if with devout hearts and a joyous hope, we "follow on to know the Lord."

2. Our text teaches us the spirit in which we should enter on *our life's work*. In the experience of Moses, this was a call to the work for which God had been gradually preparing him. When the Divine voice thus comes calling us to that work which He has planned out for us, it behoves us to "take off" our "shoes" and devoutly to listen. However gradual the preparation has been for a great work, the Divine call comes at last with startling suddenness. When we enter upon a new experience a sense of mystery presses heavily upon us. The light that ushers in a new revelation of duty, ushers in also new problems and difficulties. When Job entered upon the great task allotted him as one of the greatest and most patient of human sufferers, among the first utterances which escaped his lips was, "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" This was the protest of the human heart against limitations of vision when there was so much of light. So with Moses here. The very light that brought him face

to face with the great calling of his life was a flame which had as much of mystery in it as of revelation. So, too, it is with every true man. The new light, which at some period or other of his life reveals to him his true calling, has in it much of perplexing uncertainty. The first impulse is to be impatient of the mystery, to step aside and scrutinize the strange sight. The flame of light only deepens the darkness beyond. That is the testing hour of life when God gives us such a measure of light as to make it impossible for us to shirk a great and pressing duty, but yet hides much that we are impatient of knowing ere we commit ourselves to the task. We desire to walk by sight and not by faith, and to see the end from the beginning. We are unwilling that the pillar of light that leads in the darkness, should also be a pillar of cloud, when the glare and heat of the day would be too much for us. We are impatient of the light that has so much of concealment in it, and which by its limitations and mysteries checks our vision and humbles our pride. It is only gradually that we are brought to exclaim—

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom;
Lead thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead thou me on.
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead thou me on.
I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.

So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone.
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost a while."

It is a grand thing when a man enters upon his life's calling, and faces all the possibilities of the future in this spirit; and when, instead of saying, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, *why* the bush is not burnt," he puts his shoes from off his feet, recognizing that where there is mystery there is holy ground, and presumes not to scrutinize what is inscrutable, or draw too near to the living flame where God is, but, with profound reverence and implicit trust, accepts his mission with all the mysteriousness that surrounds it, expressing no doubt and cherishing no fear. The very mystery is given in order to inspire us with reverence, and give a scope to faith. Moses found it hard to learn this, as the sequel shows, and we all shall, if we have not already passed through the discipline; but the lesson, when learnt, well repays for all the trouble of learning it.

There is a certain part in the ascent of the Alps where the traveller is blindfolded. His safety consists in this. A single glimpse of the abysses beneath would bewilder the inexperienced climber, and thus prove fatal. How often is it that God hides our way from us and limits our vision in order to promote our safety! He often blindfolds us, and it is well that He does so. We are never as safe as when we trust Him implicitly. Learn to trust God where you cannot trace Him. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct

thy paths." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass. . . . The steps of the good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand."

XXVII.

PARTS OF HIS WAYS.

"Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?"

—Job xxvi. 41.

THIS Book—which in a former discourse I have ventured to call "The world's oldest poem," notwithstanding the efforts of some modern critics to fix for it a much later date—gives to us a glimpse beyond the Jewish pale. The names given are Edomite names. Job was probably a descendant of Esau, and therefore, was not in the line of blessing which rested upon Jacob and his descendants. It is interesting to notice that such a man as Job should be found among the descendants of Esau. This very fact seems to show that God, even in this early age, had not, as some suppose, consigned all except the descendants of Jacob to that terrible darkness which had no ray of light in it. Job and his friends were not heathen men hopelessly benighted. Granting that much of the light given to the descendants of Jacob was withheld from them, yet all God's light was not withheld. It is very significant, as pointing in the same direction, that the history of this Edomite sufferer, and the record of his struggles with doubts and fears, as also his conversations with his friends about God and Providence, are given in the Sacred Scriptures for the instruction of all ages.

The Book of Job is divided into three controversies. (1) Between God and Satan; (2) between Job and his friends; and (3) between God and Job. The *first* controversy is on the question so often raised since, whether there is such a thing as disinterestedness in religion. In this instance it had a special application to Job. This, indeed, is the question to which, primarily, the whole book forms a reply. The *second* controversy dwells upon the mission of affliction, and the relationship existing between suffering and sin. The *third* controversy dwells upon the question of the justice or injustice of God.

Our text forms a part of the *second* controversy. The friends of Job professed to have a key that would open the mystery. They represented that class of men who lay claim to be in the secrets of the Omniscient One, and to be able to supply the latest information. Three of them were rather advanced in life. They had a "rule of thumb" by which they professed to be able to explain the meaning of all calamities,—having a special regard to those which befel poor Job. Elihu, the youngest spirit, was not convinced that the rule of his friends was infallibly correct; indeed he was quite convinced that there was a serious error somewhere. Job, being the sufferer, declined to accept the sweeping assertions which his rigidly orthodox friends made. In such circumstances it is very much more difficult to receive an application than to make it. The friends of Job had a peculiar aptitude for making an unpleasant application without cherishing any weak sentimental regard for the feelings of their friend. Sentimentalism is not the besetting sin of such men. Job resented their conclusions. He knew that he was not the

hypocrite which their theory demanded that he should be. He repudiated their system of Providence made easy; and replying to Bildad, who had dwelt upon the greatness of God and the insignificance of man, he reminded him that he had not advanced any truth which he himself did not know very well before, and suggesting with keen irony that Bildad's speech was anything but original, he proceeded to speak of the infinite power of God in words incomparably superior to Bildad's in grandeur and force. Job fell back upon the mystery and boundlessness which encompass everything, and derived consolation from them in the face of his friends' cruel and unjust charges. He did not attempt to explain the designs of Divine Providence. He pronounced them, in common with everything that was Divine, to be beyond finding out. He was now prepared to trust in what was inscrutable, and to fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of his friends. Meanwhile he clung to the assertion of his integrity. He keenly rebuked his friends who had presumptuously sought to cast their little tape measures around Divine providences, and to tell their dimensions. All Nature, he affirmed, testified of an infinitude beyond human ken; so did the Providence of God.

The statement in our text, is—*that the boundless and mysterious are facts which beset our existence here.* This truth was partly the subject of the last sermon. I desire now to add a few considerations to those which I then presented. There is no direction in which man can look where He does not find the boundless and the inscrutable challenging his observation. Above, beneath, around, and within, the infinite presents itself.

What an important chapter would the knowledge of

comparative hearing open up to us. There are creatures which hear sounds that do not reach our ears. Further, there are, doubtless, symphonies in this great universe which are heard by no ear save God's! How limited is our capacity for hearing! Any sound which produces less than sixteen, or more than forty-eight thousand, vibrations a second is lost to us. This represents the limit of human hearing, the utmost range of our capacity to detect sounds. All the sounds which belong to the numberless grades above and below are inaudible to us. They are to us as if they all were silent. Only God can know how numerous and full those harmonies of the universe are, which never fill our ears with music, or thrill our hearts with delight. What if "The music of the spheres" be not a mere poetic phrase, but a grand reality! I believe it is a reality. We only hear a very small part of the music with which even nature abounds—as much as we need, no doubt, and as much as we can bear; but not all, and probably not the sweetest that God has to give. We only hear the tones of a few stops in the great organ; we have never caught the sweetness or the fulness of the harmony which the Divine *diapason* breathes forth. "How little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Again, think for a moment of comparative sight. We know about as little of this as we do of comparative hearing; but we know enough to fill us with wonder, and, I trust, with reverence. We only see in part. There are inferior creatures which can see further, and creatures which can see minuter objects than we can. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, there is no creature on earth that can see so much in things as

man. There is a *look* which is pre-eminently human. We see deeper into, what I may call, the soul of things than any other creature we know of. There is an intelligent, or, what may be termed, a spiritual expression in the human eye which you do not find in those of inferior animals.

Then there is that marvellous gift of invention with which man is blessed, and with which he compensates for his limitation of sight. The telescope and microscope, to which I referred in the former sermon, are the outward visible signs of an inward mental, if not spiritual, grace. They are the expressions of man's desire and faculty to extend the scope of his natural vision. But with all these appliances, how little a portion is seen. What a little we see in point of distance! As the science of astronomy advances, the more are men convinced of the boundlessness of space. What a conception of distance must that science convey to us which represents this earth as a very insignificant speck in our solar system, and that system, with all its wondrous complexity and grandeur, as only one among many millions of systems which go to complete God's material universe. What an exposition this on the words of the inspired Psalmist, "When I consider Thy heavens the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" A very eminent modern author reminds us that in all the ancient classics we have no reference to that peculiar tint of the sky which we now call sky-blue. The ancients never saw the infinitude which is in it, never thought of the millions of vibrations that go to make that tint which

was ever before them, but which they never recognized. Then, again, in point of time, what an insignificant span is open to our limited vision. All true discoveries —and here we need not commit ourselves to the extravagant theories of scientific men—go to show how ancient, though ever new, God's works are. What a speck is our little life of three score years and ten as compared with the history of this earth; and how short even the history of our race as compared with the history of matter! How little a portion is seen by us!

Again, there are the mysteries of God in Providence. Providence has been one of the greatest problems of the ages. Holy men of ancient days found their faith more exercised by its mysteries than, perhaps, by any other. Nature does not seem to have shocked them by its mysteries, but Providence did. This is the direction in which their feet, like the Psalmist's, were almost gone, and their steps were well nigh slipped. And even to-day, though we are in possession of much that the wisest and best of all the ages have said, and of much that God has revealed in His Word, and by His past dealings with men extending over thousands of years, how inscrutable are many of the events of Providence to us! Of course I do not include in the word "us" those men and women to whom nothing is mysterious, who can reckon with mathematical precision the times and the seasons which are hidden from the angels, and which were concealed from the Incarnate Son of God. They are a class of people to whom no ordinary reference to human fallibility or ignorance can apply. They are beyond the scope of my ministry. I have no message for them. I only speak to the ordinary type of men and women who are open to the conviction that in

this world and in Providence there are many things past finding out, *and that it is well that it is so.* Impatience of mystery is the same unholy thing the wide world over. It is scarcely less reprehensible in the devout man who dogmatizes, when he should be silent in profound reverence, than it is in the sceptic who disbelieves. The tendency in both cases is to bring down every mystery to the dead level of certainty, and to shut out of the domain of truth everything that cannot be comprehended by feeble minds or expressed by flippant tongues.

We are apt to forget that mystery has a sacred mission in this world of ours. In my last sermon I ventured to affirm that it is a necessity that the Infinite God should present mysteries as well as revelations to *finite* beings like ourselves. I will now proceed further and say that mystery is not only a necessity arising from His infinitude and our finiteness, but also that it is the condition of the development in us of some of the noblest graces—hope, reverence, and trust. It is a question how far worship is possible apart from the sense of an Infinite Being, who, while He has revealed to us as much as we can bear, has still in Himself heights of wisdom and depths of love which we can never reach or fathom. I love to think that I have no one less than an Infinite God to trust in. I cannot measure my hope because I cannot measure my God. Once we believe the fundamental article of our Christian faith, that "God is love," there is no mystery in His nature which will not give a scope to our hope, and no wonder in His Providence which will not beget an expectation.

Brethren, be prepared for mysteries everywhere—in Nature, in Providence, and in Revelation. Wherever

God reveals Himself there is more than we can receive; and that surplus of revelation is a mystery. In this sense it is the glory of God to conceal a thing. It is His glory that, having revealed enough to kindle hope, He has enough left unrevealed to sustain it. Where is there more of revelation than in the Incarnation; and where too is there more of mystery? And in this instance it is the very blending of revelation and mystery that inspires us with faith. Faith would be weaker and hope less ecstatic if either were wanting. Once we accept this "mystery of Godliness," our faith is strong enough to accept all that follows. We stagger at nothing which the Lord of Heaven can do or suffer, once we believe that He has become incarnate, and under such conditions as those described in the Gospels. The manger, where the Child Jesus was laid was the spot where the revelations and mysteries of the Old Dispensation were consummated, and as such was the birthplace of Christian faith. The Gospel was ushered in by a revelation whose very mystery was the promise that it was not the final revelation, and thus it quickened, within those who believed, the hope that they would be led on and on to know the Lord; and now that eighteen centuries have passed away, and that the records of the Gospel, the history of the Christian religion, and the intuitions of the Holy Spirit have brought to light many things that were mysterious when the angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem, who does not feel that the incarnation is a revelation to which eternity will supply the only complete exposition, and that *that* exposition will be God's own!

Oh, it is so fatal to reverence, to meekness, to hope, to faith, to progress in the Divine life, to the very genius

of the Gospel, to be impatient of mystery. Blessed are they who have seen so much of God in Nature, in Providence, in Revelation, as that they can wait joyfully God's own time to mature His greatest purposes concerning them, believing that what takes God longest to reveal will be of greatest worth when revealed, and that all that God *has* uttered are but the "word-whispers" of His love as compared with those things which He yet has to make known. Believe me, God has not yet sung out all the music of His love. The strongest love lies deepest, and is the last expressed. I love to think of heaven in the aspect of a series of progressive revelations, through which the Redeemer will become ever nearer and dearer to the redeemed because of the new depths of love which He will reveal to them, while he will have still more to reveal in infinite progression. How much more shall we then know of the lessons of the manger, of the cross, of the empty grave, and of the ascending cloud! Meanwhile let us praise Him, and thus learn how to praise Him better by and by.

"What though around His throne of fire
The everlasting chant
Be wafted from the seraph choir
In glory jubilant?

Yet stoops He, ever pleas'd to mark
Our rude essays of love,
Faint as the pipe of wakening lark.
Heard by some twilight grove.

* * *

And if some tones be false or low,
What are all prayers beneath
But cries of babes that cannot know
Half the deep thoughts they breathe?

In His own words we Christ adore,
  But angels, as we speak,
Higher above our meaning soar
  Than we o'er children weak.

And yet His words mean more than they,
  And yet He owns their praise :
Why should we think He turns away
  From infants' simple lays."

XXVIII.

THE CROSS AND THE JOY.

"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."

—Heb. xii. 2.

MANY others bore their crosses to the place of execution and suffered death upon them, as Jesus did, yet their names have long ago been forgotten, while *this* cross, and the name of *Him* who endured it, have never passed from the memory of men; and we speak to-day of *the* Cross and of *the* Crucified One as if there had been only one cross and one crucifixion in all history. Why this prominence given to the one among the many?

Again, what can account for the change which has taken place in the world's estimate of the cross? It was at one time viewed by all men as an instrument of torture and of death for the basest of society who had violated the most sacred of its laws, and thus had forfeited all sympathy and forbearance from man. No Roman citizen could be subjected to crucifixion, whatever His crimes may have been. It was considered too great a degradation for the vilest Roman. To-day, the wealthiest as well as the poorest Romans devoutly kiss the reputed wood of the cross upon which Jesus suffered and died; and crucifixion, which was once considered too degrading for any Roman to submit to, is now deemed so sacred, by virtue of its associations,

that it has ceased to be a means of punishment wherever the name of Christ is known. What has wrought this mighty change in the world's estimate of this instrument of torture and shame?

Our text furnishes *one* answer.

Jesus endured it "*for the joy that was set before Him*," and as such His endurance of it was essentially different from that of any other sufferer. He transfigured the very cross by bearing it. In the narrative of His crucifixion there is an incidental reference to Simon the Cyrenian, who bore the cross a part of the way to Golgotha, and concerning whom it is said, "Him they *compelled* to bear His cross." In this sentence is epitomized the history of all cross-bearing previous to our Lord's. Those who had endured the cross had, in every instance, endured it reluctantly, like Simon they had been "*compelled*" to bear it; but *this* One "*for the joy that was set before Him* endured the cross." He did not bear it for a moment because He was too weak to resist an overpowering multitude who, perforce, thrust it upon His shoulder, but because He—having power to lay down His life and power to take it up again—was disinterested and Divine enough both to lay it down and to take it up for man's salvation. The cross was not something which fell unexpectedly to His lot, and which He could not avoid. Long before His "hour" had come He gave to His disciples clear intimations of the cross—intimations which became more and more vivid and explicit as the hour itself drew nigh. And when at last He bore the cross, He bore it conscious of the fact that there was a joy before Him. His was not the sullen, helpless, or hopeless suffering of a criminal, but the patient and

hopeful endurance of a Saviour. Never did Christ cease to hope, not even when the cross weighed heaviest. All along He knew that it would bring far more joy than ever it did of sorrow. It was to Him no meaningless burden, as it was to Simon, or only the cruel instrument of torture which it had been to crucified criminals, but a means to an end, a suffering for a "glory to follow," an endurance "for the joy that was set before Him."

Do not misunderstand me, I do not say that the cross cost Jesus no pain, or even anguish; far from it. I only say that He accepted the cross with all its anguish and shame voluntarily, and *endured* it. Endured the *physical* suffering which attended cross-bearing and crucifixion; but more than that, endured a pain far keener than the piercing thrust of the spear into His side, or of the nails into His hands and feet, an agony which made the "soul sorrowful unto death." He felt the pang of loneliness in Gethsemane when His nearest disciples were asleep; of loneliness on the cross when the heavens darkened overhead, and God as well as man seemed to stand aloof; *that* agony which called forth the twofold cry, "Simon, . . couldest not thou watch one hour?" and "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" His, too, was the shudder of a holy nature, pure as the sunbeam, at the thought of being brought into such close contact with the "power of darkness," and of being "betrayed into the hands of sinners." Think not that when Simon, of Cyrene, was compelled to bear the wooden cross, that Jesus had *then* no cross to bear; He bore a far heavier one upon His soul than any that human hands could place upon His shoulder.

He also "*Despised the shame.*" He calmly faced the ignominy which was then inseparably connected with the cross, as He left the Praetorium for Calvary, there to die between two thieves. It was then, amid the jeers of the high priests and scribes, the hoarse cry of the mob, the cruel taunts of the Roman soldiery, and withal forsaken by His disciples, that He "despised the shame." What a commentary on these words is Gustave Doré's wonderful picture of "Christ leaving the Praetorium!" The central figure is Christ on the way to Golgotha, descending the steps which lead from the Praetorium to the court beneath. He is clad in a flowing, snow-white, and seamless robe, and bears upon His bleeding brow the crown of thorns. He appears in all the Majesty of a Royal Sufferer. What serene calmness, what sublime dignity, what subdued sorrow in that Divine countenance! In the background the heavens are dark and lowering, and the air is charged with fearful elements. Far back in the gloom, Herod and Pilate, the representatives of the Jewish and the Gentile worlds, are seen in unholy alliance. Near the Great Sufferer, and slightly behind Him, are three high priests in solemn conclave. In the foreground, and partly cast athwart His path of suffering, is the cross, the instrument of torture. The Roman soldiers divide the multitude who throng on every side; and the surging crowd fall back to make way for the Great Sufferer. As you look upon that picture, a feeling comes over you that the painter has thrown very effectively on canvas the grand idea that the world's Great Sufferer *must have room*, that all must give way for Him in His path of Love—although it be a *Via Dolorosa*—as they would for a king on his way to his throne. On the

countenances of the thronging multitude are depicted all shades of feeling—diabolic gratification, scorn, remorse, admiration, sympathy, grief, hopelessness. But amid all, stands forth that wonderful Central Figure, with a countenance which is all the more calm and heavenly for the soft shade of holy sorrow in it that tones down the brightness of the love and hope with which it is irradiated. The shade of sadness is chiefly traceable in those eyes which, withal, seem fixed upon a goal unseen by us, and unobserved by any of the motley crowd that throng the scene. This is a masterpiece of Christian art, a marvellous picture of that Divine One in human form, who in that critical hour, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."

All this He did "*for the joy that was set before Him*," *i.e.*, the joy of seeing the result of His suffering; that with which the presence of a redeemed throng, which no man can number, will fill His heart; the joy of a *Redeemer* as distinct from that of the *redeemed*, the blessedness of having *given* eternal life as distinct from having *received* it. This was the "joy that was set before Him," and which nerved Him for the cross, and all its suffering and shame. The Saviour's reward will consist in the satisfaction of His love. It was this exalted and disinterested motive, which had become in Him a life-long enthusiasm, that attached such a glory to His cross. Offering Himself a willing sacrifice, He saved others. Overcoming "the sharpness of death," He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers;" and His joy will consist in having that kingdom filled with redeemed and loyal subjects.

Brethren, great will be His joy. As His cross was His own, so will His crown be. One of the most beautiful utterances of ancient prophecy is that which speaks of the satisfaction of Infinite Love when the final result will be seen. Isaiah—having described under different figures, with wonderful prophetic force and vividness, the sufferings of the Christ, and finally having spoken of Him "as a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers," dumb—suddenly breaks forth into the triumphant assurance, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Wonderful words! *His* great love satisfied! Do you ask *now* the question, "Are there few that be saved?" Few! Can a *few* saved souls satisfy the love of Christ; satisfy it after all the anguish and all the yearning? That cannot be! Only the multitude whom no man can number, and whom John saw in vision, can satisfy that great heart which loved the world. And if *Christ's* love can rejoice in satisfaction over the result of His sufferings, those of us who have dared hope the most concerning heaven and its untold bliss, shall be more than satisfied.

Observe, that the greatest joy of Christ is inseparably connected with His most profound sorrow. The cross is very closely linked to the crown, the "suffering of Christ" to "the glory" following. Every joy has its price. The joy of a mother over a child born into the world is conditioned by a mother's anguish. The joy of a father at the return of his prodigal child derives its intensity and force from the agony which the wanderer's absence and ingratitude have cost him. Even so the Saviour's joy cannot be separated from the Saviour's sorrow, or His reward from His sacrifice. "He

shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." The *travail* is a necessary condition of the *satisfaction*. The fullest gratification in heaven and earth can only be obtained through *travail*. And as Jesus cannot have the satisfaction without the travail, the joy without the endurance, so it cannot be that, having had the travail, He will not have the satisfaction, or that, having passed through the endurance, He will not enter into His joy. The cross of Christ cannot become a dead letter in heaven, or His sacrifice be forgotten in the land of the redeemed. The Saviour's sorrow must culminate there in a Saviour's joy. The love which endured and triumphed on the cross will be enthroned in heaven.

Again, you cannot separate the *religion* of our Lord from the Cross. It is His will that you should not. The condition of discipleship is that you shall take up your cross daily and follow Him; and at every step as you proceed, He, by the *little* crosses that He places upon your shoulders, reminds you of His *heavy* one. There is no royal road to His joy. To all those who would enter into His glory, Jesus exclaims, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I . . drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Before we can "know Him and the power of His resurrection" we must "know the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable to His death." The throne is reared upon the cross, and the way to it is along the *Via Dolorosa* of cross-bearing. "If any man will come after Me," exclaims the Christ, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Learn of Him how to bear every cross which the Father places upon your shoulder, patiently and hopefully, looking upon

this life as a discipline for the life to come, and every sorrow, when rightly used, as preparatory to the joy that is in store for us.

"Never further than Thy cross!
Never higher than Thy feet!
Here earth's precious things seem dross;
Here earth's bitter things grow sweet.

Gazing thus our sins we see;
Learn Thy love while gazing thus!
Sin, which laid the cross on Thee;
Love, which bore the cross for us.

* * *

Symbols of our liberty
And our service here unite;
Captives, by Thy cross set free,
Soldiers of Thy cross we fight.

Pressing onward as we can
Still to this our heart shall tend;
Where our earliest hopes began,
There our last aspirings end;

'Till, amidst the hosts of light,
We, in Thee redeemed, complete,
Through Thy cross made pure and white,
Cast our crowns before Thy feet."

XXIX.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY.

"Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they had made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and annointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you: but Me ye have not always.

—JOHN xii. 1—8.

Read also—MATT. xxvi. 6—13, and MARK xiv. 3—9.

THIS is the second recorded instance of a woman bringing an alabaster box of ointment as a tribute of gratitude to the Christ, and anointing His feet, and wiping them with her hair. There are many points of comparison, but more of contrast, in the two narratives. Our Lord on this occasion was a guest at the table, not of Simon the Pharisee, but of Simon the leper, who had, probably, been healed by Christ, and thus had welcomed Him to his table with very different feelings from those with which the Pharisee had invited Him to be his guest. On this occasion, too, the alabaster box of ointment was the grateful offering, not of a poor stranger and a reputed sinner, who came for the first

time and with bitter tears, and whose presence was spurned by the self-righteous host, as in the former instance; but of a pure and gentle woman who had often sat at those sacred feet before, and was known only to be loved alike by the friendly host and the Divine Guest. She had no tears of penitence, but she had the pure adoration of joyous gratitude, to blend with the ointment. In this instance, too, the worshipper not only poured out the costly offering on the *feet* of the Christ, as on the former occasion, but also, with an enthusiasm kindled by a fuller and more intimate knowledge of Him and of His marvellous love and sympathy, poured the precious ointment on *His Head*. This was the crowning act of a love that had become strong, and had cast out all fear, by its frequent and lowly acts of homage at those sacred feet in the days that were gone.

There was another circumstance which marked this as a very exceptional occasion. John begins the narrative with these words, "Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with Him." Passing by the allusion to the nearness of the Passover—an allusion which becomes significant only as we read the record which follows—the interest at the commencement of this narrative seems to centre as much in Lazarus as in Jesus. He was one of the very few on earth, even at this time, who knew what it was to die, who had passed through the experiences and revelations of that hour when the heart and the flesh fail, and the scenes of earth recede and vanish from

our view. He had entered into the great secret of dying, that perplexing problem of human existence here. One's natural curiosity is gratified in finding that the presence of Lazarus at the gathering is referred to with such emphasis thus early in the narrative. This seems to promise that more will be told us of him as the narrative proceeds. Will Lazarus disclose any of those experiences which are so concealed from us, and which some are so impatient to know? What will he say to his wondering sisters, whose love for him has made them all the more anxious to know the strange experiences he has passed through?

"When Lazarus left his charnel-cave
And home to Mary's house return'd,
Was this demanded—if he yearn'd
To hear her weeping by his grave?

'Where went thou, brother, those four days?'
There lives no record of reply,
Which, telling what it is to die,
Had surely added praise to praise.

From every house the neighbours met,
The streets were fill'd with joyful sound,
A solemn gladness even crown'd
The purple brows of Olivet.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unrevealed;
He told it not; or something seal'd
The lips of that Evangelist."

There is a profound hush. There is nothing further recorded of Lazarus on this or any succeeding occasion. He disappears from our view, and we hear no more of him. This is in perfect harmony with other instances, such as the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Dorcas. The Scriptures do not satisfy the

morbid curiosity of men. When human tradition is most flippant, they are profoundly silent. Like the Christ in the presence of the inquisitive Herod, who questioned with Him in many words, the Scriptures in the presence of inquisitive men, answer them nothing.

As we read the narrative we find that the presence of Lazarus at this supper is mentioned not so much for the sake of drawing attention to him as of explaining the reason for Mary's extraordinary expression of love and gratitude to our Lord.

On this occasion the characteristic features of the two sisters came into prominence. Martha, as on a previous occasion, "served," but with this difference, that she no longer complained of her sister, who was at the feet of her Lord. Mary, as before, was meditative and devotional, but with this difference, that her love was no longer merely passive, but expressed itself very beautifully in a tribute of love. Hitherto she had known the blessedness of receiving, now of giving. Thus, one sister had become more patient, the other more active in her love. Yet, now, as before, we trace the characteristic feature of each. Martha still *served*; Mary *adored*. In Mary, the meditative predominated over the active; in Martha, the active predominated over the meditative. Each expressed her attachment and gratitude in her own natural way.

Mary, however, surpassed herself at this hour. It was to her a wonderful hour. Lazarus, her brother, who had been dead, was alive again, and was present —a living proof of Christ's infinite power and tender affection. How could she express to her Great Benefactor and Friend the gratitude which welled up

within her heart? What offering could represent a sister's gratitude for the restoration of a loving brother from the grave to his home? She brought "an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious," and broke the box and poured the ointment on Jesus' head, and anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair.

Observe the close connexion between her love to her brother, and her grateful tribute to her Lord. This is a special illustration of a general principle of divine working. How often is it that God draws out our affections to Himself through human channels! He has graciously ordained that life should be one vast discipline of love, in which one stage shall prepare the way for another, and all end in Himself. In this instance Mary's love toward her brother intensified her love toward her Lord. There was no offering too costly for her to place at the sacred feet of that Divine Friend, who had restored her brother to her from the very grave. Commentators tell us the cost of the offering which she brought; she thought not of the cost; such gratitude reckons not the value of the offering it brings.

Her act, however, drew forth the rebuke of narrow-minded men, foremost among whom was Judas. How difficult it is for such a man to estimate such a deed! Grateful love seemed to him very extravagant in its bounteous offering. "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" was the bitter complaint of the false man. A selfish heart reckons offerings in *"pence" (denarii)*, and hides parsimony under the cloak of philanthropy. In olden days, Dionysius, the tyrant, took away from the statue of Jupiter Olympus its covering of gold, substituting for it

a covering of wool, and saying, "Gold is too cold in winter and too heavy in summer; it behoves us to take care of Jupiter!" It is marvellous how considerate such men as Dionysius and Judas can be when they make an effort!

Judas had already manifested that miserly and deceptive spirit which was so soon to find its exemplification in the betrayal. "Not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag and bare what was put therein," exclaimed the loving John, to whom it was extremely painful to say anything that was hard or unkind; but it was the stern truth. John must unmask the hypocrite for succeeding ages, and epitomize the man in a word—*thief*. The signs of the approaching betrayal were too evident even for John, with all his charity, to cover them over.

"Why trouble ye the woman," exclaimed our Lord to Judas and the others. In other words, "Check not the generous outflow of a grateful heart. Do not despise what you cannot, or will not, surpass." Here our Lord appears as the Vindicator of the true worshipper, against the unkind suggestions of smaller natures. It was Mary's misfortune to be misunderstood and to have her actions misconstrued by those who should have sympathized with her most. On a previous occasion she had been rebuked by her own sister, and now she was blamed by the disciples, and each time for the manner in which she expressed her profound reverence toward the Christ. In each case, however, she found her Vindicator in her Lord, while she herself remained silent. How richly did His approval and vindications compensate for all the misunderstandings and unkind words of others! What a

joy it is to all sincere men and women when subjected to the hostile criticism of those from whom they had expected nought but kindly encouragement, to realize that there is One who knows the full meaning of the service they render, and will at length vindicate the love which cannot vindicate itself!

"She hath wrought a good work upon Me," or, more correctly rendered, a "*beautiful* work." Our Lord saw beauty where Judas, and even some of the other disciples, only saw "*waste*." There are those who have little or no appreciation of the beautiful in life—Peter Bells, to whom "a yellow primrose on a river's brim" is "a yellow primrose," and nothing more. They, as a rule, have no place for the beautiful in their theory of the universe. They submit everything to the low standard of utility. They value the light of the sun because of the quantity of gas it saves, and the amount of potatoes and beans it ripens. "Consider the lilies of the field," exclaimed our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. Why the lilies? They toil not, neither do they spin! *Therefore* consider them. "They toil not neither do they spin, and yet *Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*." Toiling and spinning are not the highest end of existence, but reflecting the glory of God. The lilies bear the impress of Divine wisdom, skill, and loving care. Consider them, for God's own hand has painted them, and His eye ever watches over them. This world is filled with beauty, and the beautiful has an exalted mission wherever it may be found.

> "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,
> Its loveliness increases, it will never
> Pass into nothingness."

When God made this material world, He crowned it with beauty; would it not be strange if, in the spiritual world, there were no place or scope for the beautiful? Are there not many services of love in which we can engage, which rise far above all considerations of *utility*, and which it would be sacrilege to judge by utilitarian principles? Among these the service rendered by Mary on this occasion occupies a very exalted position. It drew forth the unqualified approval of the Christ. *He* pronounced it *beautiful*, and thus silenced all paltry insinuations of *waste*.

There are some pious but prosaic souls still in the world, who associate waste with aught that is beautiful; thus on the principles of economics the "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious," has no place in their religious exercises. From fear of waste they miss the beautiful, and their lives degenerate into commonplace, dull things. My friends, it is sublimely true that both in the material and the spiritual worlds, wherever there is beauty there is *apparent* waste, and that wherever there is beauty there is the *truest* economy. What more economic use could Mary have found for the precious ointment than by pouring it in rich profusion on the head and feet of her Lord! None of its odour was lost; John tells us it filled the house; since then it has filled the world. Jesus predicted that it would when He exclaimed, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresover this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Our Lord proceeded still further, and affirmed that this was not a purposeless offering—"Against the day of My burying hath she done this," said He.

Whether from a holy impulse, or from a distinct intimation of His approaching death, she gave expression to her gratitude in this way, we know not ; we have the fact, however, that this was the last and well-befitting homage of a grateful spirit to the living Christ before His death and burial, and one which was beautifully emblematic of the homage which the best and holiest in the ages to come would render.

I do not think, myself, that Mary saw half the meaning in her grateful tribute which Jesus gave to it on this occasion. His infinite charity filled up the rough outline with its own rich hues, and thus transfigured it. The disciples found fault with Mary's offering. Jesus could see no blemish in it. There are some present who know what a marvellous meaning love can give to the most insignificant offering. Some of you mothers remember when, perchance, your little daughter had a strange yearning to show her love to you by some offering that she could bring. You noticed some omenous movements and significant looks, which seemed to suggest that there was some innocent plot or other fast developing. At last the great surprise came. The little child brought, perhaps, a little book-mark, bearing a text lettered and illuminated by her own hands—the best that the little artist, with her simple materials, could produce. As an artistic production it was rather primitive ; there was a crooked stroke here, a blur there ; and even the child, though delighted with her little offering, wished it were a little better and worthier; wished that crooked stroke were straighter ; that the blot was not there ; and that the letter which was not an initial letter, but which towered above its fellows, like Saul among the prophets, could, somehow or other,

be brought down to the level of its companions; but you looked upon it, and to *you* all was beautiful. You scarcely saw the crooked stroke, the blur, the big letter; and only saw them to admire them. There was nothing which that child's hand could do, when moved by such a loving heart, that would not appear beautiful in your sight. If any one was unkind and foolish enough to point out any of the blemishes in that filial offering, you were not long before you replied in the impatient tones of an overpowering love, "She hath wrought a beautiful deed. . . She hath done what she could." You felt that such a tribute was too sacred, too beautiful, for criticism, and you placed the little book-mark with fond pride in the mother's best book —the Bible—as the choicest offering which a child's love could present, and the choicest which a mother's love could accept. Ah, it is thus that Jesus estimates and deals with our humble offerings. We present to Him our little texts of love, rudely sketched; our brethren point to the blurs, and our own hearts tell us that what we bring is poor indeed; but still we offer them as the best we can present, and the Great Saviour accepts them with a smile that kindles an unutterable joy within us; and as He looks upon our little texts, every letter becomes richly illuminated with the golden light which streaming from His heavenly countenance rests upon our poor workmanship, and we begin to think how true His own words are—He or she "hath wrought a beautiful work"—because the beauty of the Lord our God gilds every line and transforms every blot which our feeble hands have wrought.

Jesus still further vindicated Mary's act as He affirmed —"For ye have the poor always with you, but Me ye

have not always." There are duties and privileges which come to us with exceptional urgency, and before which every other duty must give way. They come and pass away with the hour, never to return again. Such were those obligations which the presence of Christ among men created. On this occasion He reminded the disciples that the poor would claim the sympathies of the Church in all ages; that there were in store numerous occasions for deeds of benevolence toward *them*, but that *His* presence with them would be but brief. Thus, as our Lord drew near to the close of life He impressed upon His disciples the urgency of the passing hour, and hence the importance of being prompt and decisive in what they intended to do. Jesus not only impressed this upon His disciples on this occasion, but also when Judas sought to delay the final act of betrayal He said, "What thou doest, do quickly." There was no time for delay, whether it be to do homage or to betray.

"She hath done what she could" were words which had been once previously uttered by our Lord when the poor widow cast her two mites into the treasury. This was the highest possible commendation. In each case it was Christ's approbation of a love which knew of no reserve, which had attained to the full measure of Christian service in that it gave its all, and poured forth its best and choicest gifts at the Saviour's feet.

Such a commendation could only be surpassed by the promise which followed—recorded by Matthew and Mark—and to which I have already briefly referred. "Wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." This is the only instance

of our Lord uttering such a promise over any service rendered to Him on earth. He promises to this deed an immortal fame. To the end of time the record of this offering will form a part of the Gospel which will be preached to men. Mary's is an immortality on earth—being dead she still speaks. She is not one of those who "come and pass away unremembered." In her we have one who has acquired immortal fame without seeking it. There is a sense in which it may be said of all of us, that we shall not cease to live in the world. Our lives cannot be buried with our bodies in the tomb. They have thrown their force for good or ill into the great life of humanity which will still go on. Some live by the words they have uttered, which are treasured in the memory of men, and by which they have enriched the world and made it indebted to them to the end of time; others, by noble deeds which they have performed, and good examples which they have presented, and which, as transmitted in the lives which were influenced by them, will bless generations yet unborn. Others, alas, will live by words and deeds which have contributed their part to make the world worse. When in our graves we shall all exert more or less power in the world, and thus live by that which we have said or done, and which, in some degree, has helped to mould the characters and determine the future of those with whom we have come into contact, and who, in turn, will exert a similar power over others. But in a sense very different from this does Mary's deed live in the world. The record of it comes with the Gospel; yea, even forms a part of it, bearing upon itself the direct approval and commendation of the Great Saviour, as well as His prediction, which also comes with the

authority of a request, that for all ages and to all nations, "this, that this woman hath done, shall be told for a memorial of her."

All this Mary did in return for the restoration of her brother to life. Have we no motive as powerful as this to bring us to the feet of Christ? Have we no alabaster box to break there? Nought is waste that we offer to such a Lord. John tells us that Mary brought "a *pound* of spikenard, very costly." Many commentators have felt a considerable difficulty in believing that it was a *Roman* pound—it would be *too much* to bring—and have come to the conclusion that it must have been considerably less, since this Greek word, adopted into the Aramaic, may be found in Rabbinical writings as equivalent to a *mina*, a much smaller measure. What a blessing to be able to throw a suspicion on what people would otherwise be too ready to believe, that Mary wasted nearly, if not quite, twelve ounces of precious spikenard on the head and feet of Christ! How indebted will the world be to the end of time to Friedlieb and others for this learned loop-hole out of a terrible difficulty! How gratifying it is that we can, *possibly* with some correctness, but certainly with an amount of plausibility, cut off some of the ounces and make the quantity more in harmony with our notions of things! Blessed be criticism when it brings the wonders of grateful love down nearer to the common-place level of policy! There is, too, another critical loop-hole. Some affirm that Mary did not anoint *with* the pound, but *from* it, notwithstanding the clear intimations of John and Mark to the contrary. Ah, it is often hard for us to accept as a beautiful act the tribute of an all-absorbing love—it appears to us so very prodigal

—and any learned remark which makes the measure of a loving tribute less noble, by casting the slightest doubt as to the largeness of it, is accepted as a precious Gospel.

I have nothing to say against vigorous and healthy criticism; but I desire to protest against the tendency of a style of criticism which is very popular to-day, to modify as far as possible the meaning of every sacrifice of love, triumph of grace, and statement of duty, which may be found in Sacred Writ, and thus make it easier for us to remain in our refined selfishness, without any conviction of exalted duty, or sense of shame, to disturb our rest, or ruffle our self-complacency. Beware of welcoming too readily every attempt to bring down the marvellous to our mean level, and thus to limit the scope of Christian service, and the measure of Christian sacrifice within the ordinary range of our prosaic, and alas, often worldly lives. Let us not be too willing to assume that *our* offerings present the true standard of self-sacrifice, and that, therefore, every offering that assumes more heroic proportions is a waste. The *tendency* to reduce every sacrifice of love to the smallest possible dimensions is a very dangerous one. Our religion should have its "alabaster box of ointment, *very precious*," to break at the feet of Christ. The desire to exclude it as far as possible from the sphere of Christian service, or to bring the smallest and least costly gift which, short of very shame, we can offer, is very degenerating. Oh, how ready men are to bestow the costliest alabaster boxes of spikenard upon themselves! How many have been broken and poured out in rich profusion in the service of worldly fame and pleasure! There has been no limit to the value of such offerings.

And yet men are shocked when the greatest and choicest gifts are brought to the feet of Christ, and call them "*waste.*" The offering, which they pour upon their own heads without the slightest hesitation, appears to them an intolerable prodigality when poured on the head and feet of the world's Saviour! Brethren, remember that he to whom much is forgiven loves much, and that love can only live as it bestows its best and choicest gifts upon the object of its affection. There will be no stinting of homage in heaven. There the countless throng of the redeemed will cast their crowns at their Redeemer's feet. The crowns which His pierced hand will place upon their brows as the best and costliest tokens of His Divine approval, will be those which they will lay at His pierced feet as the highest tribute of their grateful love. In heaven and earth the service we render to the Saviour becomes sacred and exalted in proportion as we give to Him in fervent praise that which He has bestowed upon us in heavenly blessing. The service we render on earth is at best but imperfect; our choicest spikenard has an earthly odour about it; but our love will find fuller scope and more perfect expression in heaven. Meanwhile it is a joy for us to know that He who receives the homage of Gabriel in heaven, accepted, and called "beautiful," the offering of Mary on earth; and therefore, that He will not disdain to accept the services we render, if they are prompted by the love that prompted hers.

O Christ, let Thy great love constrain us to love Thee now, and loving Thee, to place our best and costliest gifts at Thy sacred feet; and in Thine infinite mercy accept the offerings which shall be presented by us from a love which Thou Thyself hast kindled. Thus, by

serving Thee here, shall we be prepared for Thy more exalted service in the land of the redeemed.

"When Thou, in patient ministry,
Didst pass, a stranger, through Thy land,
Two costly gifts were offered Thee,
And each was from a woman's hand.

To Thee, who madest all things fair,
Twice fair and precious things they bring;—
Pure sculptured alabaster clear,
Perfumes for earth's annointed King.

Man's hasty lips would both reprove,—
One for the stain of too much sin,
One for the waste of too much love;
Yet both availed Thy smile to win.

The saint who listened at Thy feet,
The sinner sinners scorned to touch,
Adoring in Thy presence meet,
Both pardoned and both loving much.

Thus evermore to all they teach
Man's highest style is "much forgiven,"
And that earth's lowest yet may reach
The highest ministries of heaven.

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And that love's costliest sacrifice
Is worth the love, and nothing more."

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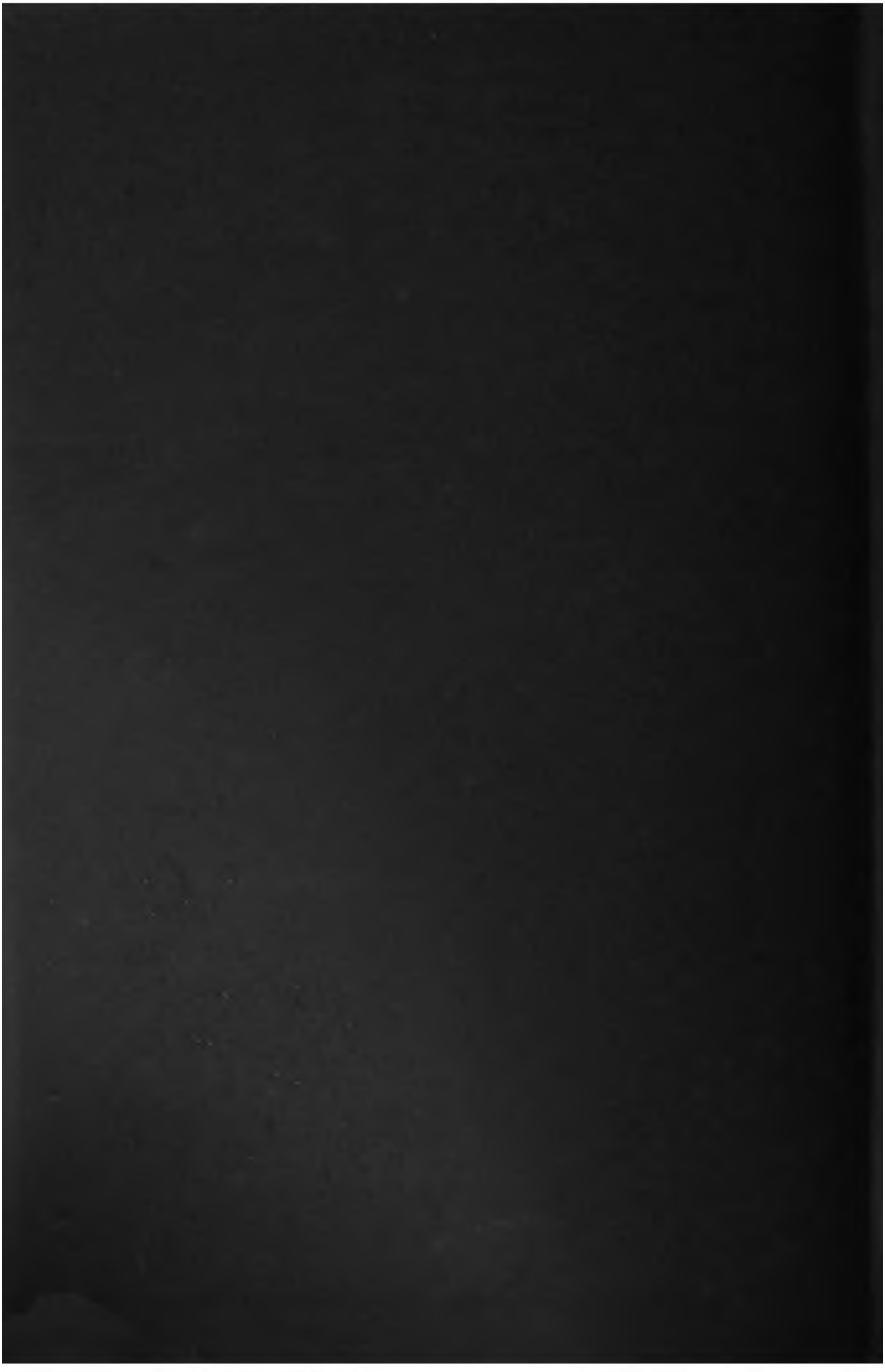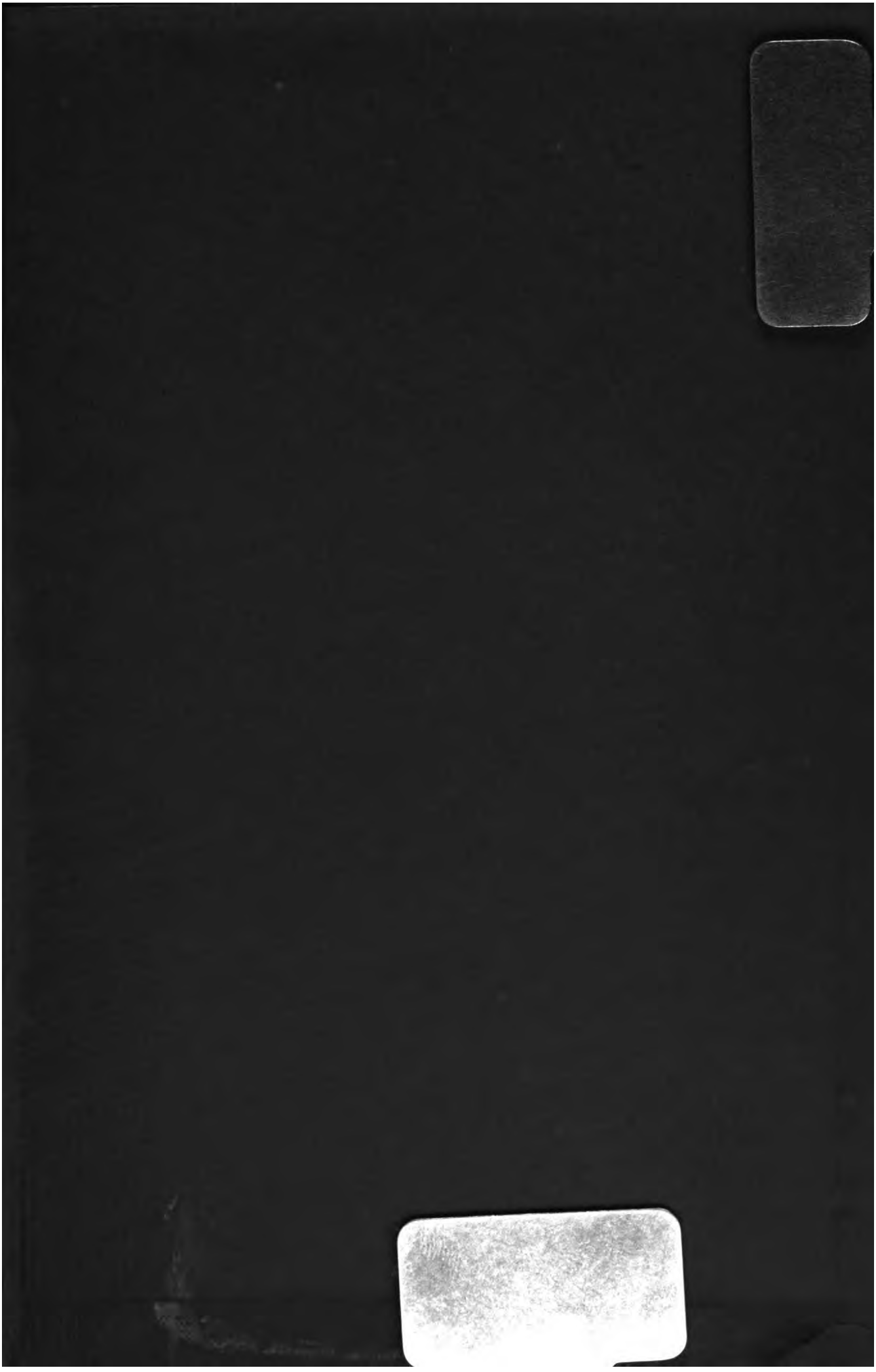
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