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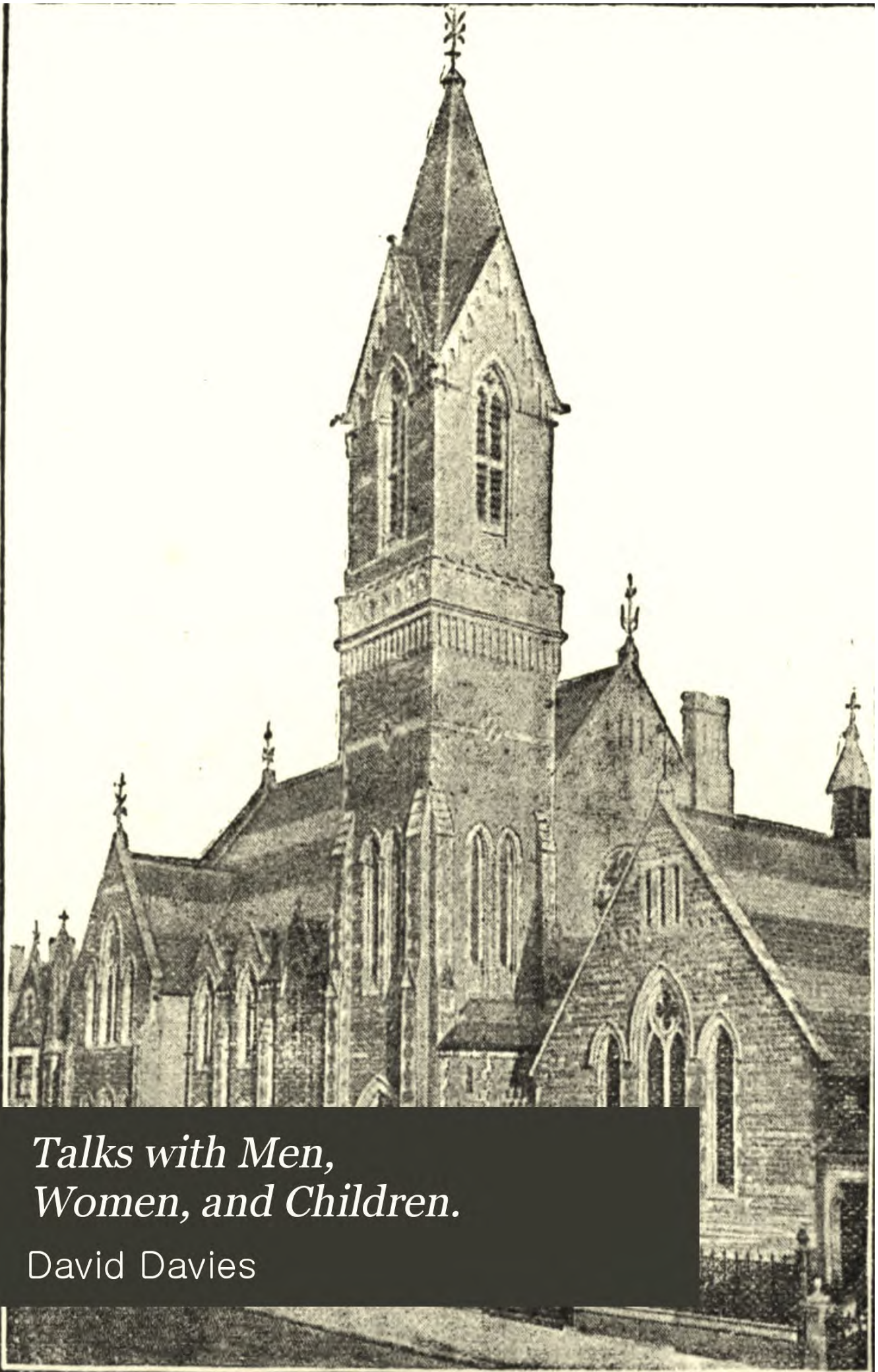
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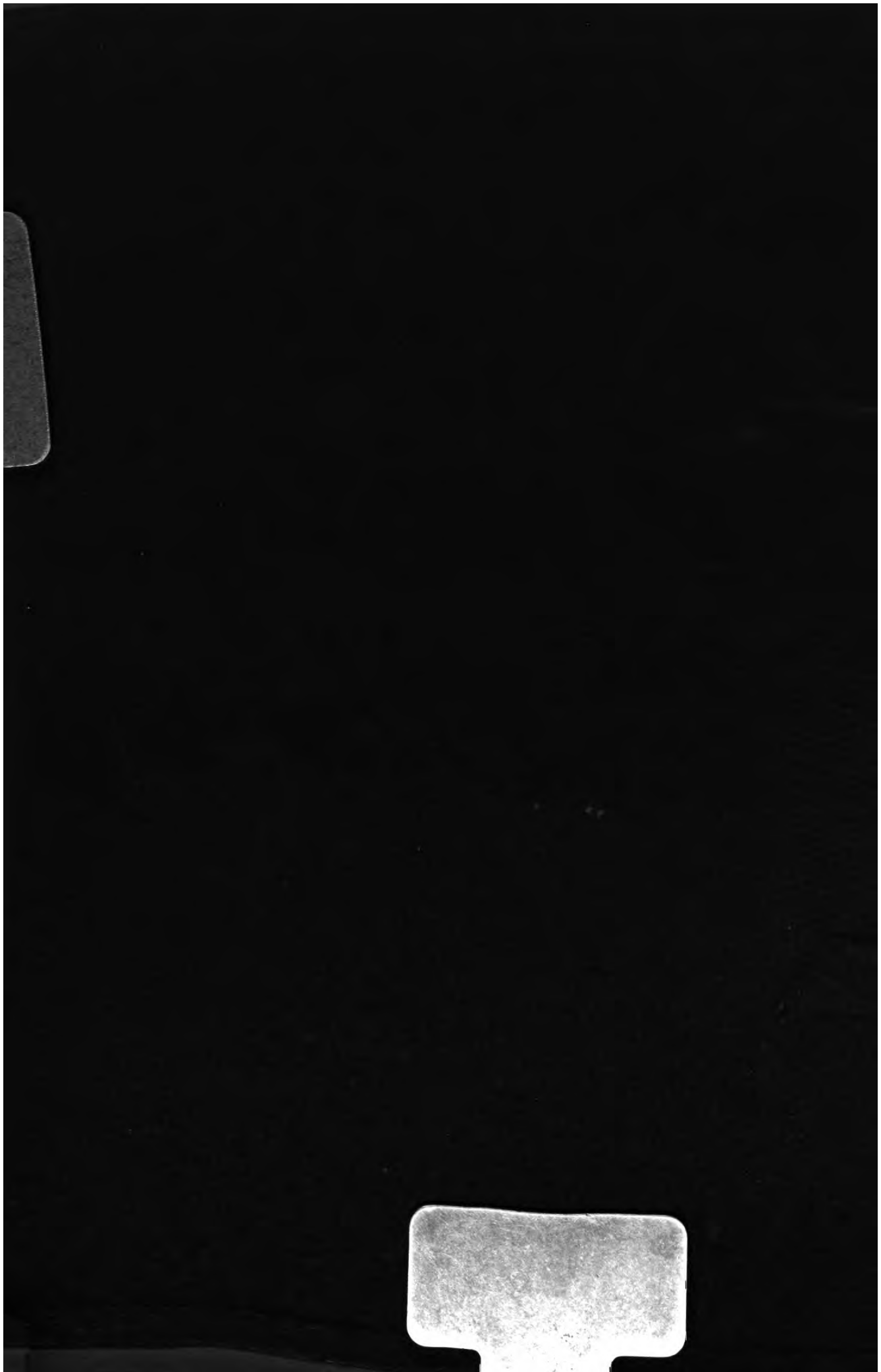


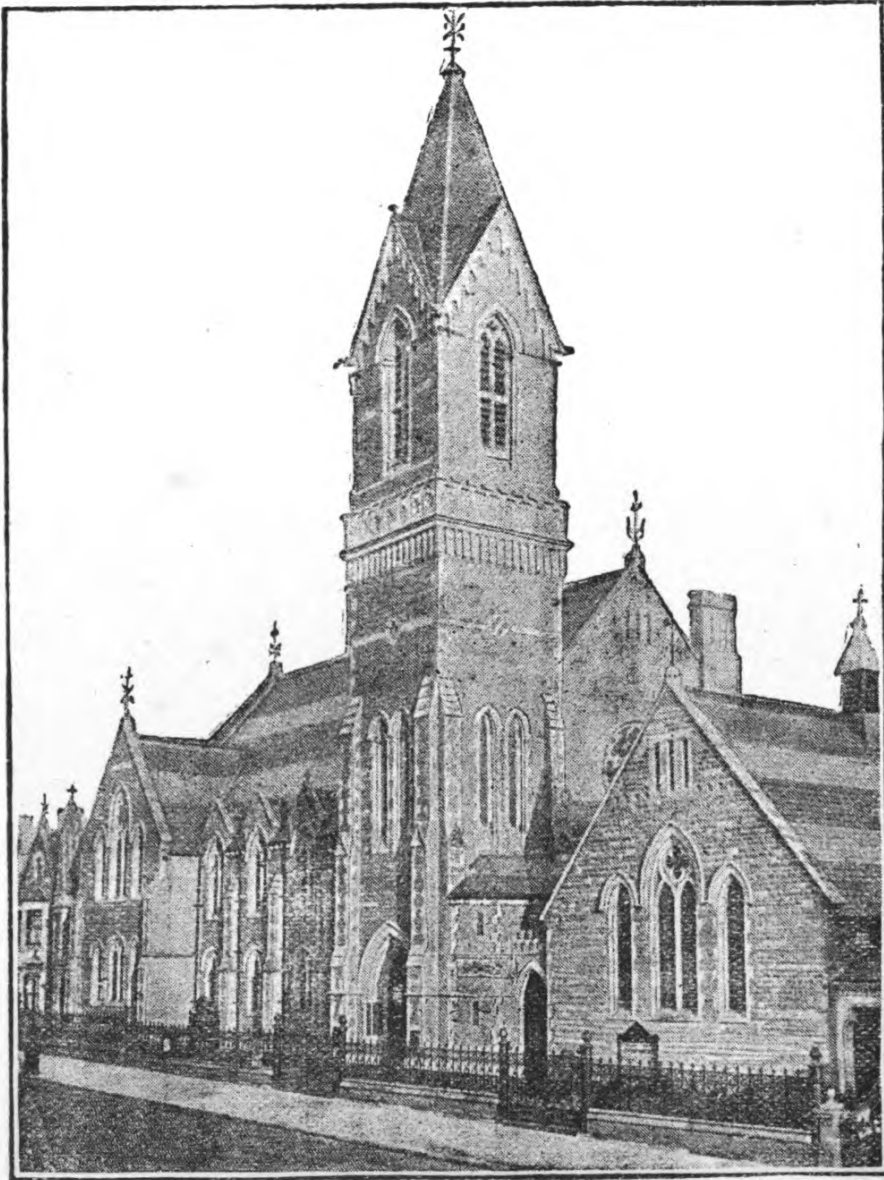
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*Talks with Men,
Women, and Children.*

David Davies





HOLLAND ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH,
HOVE, BRIGHTON.

*Talks with Men,
Women, and Children.*

BY

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To
MY ESTEEMED FRIEND
MR. GEORGE THOMAS CONGREVE,
WHO ERECTED AND PRESENTED
AS A FREEWILL OFFERING TO GOD
THE BEAUTIFUL SANCTUARY
WHERE THESE SERMONS WERE PREACHED,
AND TO
THE CHURCH AND CONGREGATION
TO WHOM
IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO MINISTER
AS A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST,
I NOW AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE
THIS BOOK.

PREFACE.

THESE sermons, preached in the ordinary course of my ministry and published weekly during the year 1889, under the title of "*The Holland Road Pulpit, Brighton: Talks with Men, Women, and Children,*" are now presented in the form of a volume to the reader.

The fact that these discourses were reported as they were extemporaneously delivered, and that they have been generally condensed from the reporter's notes for the space at my disposal, will largely account for their conversational tone, their occasional abrupt transitions, as well as for their brevity, especially in the concluding applications and appeals.

The *Talks with Children* have formed a special feature of this publication.

These sermons have been blessed of God in their delivery and weekly distribution. I earnestly hope that in this more permanent form they will be graciously approved of Him in being made a means of blessing to those who may read them.

The kind reception given to the weekly issue has encouraged me to continue the publication beyond the original limit which I had laid down—namely, 1889.

DAVID DAVIES.

63, WILBURY ROAD,

HOVE, BRIGHTON.

December, 1889.

CONTENTS.

TALKS WITH CHILDREN.

	PAGE
JACOB'S STAFF (Gen. xxxii. 10; Heb. xi. 21)	1
MAKING CAKES (Jer. vii. 18)	9
THE TWO GUESTS (Ps. xxx. 5)	17
MAKING EXCUSES (Gen. iii. 12, 13)	25
A LIVE COAL (Isa. vi. 6)	33
THE FOWLS OF THE AIR (Matt. vi. 26)	41
WHEELS (Ezek. x. 13)	49
NOAH'S ARK (Gen. vi. 22)	57
LITTLE FOXES (Song of Sol. ii. 15)	65
OTHER LITTLE FOXES (Song of Sol. ii. 15)	81
LITTLE BOATS (Mark iii. 9; John xxi. 8)	89
TWO BASKETS. No. 1 (Exod. ii. 3; 2 Cor. xi. 33)	97
TWO BASKETS. No. 2 (Acts ix. 25; 2 Cor. xi. 33)	105
TRIMMING LAMPS (Ps. cxix. 105; Matt. xxv. 7)	113
"WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND?" (Exod. iv. 2)	121
THE CLOSED DOOR (Rev. iii. 20)	129
THE MISUSED PENKNIFE (Jer. xxxvi. 23)	137
THE WELL BY THE GATE (2 Sam. xxiii. 15)	145
A GOOD NAME (Eccles. vii. 1; Song of Sol. i. 3).	153
SHIMEI, THE STONE-THROWER (2 Sam. xvi. 13)	161
SHIMEI, THE DUST-THROWER (2 Sam. xvi. 13)	177
SWEET LIGHT (Eccles. xi. 7)	185
"LITTLE, BUT EXCEEDING WISE" (Prov. xxx. 24, 28)	193
MOUNTAIN CLIMBING (Exod. xxiv. 2)	201
DORCAS AND HER WORK-BASKET (Acts ix. 39)	209

	PAGE
ABOUT "RUBBISH" (Neh. iv. 10)	217
EATING BOOKS (Rev. x. 9; Ezek. iii. 1)	225
JESUS SITTING BY THE SEASIDE (Matt. xiii. 1)	233
THE UNFINISHED SUM (1 Chron. xxvii. 24)	241
THE PRIEST'S THUMB (Exod. xxix. 20)	249
THE NEW CART (2 Sam. vi. 3)	257
PAUL GATHERING STICKS (Acts xxviii. 3)	265
PAYING THE FARE (Jonah i. 3)	273
LODGINGS IN THE COUNTRY (Song of Sol. vii. 11)	281
LODGINGS BY THE SEASIDE (Acts x. 6)	289
HUMBLE LODGINGS (2 Kings iv. 10)	297
BAD LODGINGS (Ps. lxxxiv. 10)	305
BAD LODGERS (Jer. iv. 14)	313
GOOD LODGINGS (Acts xxi. 16)	321
HARD AND SOFT PILLOWS (Gen. xxviii. 11; Mark iv. 38)	329
AWAKING (Ps. lvii. 8)	337
JESUS WATCHING THE CHILDREN PLAY (Matt. xi. 16, 17)	345
THE BROKEN PITCHER (Eccles. xii. 6)	353
THE UNTURNED CAKE (Hosea vii. 8)	361
"WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?" (Gen. xlvii. 3)	369
"WHAT IS THY NAME?" (Gen. xxxii. 27)	377
A LAD IN THE CROWD: 1. HOW THE LAD WAS FOUND (John vi. 9)	385
A LAD IN THE CROWD: 2. WHAT THE LAD HAD (John vi. 9)	393
A LAD IN THE CROWD: 3. WHAT JESUS DID WITH THE LAD'S STORE (John vi. 9-14)	401
THE CRYING STONE AND THE ANSWERING BEAM (Habak. ii. 11)	409

SERMONS.

LIFE'S CONTRASTS (Mark i. 12, 13)	3
A NATION'S CRISIS (1 Sam. iii. 1)	11
THE HEALING OF THE LEPER (Matt. viii. 1-3)	21
CHRIST CRUCIFIED: WHO WILL ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY? (Matt. xxvii. 4, 35)	26
QUARTUS A BROTHER (Rom. xvi. 23)	35
THE FORERUNNER AND HIS LORD. No. 1 (John i. 19, 20, 26, 27)	42
THE FORERUNNER AND HIS LORD. No. 2 (John i. 6-8; v. 35)	51

Contents.

xi

	PAGE
THE BIRTH AND CORONATION OF OUR KING (Isa. ix. 6; Matt. ii. 2; John vi. 15; John xix. 2, 3)	59
THE STORY OF DELIVERANCE (Ps. xi. 1-3)	67
THE FATHER'S HOUSE (John xiv. 1-3)	73
THE HANDS OF GOD (Heb. x. 31; 2 Sam. xxiv. 14; Ps. xxxi. 5)	83
PAUL THE READY (Rom. i. 15; Acts xxi. 13)	91
THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN (Luke vii. 15)	100
JOSHUA AND "ANOTHER GENERATION" (Judges ii. 6-10)	107
"A CITY AND A TOWER" (Gen. xi. 1-9)	115
CALEB'S CHOICE (Josh. xiv. 12, 13)	123
"WHAT AND IF?" (John vi. 62)	131
"A BODY PREPARED" (Heb. x. 5)	139
ABRAHAM OFFERING ISAAC (Heb. xi. 17-19)	147
THE SEA AND THE NIGHT (Ps. xcv. 5; Ps. civ. 20)	155
"NO, NEVER!" (Heb. xiii. 5)	163
JOSIAH, THE OLD-FASHIONED YOUNG MAN (2 Chron. xxxiv. 2, 3)	169
THE MAGNITUDE AND TENDERNESS OF DIVINE DEALINGS (Isa. xi. 10-12)	179
THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (2 Tim. iv. 8)	187
THE JAVELIN AND THE LYRE (1 Sam. xviii. 10)	196
CHRIST'S WORDS AND DEEDS (John x. 21)	203
PAUL IN ARABIA (Gal. i. 17)	211
MARY AT THE SEPULCHRE (John xx. 11-18)	219
THE RESERVE OF DIVINE ROYALTY (Job xxvi. 9)	228
THE FIRST PSALM	234
MAKING BATTLEMENTS (Deut. xxii. 28)	242
"WOMEN AND OTHERS" (Heb. xi. 35, 36)	251
THE HUMAN MINISTRY (Acts xiv. 15-17)	259
CRIES AT THE CROSS : 1. THE CRY OF BLASPHEMY (Matt. xxvii. 39-44)	268
CRIES AT THE CROSS : 1. THE CRY OF BLASPHEMY— <i>continued</i> (Matt. xxvii. 44; Luke xxiii. 39)	275
CRIES AT THE CROSS : 2. THE CRY OF PENITENCE (Luke xxiii. 40-42)	283
CRIES AT THE CROSS : 3. THE CRY OF MISAPPREHENSION (Luke xxiii. 27; Matt. xxvii. 47-49; Luke xxiii. 47)	291
CRIES AT THE CROSS : 4. THE CRY OF TESTIMONY (Matt. xxvii. 54)	299

	PAGE
THE JOY OF HARVEST (Isa. ix. 3)	308
THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN (Matt. xiii. 33)	314
SILENCES AT THE CROSS (John xix. 25)	323
YOUTHFUL ROMANCE AND MATURE EXPERIENCE (Mark x. 37 ; Rev. i. 9)	351
THE RESTORATION OF THE OVERTAKEN TRESPASSER (Gal. vi. 1, 2)	339
A LION IN THE WAY (Prov. xxii. 13 ; xxvi. 13)	347
TWO STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JOB : I. JOB'S PERPLEXITY (Job iii. 23) ; 2. JOB'S DELIVERANCE (Job xlii. 10)	355
THOMAS "NOT THERE" : A LOST OPPORTUNITY (John xx. 24)	363
THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A GREAT RESOLVE (Matt. xvi. 21-23)	371
THE TEMPLE : THE FRUSTRATED PURPOSE AND THE FULFILLED DESIGN (1 Kings viii. 17-20)	379
CRIES FROM THE CROSS : THE CRY OF INTERCESSION (Luke xxiii. 34)	387
CRIES FROM THE CROSS : THE CRY OF DESOLATION (Mark xv. 34)	395
THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE MAGI (Matt. ii. 1-2)	403
GOD REQUIRING THAT WHICH IS PAST (Eccles. iii. 15)	411

CORRECTIONS.

Page 9, line 6 from top, <i>read</i> "you" for "they."	
„ 235, „ 37 „ „ „ <i>“of” omitted before</i> “the Hebrew.”	
„ 238, „ 21 „ „ „ <i>“In” „ „</i> “both cases.”	
„ 256, „ 15 „ „ <i>read</i> “burst” for “bursts.”	
„ 318, „ 37 „ „ „ <i>“bacillae” for</i> “bacilla.”	

I.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN.—JACOB'S STAFF.

“With my staff I passed over this Jordan.”—GEN. xxxii. 10.

“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, *leaning* upon the top of his staff.”—HEB. xi. 21.

My subject is Jacob's staff. Jacob evidently valued it greatly. I believe that these two verses refer to the same staff. Probably it was not a very valuable or beautiful one. Jacob had very likely cut it in one of the woods surrounding Beersheba, and had often used it in watching the flock and in going on his journeyings after wandering sheep. When at last he had to leave home, through the deceit he had practised upon his poor blind father and the wrong he had done his good-natured but careless brother, he could take with him no companion save his staff. This was a longer and a lonelier journey than any he had taken before. But it is wonderful what a companion even a walking-stick may become. I can imagine Jacob's mother saying to him as he was about to leave, “Take your staff with you, my son; it will be something to connect you with the old home when you are far away; besides, it will help you on your journey.” Then I think I can see Jacob take his staff and cross the threshold, with nothing in his possession save a little food that his mother had carefully prepared for him, and his staff. I imagine him looking at his staff as upon an old friend, who had in times gone by shared with him many a danger, and now as the only companion who would face the risks and sorrows of his new and untrodden journey. How it helped him to proceed on his weary way! He felt that even now he was not quite alone. The staff seemed to say to him, “You will find me as true and as faithful as ever. We must help each other. If you will carry me I will do my best to bear you up; we can only get on by helping each other.” Jacob would listen and gain heart. When at length the night came on, and Jacob was about to climb the barren slope of the hill toward Bethel, the staff continued, “Lean hard upon me; the hill is steep, and I am well able to bear your weight.” Jacob said nothing,

Jacob's Staff.

but he leaned the harder upon his faithful companion as he pursued his journey. As the darkness thickened Jacob took a stone for his pillow, and slept in that lonely place. Even then, when in his dreams Jacob had a vision of the heavenly ladder and of the bright angels that were coming and going from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven, how near the staff was still to the pilgrim! There it was with Jacob at the very gate of heaven! When Jacob awoke, the staff—like the stony pillow—became more precious to him than ever. He erected the stone for a memorial, and left it there; but he took the staff with him, often wondering how much of the light of heaven had reached it, and how many angels had stooped over it. *They*, however, needed no staff. Then the staff seemed to speak again and say, "Let us take courage and go on. It was well worth while to go up the mountain to receive what we did. We will climb again if need be. Never were a pilgrim and his staff nearer ascending the angels' ladder and entering heaven than we were last night. It may be that I shall yet help you on that last journey, and what if you lean upon me when you take the last step!" What else happened between the pilgrim and his staff I cannot now tell, except that they became more and more endeared to each other by the experiences they passed through together. In later days they would often have a talk about the many journeys they had taken hand in hand. Jacob at length became rich, and returned with all his family and possessions to his native land, but he did not therefore despise the old staff. When he became an old man, and he had passed through many troubles and at last went to Egypt, we may be assured that he took with him the same staff, and with it appeared in Pharaoh's palace and in the presence of the king when he said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years." Even when he came to die we learn from the second verse of my text that he still had his staff; and leaning upon that old companion which had sustained him many a time before, he worshipped God, and blessed two of his grandsons, the sons of Joseph. He then probably died with the staff still in his grasp. It reminded him of all the way the Lord had led and delivered him; he would trust in that Lord still, and lean upon that staff as he took the last step of his earthly pilgrimage. Then when Jacob was gone, how that staff must have been valued in Jacob's family!

The two boys whom he blessed while he leaned upon it would often speak about "Grandfather's staff;" yea, and in their later years tell their children to treasure it for the sake of former days.

I want you all to realize at the beginning of the New Year that you, too, are pilgrims, and that each of you needs a staff. No one can tell whether your journey will be long or short, rough or smooth, in this world; but you all need something to sustain you on life's journey to a better land. Children often sing, "Jesus loves me, this I know." Now that is a staff upon which they can lean all through life. Like Jacob's, it will do for old age as well as for youth. The aged Christian needs no stronger staff to lean upon when he dies than the love of Christ. David exclaimed long ago, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." We may have that confidence. In childhood, throughout life, in death, we need only His love to sustain us.

II.

SERMON.—LIFE'S CONTRASTS.

"And straightway the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him" (R.V.) — MARK i. 12, 13.

WE have known some artists who have portrayed with exquisite delicacy of touch the placid lake as it reflects upon its bosom the glories of the arching sky and the varied hues of the surrounding landscape; we have known others who, with marvellous quickness of eye and boldness of execution, have caught the winter torrent as it leaped over the precipice in brawling cataracts, or as it rushed down its stony staircase of rock and boulder in numberless rapids and ever-varying cascades on its journey to the sea. This contrast reminds us of John and Mark. The former depicts the attributes of the Christ in their wider reaches, and portrays His Divine personality as he mirrors the glory of the Father and the serenity of the skies; while Mark catches the rush of that wondrous life among men in its numberless activities, and with a master-hand delineates the rapid succession of events in their ever-deepening perspec-

tive and continuous progression. His record throughout is full of movement and of life. We no sooner begin to read his Gospel than we find ourselves caught in the rapids and carried away helplessly by the rush of the narrative. Mark catches the urgency of the life he seeks to record; seldom enters into detail; has only time for the bare outline. He lights up his pictures with single yet bold and rapid touches, and leaves it for other evangelists to fill in the detail if they can.

Matthew records the fact that Jesus "went straightway *out of the water*," but it was reserved for Mark to note that the speed of that ascent was accelerated by the Spirit *driving* Jesus "forth into the wilderness." Further, the "then" with which Matthew ushers in the story of the Temptations, immediately after the record of the Baptism, is the nearest approach on the part of the other evangelists to represent the urgency expressed by Mark, and even that lacks the intensity and graphic force of the word "straightway." Mark thus emphasizes as no other evangelist does the rapid alternations of the extremes of experience in the life of our Lord at this juncture. The transitions are sudden and complete. Strange and startling is the combination of opposites in these verses. The brief narrative in its rapid, erratic course abounds with surprisals. The Spirit "*rends*" the heavens, yet descends like a "*dove*;" and again that dovelike presence "*drives*" Jesus "forth into the wilderness," where "Satan" (a more emphatic epithet than the "devil" of the other evangelists) and the "wild beasts" (mentioned by Mark only) lurk, but where the "angels," too, are ministering; and all these alternations are made to hinge on the one word "*straightway*." It is evident from the emphasis which Mark places upon this word that it expressed to him a very significant fact; it can scarcely fail to do so to us if we give it careful thought.

We will consider our text as a graphic narrative of an important fact in the life of our Lord, and by way of practical application as an illustration of a universal experience in the lives of His disciples in all ages.

In considering this as a prominent fact in the life of Christ, we observe that in the tenth and eleventh verses Mark notes the ready response of Heaven to the act of obedience in Baptism, while in our text (the twelfth and thirteenth verses) he records the immediate counterblast of hell in what we find, from the detailed narratives of the other evangelists, to be a succession of

temptations which embrace the whole sweep of satanic power. Now what impresses us most forcibly is not so much that our Lord should have been the object of the Father's special approval, nor even of satanic assault, as that these experiences should be so closely associated the one with the other. This is all the more striking when we remember what we have already stated—that it was the Spirit who descended upon Him from heaven that *drove* Him forth to the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. "Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit," says Luke, "returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness forty days, being tempted of the devil" (R.V.). It is hard at first to trace the close connection between being "full of the Holy Spirit," also "being led by the Spirit," and "being tempted of the devil." The narrative seems to close in an anti-climax. Yet we are not on that account to ignore the sequence of events. The heavens, from whence the Spirit came, no sooner close than the wilderness opens to receive Him whom the Spirit drives thither, and the Father's approving voice no sooner dies into silence than it is supplemented by the insinuating whisper of the Tempter. The Baptism, in more than one sense, took place on the edge of the wilderness. From the ninth verse onward we read of transitions which prove to be as progressive as they appear violent. "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan." Nearly the whole length of Palestine is traversed by this brief, crisp narrative. In this and the following verse the extremes of experience are also touched. The movement in every sense is so rapid as to startle us. Picture Jesus leaving the humble home, His widowed mother, brothers and sisters, and obscure calling in despised Nazareth, traversing well-nigh the length of the land, being baptized, the heavens opening, and the Father's approval sounding from the skies. There is a quickness of movement in the narrative as we approach this climax which clearly intimates that there must be something beyond. Such surprisals must be followed by crucial moments. Moments of ecstasy in this life of ours are sure to dip somewhere into sorrow. Is the Christ touched with a feeling of our infirmities? If He is, then

1. The hour of instantaneous approval must be followed by a counterbalancing test. This, at least, has been the case with the best of *men*. Paul's rapture into the third heaven, lest he should "be exalted overmuch," was succeeded by "a thorn

in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him." In this case the rapture not only made the thorny trial necessary, but was also a preparation for it. Who shall say that it was not so in the experience of the Christ Himself? His hour of ecstasy was the prelude to the hour of conflict. The one as a human experience would have been incomplete without the other. No human life can be written or its conditions realized without a record of temptation as well as rapture, a recognition of the diabolic presence and power as well as the approving and inspiring voice of God. Moments following such special manifestations as this were necessarily moments of conflict if Christ was tempted in all points like as we are; but let us also remember that in that hour of transition the thrilling inspiration of the descending dove became the irresistible impulse of the constraining Spirit, by whom the Christ was urged onward into victorious conflict with the enemy of man. This conflict made possible the highest perfection—that which is wrought through suffering. It is ever thus in the life of Christ's disciples. The virtue that is nurtured by the approval of Heaven would be "cloistered" and effeminate apart from the tests which ever come in the train of such approval; and the temptations of our wilderness and solitary places would be to us but hopeless defeats apart from the preceding assurance of Divine sonship and the energizing power of the Spirit that descends like a dove on God's anointed ones, and fills them with godly courage. We cannot separate in the life of our Great Exemplar any more than in ours the vision of God from the temptation of the devil; "straightway" is the word that must connect these opposite poles of human experience.

2. It was important that Jesus should know at the outset through the discipline of hand-to-hand encounter the power of the foe. Half the battles of life in the spiritual as well as the physical sphere have been lost through under-estimating the power and resources of the enemy. He who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil had at once to meet the full force of satanic onslaught, and exhaust the enemy's resources in a rapid succession of victorious conflicts. These early experiences decided subsequent ones. They supplied the key-note of the life. It is so with us. How early in life do we, as a rule, determine our relation to the tempter, whether we shall be his conquerors or his slaves! The tide of battle is generally decided in days of youth, and in our earliest conflicts.

3. Our Lord's withdrawal was important as a safeguard against the mistaken enthusiasm and premature applause of the multitude. It is not for us to dwell upon the strain to which the Son of Man must have been subjected when, at the close of His Baptism, He stood alike at the focal point of Heaven's miraculous approval and the wondering admiration of the assembled throng. But from subsequent events we learn that after exceptional manifestations of Christ's glory or power the blind enthusiasm of the multitude had often to be checked by His sudden withdrawal. Jesus having performed the miracle of the loaves, when He perceived that they "would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, departed again into a mountain Himself alone." These were moments when the high mission of the Son of God could be guarded only by withdrawal from the multitude, who, in the excitement of the hour, sought to violate and vulgarize the plan of His great life. It is thus in the lives of His followers. There are times when the integrity of their character, the beauty of their consecration, and the highest interests of their life can only be maintained by withdrawal from the ready and enthusiastic approval of the crowd, even when the withdrawal involves severe temptation and stern conflict.

4. The Father's approval had isolated Him from His fellows ; He must now stand the test of isolation. That unknown One, like many before Him, stepped forward from the crowd and was baptized ; but lo ! the heavens opened, and the Father's voice and the descending dove singled Him out as the only-begotten Son of God and the Anointed One of Heaven. By one brief surprisal He stood forth in solitary grandeur. But there is no honour without its counterbalancing trial. This chosen One of Heaven, who stands forth in all the sublimity of His distinctive personality, must bear the weight of His exceptional calling ; He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people must no man be with Him. Exceptional honour necessarily involves exceptional isolation. It is in isolation, too, that the greatest battles of life must be fought and its truest victories won. This was true in the life of our Lord ; it is equally true in ours.

5. The temptation prepared the way for angelic ministries : "And the angels ministered unto Him." This is a strange ending to the story. The narrative once more takes a sudden turn. Fallen and unfallen angels come into close contact in

this conflict. In one sense the Christ was alone ; in another He was not alone, for the angels were with Him. This, too, is a representative experience. We have already observed that whenever the word of Divine approval comes to the godly man the devil is not far from the scene ; we now learn that whenever the satanic sneer comes to him God's angels are not far off, but ready to minister. Thus all temptations of the devil when nobly resisted shall end in angelic visions, and every trial of strength in the assurance of Heaven's aid. God in our experience, as in that of our Lord, not only anticipates satanic besetments by His inspiring approval—or by what our fathers called *prevenient grace*—but also supplements all our conflicts by such gracious ministrations as proclaim us to be the sons of God and the heirs of glory.

Brethren, the story of these alternations in the experience of our Lord comes to us with soothing power amid the chequered scenes of life. Temptation has a place in every human life ; yet we are not to court temptation. We remember that He who Himself had passed through it in its varied forms, and emerged out of the conflict victorious, nevertheless taught His disciples immediately after this to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." It is a terrible thing to be tempted. Infinite issues are at stake. On the other hand, temptations need not appal or unnerve us. They have a place in our training. There are latent energies implanted in the godly man which only special moments of testing bring forth. Temptations afford Heaven an opportunity of revealing its resources as it never could otherwise. We should not know here how watchful our Father in heaven is, and how inspiring the ministry of angels can be, were it not that we know how terrible the assaults of hell are, and how stern the conflict we have to fight with the tempter. It is in temptation that we learn as we cannot in any other circumstance, that "greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world," that "it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." This is our Gospel to the tried and tempted everywhere and for all time.

III.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON MAKING CAKES.

“The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven.”—
JER. vii. 18.

I SHOULD like you all to repeat the text until they know it thoroughly, and be able to answer without hesitation what the children did, what the fathers did, and what the women did. Again, who gathered the wood? who kindled the fire? and who kneaded the dough? Now this verse is full of interest to children because it speaks of children, of fathers, of women—that is, of mothers, aunts, and sisters—and last, but not always least, of cakes. I like the verse very much, because it shows how each may take his part in what has to be done by the united efforts of all. It is important for us to understand at the outset what had to be done on this occasion. The people who lived in Jerusalem at this time, alas! worshipped the sun, and called it Baal, also the moon, and called it Ashtoreth,—just as our ancestors did at one time in this country, calling the day upon which they worshipped the sun *Sunday*, and the day upon which they worshipped the moon *Monday*. In Jerusalem, at the time referred to in our text, the people used to offer cakes to the moon. These cakes were always made round to resemble the moon. This offering was considered to be a very important one, and all wanted to have a share in making the cakes and presenting them.

Now the first thing that had to be done was to get plenty of firewood. You cannot make a cake without fire, and you cannot get fire without fuel. Thus I think I can hear a Jewish mother say, “Now, my children, I want you to get some good firewood for to-morrow—wood that will burn brightly; I am going to make some cakes for the queen of heaven, and—who knows?—perhaps there may be a few tit-bits left!” Off the children go. That’s just the work they like; they can stoop easily, or jump over the hedge or fence, and tear their clothes without having much scolding, as they are gathering wood for their mother. Little Hannah gathers her apron full, and Dan

or Benjamin as much as he can carry in his arms, and they return home full of glee. They have done their part.

But the following morning the fire had to be kindled. The fathers were best able to do that. Children were taught then, as now, not to play with fire, and the mothers were engaged in another way, so the fathers had to kindle it. There was the difficulty of lighting it in those days before matches were invented, and even before flint and steel were in use. It required strong arms to kindle a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood vigorously together. The fathers could do that best; for they had muscular arms, and they gladly did their part.

Then there was need of clean and gentle hands to knead the dough, and there were none who could do that as well as the mothers, aunts, and the elder sisters. It was their turn now, and the children would look earnestly on and wonder whether the dough would go far enough to make the necessary number of cakes for the "queen of heaven," or the moon, and one or two over. They little knew that the mother or sister had put in an extra handful of meal for that purpose. Then there was the baking and the consumption of the odd cake or two by the little wood-gatherers. But beyond all this there was a great pleasure reserved for them all—the privilege of presenting to the moon the cakes in the making of which they had all had a part, and which were as round and as perfect as a woman's hand could make them.

Of course it is very sad to think of fathers, mothers, and children worshipping the moon in ancient Jerusalem, and forgetting Him Who had made the heavens and all they contain; yet I think that the way in which they all gladly did what they could, even in the worship of a false goddess, is a good example for some of us in the service of the true God. Children have their part to do still. Often, as in this case, the work begins with children. They cannot do much; they cannot kindle a fire, or make a cake or a loaf; but they can gather wood, supply the fuel, and others will kindle the fire and provide an offering fit for the altar of God. You cannot as yet, at least, go forth to distant lands as missionaries and Zenana workers, and take the bread of life—not as a gift to God, but as a gift from God—to the heathen; but you can enable others who are older than you to do all this. You can contribute your pence to the missionary society, and thus you and the thousands of children in our Sunday-schools and in

our homes can supply the fuel, which the zeal of our missionaries will set on fire; touched by that living flame the message of the Saviour's love will become the bread of life to the dying heathen, and the sacrifice will be accepted by our God as a sacrifice with which He will be well pleased.

IV.

SERMON—A NATION'S CRISIS.

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.”
—I SAM. iii. 1.

“THE word of the Lord was precious in those days” in the sense of being *rare*, and in no other. These words tell of a terrible scarcity. They point to one of the greatest gaps and deadliest silences in the history of Divine Revelation. They tell the story of a sad retrogression. God had spoken many times before; the centuries had been vocal with the music of His voice; but there was a painful silence now.

There had been already one wide gap between the patriarchal age and the Mosaic; but since then God had broken the silence, and spoken as He never had before. He had given the law, and instituted a religion rich in symbols and replete with ceremonies and observances. He had ordained a priesthood, appeared in the Shechinah, and condescended to make the Tabernacle His recognized dwelling-place among His people. He had also taken the nation whom He had redeemed beneath His special care; had in times of pressing emergency, and in great national crises, raised up deliverers for His people,—deliverers who by their heroisms and triumphs had vindicated the Divine choice and the national trust.

But gradually the glory of this Divine order in the religious, as well as the political, life of the nation had become dimmed, and its power nullified by the decay of national faith and purity. The priests and judges—the religious and political rulers—fell sadly below the level of their high callings. The high priesthood had passed over from the family of Eleazar to the house of Ithamar, his younger brother. Whether this was brought about by some glaring inconsistency in the hereditary house, or some milder departure, or some external but violent revo-

lutionary force, it is hard to tell. Eli, however, belonged to the house of Ithamar. He was not only a high priest; he was also a judge. By what valiant deeds, if any, he had attained to that dignity we do not know. Attempts had been made to make the judgeship hereditary. Possibly the appointment of Eli was the outcome of that movement.

Be that as it may, those were dark times—times of national dissoluteness and gross idolatry, made still more reprehensible by the rapacity and profligacy of the sons of Eli, and more hopeless by the incapacity of Eli to struggle with those terrible adverse forces. The result was that in relation to the people specially called by God, and in an age when there were a national religion and a sanctuary of Divine appointment, and high and responsible religious and political orders instituted for the well-being of the nation, the heavens had become silent and dark. God would not speak through degenerate men, or reveal His glory to a dissolute people.

My subject this morning is—*A nation's crisis in the withdrawal of the word and vision of God.* This is an illustration of the principle, “From him that hath not shall be taken away that which he hath.” Let us look briefly at the state of things as they existed at that time. There were a Tabernacle and a religious ceremonial, but no hallowing influence went forth from these to the nation. There were a high priest who was helpless and a priesthood that was polluted. There was a judge, but judgment had ceased even in his own house. Thus we find a state of things in which Divine institutions and so-called consecrated men had ceased to be a power for good, and had become a positive source of evil. The whole narrative in this chapter is sadly suggestive. Even the detailed description of the natural surroundings is terribly symbolic. It was a night scene, one of utter weariness and almost extinction. The picture in all its accessories adds vividness to the central fact:—The word of the Lord scarce—no open vision—Eli old, helpless, nearly blind, and asleep—his sons profligate—the lamp burning dimly. What wonder that God is silent at such a time when there is no one who will hear! What wonder that the visions of heaven are withheld when the eyes of the world's seers are dim! The measure of Divine silence in every age is the measure of that age's deafness. “He that hath an ear to hear let him hear” is the supplement of every Divine message to the world, and “he that hath eyes to see let him see” is the

Divine summons accompanying every vision. Thus the hope of every age is in its prophets and seers.

What then shall be done at this juncture in the nation's history? Old institutions are all but dead, and Divine orders of men have lost their sacredness and meaning. The great God will take a new departure before all possibilities are gone. Ere the lamp is gone out, before as yet the present order of things has quite closed, a Samuel must be raised who cannot sleep in such an awfully still and ominous night. The voice of God will come through the stillness to his listening ears, and the summons to duty will break upon the dull monotonous hush of that dark hour, and stir new hopes and ambitions in the heart of that child. At first Samuel does not know the full significance of that summons. He accepts it as the voice of Eli. Thrice he mistakes it for the high priest's call; but Eli, whose own opportunity of reforming the age is gone, gives the clue to the child concerning the deep significance of that voice which he himself, alas! has too often ignored, and teaches him how to answer his God when He calls. What tragic force, tender grace, and touching pathos are to be found in strange combinations in this narrative!

The striking fact which runs through the record, however, is that God superannuates the useless, although it be a Divine and historic order of things and calls into being a new and better order.

1. With Eli's death the office of judgeship practically ceased, and was only continued for a brief period in the life of Samuel, until the new office of kingship—not the best possible substitute, but the best for which the nation was prepared—could take its place. This illustrated the principle that no institution, however divinely ordained, which has become degenerate should be continued for its own sake; hence the judgeship was finally condemned in Eli and discontinued with Samuel.

2. With Eli's death, too, the office of the high priesthood, as existing in the family of Ithamar, was doomed. It then returned to the family of Eleazar. The house of Ithamar had exhausted its opportunities and failed. Such a calling is of more value than any family which may be identified with it. If it can be saved let the family be thrust aside. No vested interests of ours in God's service must claim precedence.

3. In the judgment that befell Eli and his house even the sacred calling of the priesthood—apart from the minor con-

siderations of family—was curtailed in its high prerogatives and functions. The sacerdotal order of men had hitherto been exclusively the teachers; and feasts, fasts, sacrifices, offerings, and the various ceremonials of the Temple had been the chosen means of Divine communications with man. The priests had been appointed to teach all the statutes (Lev. x. 11). But this prerogative had also been misused, and had ended in a monopoly of rights and privileges without any commensurate claim to excellence. Eli was both high priest and judge; yet just at the point where there was the greatest plurality of honours there was the least efficiency of service. Hence the necessities of the times demanded a new departure; and as God's plans and methods are progressive, and the old order of things was scarcely remediable, He appointed a new and nobler succession of men than the priests ever had been. He called Samuel to be the first of that grand succession of men who stand unapproached in history—the prophets of God—those who rebuked kings and priests alike, and who were known in their day, and will be to the end of time, by the title, “Men of God.” Where sin abounded grace did much more abound; the crisis of evil became God's crowning opportunity for good. This, however, was done at great cost. God broke entirely away from the family of Eli in calling the first man of the great order of prophets. He would not allow the nation to rush on heedlessly to ruin in order to save the dignity and maintain the self-complacency of any class who had forfeited their privileges by the neglect of their duty. This applies to the chosen method of Divine working in every age. Every denomination, community, or nation stands permanently by the work it does and the blessing it confers upon the world. There is the seed of decay in all uselessness. As Christian denominations and churches we should be mindful of this. “The Church in danger!” What a fearful confession, or what a cry of faithlessness! The fate of the Christian Church under God is in its own hands. No human disestablishing can touch its life, if it has any, and no amount of human establishing or patronage can make a permanent institution of it if it has not in itself an irresistible inherent force—the very life of God. No church which does its Lord's bidding is in danger. He hath need of it, and the world hath need of it, and, like man, it is immortal until its work is done. There is a rigid principle of utilitarianism running through the Divine system of service in

all ages. No method of working, any more than any order of workers, is spared any longer than it maintains its effectiveness. The candlestick may be removed any time when once it has ceased to send forth light. Not one stone shall be left upon another in the temple which no longer has its Shechinah. There is no sinecure in the whole sphere of Divine service.

Now let us see how in this case God accomplished the great change which was rendered necessary. Observe that God spoke to a child rather than to the aged high priest and judge. God had previously spoken to Eli by the mouth of a prophet—one of the occasional prophets raised by God before the *order* of prophets was originated in Samuel. Eli, however, with the characteristic lack of energy which increased with old age, and with that persistent indifference which generally accompanies a weak amiability, contented himself with a verbal reprimand of his wicked sons rather than a parental and judicial restraint. God now spoke to Samuel, and through him to Eli only at his own urgent request. What if the child succeed where the "man of God" has failed? But the message was one of doom rather than reproof, and by this step God was withdrawing from Eli. Eli soon learnt the significance of this step; yet observe how with all his failings this privileged man, in whom so much religious monopoly had been vested, accepted the change. Never was Eli greater than here.

Samuel did not know God's voice. How easy it would have been for a man with less reverence than Eli to have ridiculed the lad, or to have been embittered with the thought of receiving a revelation through an ignorant child who mistook the voice of Jehovah for the voice of his master! But to Eli the very paradox brought with it crushing solemnity. What a *necessity* there must have been for God to speak to that child! Did he speak to him because there was no one else to whom he could speak—because all other ears had been stopped? How true thus early that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God established strength. It was because the word of the Lord was precious, or *scarce*, that the child had run so excitedly and knew not what to make of that voice. What a reflection upon the condition of things! Did not even Moses hide his face and fear when he heard that voice first of all? Solemnized by such thoughts, Eli taught the child how to answer God—a lesson which the teacher had sadly neglected, but which the pupil remembered to the last. There is a touch

of exquisite pathos about all this. Eli did not try to step in between the lad and his God. He let the one who had heard the voice have the privilege of answering it.

The submissiveness of Eli in the presence of the child when the crushing message came was in perfect harmony with what had preceded. He who had "served unto the Lord before Eli" now became a prophet of the Lord to Eli. The disciple stepped in advance of his master through the urgency of the Divine call. Yet Eli without a murmur accepted the words from the child's lips as God's final message.

Notice, too, how at the very outset there was a severe test for Samuel. Eli had survived his ministry, and Samuel received the first call to take his place. This was as trying to the sensitive child as to the saintly veteran—perhaps more so. The test came with the call—a test of faith toward God and of fidelity toward Eli. What could not be expected of the lad who responded so soon and so faithfully to the high and trying demands of the occasion, who first kept silent notwithstanding the great pressure of his terrible secret, and then uttered his message with such fidelity and firmness at the call of urgent duty! Having thus spoken to Eli, he will find no difficulty in subsequent life to speak to the people. This was the crucial moment, when he was to rise to the courage of a prophet.

The hope of the age was thus made by God to centre in that child (vv. 20, 21). How often in times of degeneracy has God touched the race through a child, and thus saved it! Around the cradle in Bethlehem gather the hopes of the world. Who shall deny the ministry of the Child and remember the story of the Incarnation? The cradle, like the cross, is transfigured by the touch of Jesus Christ. What may not God yet do through children, since the Saviour of the world was Himself a child, and thus touched infancy before manhood! Every child under the Old Dispensation who became the deliverer of his people was but a type of the "Holy Child Jesus," Who is also the Saviour of the world. The manger was the fulfilment of prophecy; it was also the prediction of the cross. The redemption of the world cannot be severed from the story of the Child that was born, the Son that was given. May we lay our grateful homage at His feet!

V.

A PARABLE FOR YOUNG AND OLD—THE TWO GUESTS.

“Weeping may come in to lodge at even, but Joy in the morning.”—
PSALM xxx. 5.

I HAVE here followed the marginal reading of the Revised Version in the former part, and have omitted the word “cometh,” always printed in italics, in the latter part of the verse. David, in dedicating his new and costly palace, seems to look forward to the future, and to wonder what guests will cross that threshold. There are two, at least, who will be sure to visit him—Weeping and Joy.

The first guest is *Weeping*. She cannot be shut out from the palace any more than from the cot. David probably would not exclude her if he could. Therefore on the day of dedication he speaks first of Weeping, as a guest that will be certain to enter his new home.

Weeping is represented as coming in to lodge at even, when the gloom gathers round and the darkness descends. This is the observation of one advanced in life, and who knows well what he is talking about. It is at even that Weeping comes to all our homes. When she enters we close the shutters, and very often put out the candle, and in the glow of the dying embers on the hearth talk to her awhile.

Weeping is sure to come to us when the shadow of death rests upon our home, and when the blinds are drawn. We soon see her tall slim figure, in sombre garb, as she appears in the gloom, and quickly hear her voice break in sobs and sighs upon the silence. She begins to talk to us, and to tell us that there seldom was a home so dark as ours, or a trial so great; that such a loss can never be fully made up; that now we are only just beginning to find out what life is; that all its friendships and relationships are disappointing; that our best friends only come to go; that we never knew their value until it was too late; that when they are gone we are poorer and sadder than if they had never come to gladden us; that we have been walking in a vain show, and rejoicing in a delusive hope; that

our heart and life have been impoverished for ever; and that "the tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back" to us.

Again, Weeping comes in times of adversity and anxious care. With pensive countenance and in sad tones she says that Providence is full of mystery, and that in all ages she has known some of the best people who were thus sadly perplexed. She tells us that she well remembers how Asaph long ago used to say, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. . . . Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 5, 13). She reminds us how David, too, and other saints felt the same burden of mystery, and adds that no one has ever found the solution. She is not surprised that we are troubled; we well might be.

Again, Weeping comes in those trying hours when friendships disappoint us and close and tender relationships become strained. She suggests that human nature is, notwithstanding all its professions, selfish and untrustworthy; that the exclamation of the Psalmist is, sooner or later, the exclamation of all who have known much of the world and its ways: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help." And, "I said in my haste [or alarm], All men are liars." "Ah," adds Weeping, "there is enough occasion to make any man say so!"

Again, Weeping is sure to come to us in the hour of our humiliation and shame. In the dim glimmer of the fire on the hearth she brings to our notice stains on our garment which, she assures us, would look a thousand times worse if we saw them in the proper light—saw them as others see them; and, above all, as God sees them. She tells us that such marks can never be removed; that there are also ugly scars upon our countenance which will always disfigure it; that it is a hopeless thing when a man has lost his good name; that when that is lost there is nought worth keeping. She tells us, too, that even those stains which others may not detect God sees; that sin is sin, whether it be secret or open; and that, the wide world over and in every age, "the wages of sin is death."

These are but a few of her visits and of the things she tells us. That young man or woman knows but little of life who

has not been visited by this sad and pensive guest. Yet one who knew her well tells us here that her visit, long as it may seem, is after all but brief. She comes with the darkness, and departs with it; for no sooner does the first grey streak of dawn shoot upward from the distant east, telling of returning day, than this tearful guest gathers together her long sable robe, and in plaintive tones bids us adieu. As we open the door for our departing visitor, we find that she is leaving none too soon; for on the threshold she meets another guest, who comes to us at the dawn of day, and whom the Psalmist calls *Joy*. Weeping and Joy know each other. They have met on other thresholds before now.

Weeping vanishes out of sight in the grey light of dawn, and Joy enters our dwelling. The blinds are drawn up again, the fire is rekindled upon the hearth; and then, in the growing light of day that streams through the window, Joy talks to us awhile.

We repeat to her what Weeping has told us, and Joy replies that Weeping is a true teacher, that it is her prerogative to utter many a truth which only she can teach, but that she overlooks others none the less important. For instance, that in speaking to us of our bereavement as a loss for which nothing can compensate, she forgot to tell us of the meeting again; of the memory of that dear one which will be to us a life-long inspiration; of the upward direction which such a bereavement should give to our thoughts and aspirations; of how it brings heaven nearer, and makes eternity a greater reality to us; and of how it may be one of God's ways of uniting us to Himself by associating His home with ours.

Again, Joy reminds us that when Weeping spoke of affliction as being the mystery which has perplexed God's saints in all the ages, and of how she had heard Asaph say, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked," etc. (Ps. lxxiii. 2-13), she forgot to tell us the rest that Asaph said: how that he began the psalm with, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart;" and how that, further on, in speaking of the prosperity of the wicked, he exclaims, "When I sought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went to the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. . . . Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh

and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (verses 16-20 and 25, 26). "She forgot to tell you, too," adds Joy, "what another Psalmist said: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word'" (Ps. cxix. 67). "Yes," continues Joy, "Weeping is a good teacher, but she has a poor memory for aught that is joyous; she only remembers the sad."

Joy pauses, and then, with a still brighter glow upon her countenance, and a clearer ring in her voice, she continues, "And when Weeping spoke to you of your sin, she gave you but half the truth. When she told you that you could never remove the stains of sin which God saw upon your garment, she forgot to say that 'the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin,' and that 'if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, Who is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.'"

Joy no sooner utters these words than we hear a gentle knock at the door, and a voice full of tenderness exclaims from without, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will eat with him, and he with Me." We open the door, and lo! One crowned with thorns, and bearing in His hands and feet the marks of the nails, and in His side the mark of the spear; but from Whose gentle, loving countenance beams a tender light that fills the house with brightness and our hearts with praise. He has been near us all the while, and Weeping and Joy were but His messengers; for He was the "Man of Sorrows," and yet the King Whose kingdom is "Joy in the Holy Ghost."

And so the night ends in morning, and morning in perfect day; the sorrow gives place to joy, and joy culminates in rapture. The brief visit of Weeping, who came in to lodge at even, prepared us for the visit of Joy, who came to us with the dawn, and both visits for the revelation of the gracious Saviour Who shows to us the fulness of His love. Our hearth is the more sacred for the visits of both guests, and our heart the richer for their twofold ministry; we would not close the door against either if we could, since evermore they come to us to usher in the Lord of Glory.

VI.

SERMON—THE HEALING OF THE LEPER.

“When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy was cleansed.”—MATT. viii. 1-3.

THE order taken by Matthew in this record is antithetical rather than chronological. The first verse of this chapter supplies the contrast to the first verse of the fifth chapter. *There* we read, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him. And He opened His mouth, and taught them.” Thus Jesus gave expression to the true instincts of a preacher. He recognized a congregation in the multitude and a pulpit in the mountain. Give a true preacher a multitude and a mountain, and he will know what to do. He will go up the mountain, open—not always his manuscript, but always—his mouth, and teach. And *teach*, observe. How many there are who open their mouth compared with those who open their mouth and *teach*!

Here we read of Jesus coming down from the mountain. What history is condensed into that period between the ascent and the descent! The first lawgiver received the Law during his stay on the mountain-top; the Christ too proclaimed His Law during this brief withdrawal. The result was that the people were astonished. But the hour of astonishment is a dangerous one. We know but little what may follow. In the narrative the record of the people’s astonishment is followed by the statement of Christ’s descent. This is the moment of transition from the altitude of a teacher to lowly contact with misery and sin. Luke tells us that the healing of the leper took place in a city. Many a man who is great on a mountain becomes small on the plain and in a city. The teacher often derives importance from the vantage ground which he occupies. We sometimes hear it said, “So-and-so is great in the pulpit, but nothing out of it.” Moses fell below his level when he came down from the mount. What of Jesus Christ when *He* comes down from His mountain? Will He still maintain the high altitude of the Sermon on the Mount? He is now subjected to a new test which may decide the limitations of His ministry. We have already read (ch. iv. 23-25) of His miracle-working power. But no leper was

found among those whom He had healed. Now there draws nigh to Him a man whose disease is acknowledged to be incurable, save by the direct touch of God. The Christ has already *taught* men whom the Rabbis counted "cursed" because they knew not the Law; will He continue the expansion of the recognized limitations of ministry by *healing* a complaint which is nowhere mentioned among remediable diseases in the writings of the Rabbis? Will there be as great a departure from the recognized rules in His healing as in His teaching? Where will His uniqueness vanish into the commonplace?

Terrible is the fate of the man who is called unclean by society, especially if that uncleanness be accepted as a token of the stroke of God. Still more terrible if, as in this case, the man himself has to proclaim his uncleanness wherever he goes. All tends to sullen, callous despair. There is a depressing, damning effect in constantly proclaiming our own vileness. Read the record: "Behold, there came a leper." The narrative hurriedly dismisses the multitudes, and gives room to the man to whom they gave no room. Multitudes are commonplaces; a leper of this man's type is exceptional. The whole record is graphic. It all revolves around the isolated, companionless man, who has felt the bitterness and loathsomeness of a fearful loneliness, and who now draws near and worships Jesus. He has drawn evidently nearer than the authorized six feet. Here is a man who comes, prays, and hopes in violation of all precedent—an awful thing in the sight of the ancient Rabbis, and indeed of committee men of all ages, but a grand thing in the sight of Christ. We consider:—

I. The leper's prayer.

1. He drops his old formula—the recognized and time-honoured cry of lepers, "Unclean!"—and offers a prayer of his own. Who ever heard a leper speak like this before now? The first thing that Jesus Christ teaches us is to pray our own prayers. He gives us originality of utterance. He makes the heart speak in its own native accent. Sorrow in the presence of Jesus Christ abandons its platitudes and stereotype phrases.

2. It is the utterance of hope. Christ not only gives a tongue to sorrow, but also turns its sighs into trustful petitions. By a great law of compensation, where there are great suffering and sorrow there are generally a persistent purpose and a tenacious hope, which in the presence of Jesus Christ easily

glide into belief. There is no sorrow that has no hope when Jesus draws near; we are "without hope" only when we are "without God in the world."

3. It expresses faith in the power of Christ. It is a grand thing when a leper can believe in anything besides his own misery. Probably this man had only heard at a distance—owing to the disabilities of his loathsome disease—of Christ's deeds of power, and had never been near enough to Him to hear the tender tones of that voice which had melting pity in it, or to trace the lines of gentleness and grace in His loving countenance. Besides, men learn sooner to trace power than tenderness. The Red Sea and Sinai revealed God's power, but it took a millennium and a half longer for Calvary to reveal His love. The plea of the leper therefore is, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst." Did he accept the general belief that only God could heal the leper? Then what depth of meaning in this admission of Christ's power! But it is a daring challenge to the *will* of Christ. The leper had risen to the level of a mighty faith that with regard to Christ, at least, it was true that "where there was a will there was a way." This is a great crisis in our Lord's life; one of the supreme tests of His great ministry. Shall the faith of the leper be greater than Christ's power; or shall Christ's power be greater than His will or sympathy! The Saviour of men must not fail through lack of sympathy! Thus the poor leper by the daring challenge of an irresistible faith throws Christ back upon His resources. Brethren, I say, with profound reverence, that some men pray in such a daring fashion as to make it necessary for God to do His very best. "What wilt Thou do unto [or *for*] Thy great name?" has been their final and victorious appeal when every other has failed, from the days of Joshua until now. Human faith must in no instance surpass Divine provision.

4. It is a prayer in a sentence. Nought condenses utterance like sorrow, except it be sorrow transfigured into hope in the presence of Jesus Christ. Think of the prayer of the publican, the prayer of the thief on the cross; then think of this prayer. There are others in the Gospels equally terse and mighty. Do we pray after this fashion, or do we pray by the clock?

II. The Saviour's answer.

1. It is an answer in a touch. This is the last form in which the leper could have hoped for an answer. Contact with the

leper was next in defilement to contact with the dead. The weight of the law, the custom of the ages—with only two exceptions—and public opinion were all against this mode of answer. But as the prayer was in defiance of precedent, so was the response. What a thrill this touch must have sent through the leper! How long had he been without the touch of a human hand? Perhaps for years! What “virtue” of consolation and strength goes forth sometimes through the touch! Of all creatures on earth only man has a hand; the touch of that is pre-eminently human. Sometimes it rests upon the fevered brow so tenderly as if it were the touch of God, and in its gentle movements imparts such soothing as if the air were tremulous with the fanning of an angel’s wing. There is nothing more tender than the sympathetic touch of a human hand; hence Christ ever healed men by *touching* them, and thus sent a heart-throb into every miracle. What a theme would be THE GOSPEL OF THE HAND, both in its power and its tenderness!

2. It is an answer in a word. “I will.” This answer is briefer even than the petition. It is the echo of the prayer without the “if” that introduced it. That word “if” is echoless. God’s response is always the echo from heaven of the best part of our prayers on earth. The doubt of prayer dies in the utterance, only the faith of it lives in the answer.

3. The answer is emphasized by the immediate healing. It is a response which others may see, and the priest certify; and for which God shall be praised. The keynote of our Lord’s ministry is given here. He Who on this occasion healed that disease which was of all diseases the most terrible and tragic symbol of sin has from that day until now been delivering men from their sins and cleansing them from all defilement.

4. This answer was the pledge and promise of a still greater healing—was predictive of the Crucified Christ in His relation to the still more fearful leprosy of sin in all ages and in all lands. The burden of my text is that there are no incurables in the presence of Jesus Christ—none beyond His power to heal and to save. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” “And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” How many of us have sought and received this cleansing?

VII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON MAKING EXCUSES.

Read GEN. iii. 12 and 13 vv..

EXCUSES are very old, almost as old as sin, for man no sooner sinned than he began to excuse himself. Sin and excuses have ever since gone hand in hand. There is a great deal of Adam in little boys, and a good deal of Eve in little girls.

1. Look at *Adam's excuse*. How very ungallant it was of him to speak of Eve in this way! Yet I have known little boys quite as ungallant, when they have tried to put all their own blame on their little sisters. How Adam must have despised himself after this miserable pretence; and how little boys must often have looked with contempt upon themselves for having meanly tried to make scapegoats of those weaker than themselves! It were far better had they never made an excuse, for a false excuse more than doubles the sin, and is far more aggravating than the first wrong.

2. *Eve's excuse* is not a whit better. It is true that she was not mean enough to turn the blame back on her husband. She felt she was to be blamed more than Adam. But she put all the fault upon the serpent. How humiliating was her pretext! There she stood, made after the likeness of God, and yet she confessed that she had listened to the serpent rather than obeyed her God! I have heard little girls, too, give very humiliating excuses, such as "I have a quick temper;" "I can't help it, and there's an end of it." *No, that is not an end of it.*

Notice that the excuses of both Adam and Eve were largely untrue. You would think that they had no will of their own; and yet if Eve had questioned Adam's right to make his own choice, and the serpent had suggested that Eve had no self-control, both would have indignantly resented the insult.

We read in Luke xiv. 18: "They all with one consent began to make excuse." "*Began!*" There is here a quiet suggestion that they were a long time before they finished.

Now, bad as excuses are, they show that people are ashamed of doing wrong, and there is hope of every-one who blushes at the thought of wrong doing. The *Tempter* was not ashamed, hence there was no hope concerning him. But if we are ashamed, how much better it is to confess our faults. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Each of you can pray, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner;" and if you thus pray earnestly, the Lord *will* forgive, will be your Lord and your Guide even unto death, and your everlasting portion.

VIII.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED—WHO WILL ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY?

"What is that to us? see thou to that. . . . And they crucified Him."
—MATT. xxvii. 4 and 35.

CHRIST crucified—who will accept the responsibility? That is my theme. At first the conspiracy that found its consummation in the death of Christ brought together men of different types and of conflicting sympathies and interests. As we read the preceding narrative we find suddenly a simultaneous and ominous movement of opposite factions. The chief priests, scribes, and (according to John) Pharisees "*assembled together* and consulted, that they might take Jesus by subtilty and kill Him." The event which hastened this step was the cleansing of the Temple, and the public exposure of the ignorance of the scribes and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In all ages the cleansing of the Temple has generally led to crucifixion. Thus party antagonism among the leading schools in Jerusalem was now forgotten, and Pharisees and Sadducees, two hostile factions, "gathered a council" and "assembled together and consulted." No sooner was this done than another appeared upon the scene. Judas made simple what otherwise was a difficult task. They did not appear to be afraid of the people any longer. There was the broad fact that one of Christ's disciples—one of those who knew Him best, who had entered into the secrets and confidences of His life, and who were most familiar with His motives—was prepared to betray Him. That obscure disciple by this one act secured gratifying prominence in being placed at the head of a "great multitude with swords and staves." But the Sanhedrim must have a share in the transaction. The dignity of each member must be consulted; he must be allowed an opportunity of asserting his importance by having a voice in the matter. Then due deference must be paid to the Roman power and its representative in Jerusalem; thus "they bound Jesus and carried Him away and delivered Him to Pilate." Pilate accepted this as his lawful right; but,

mindful of the difficulties which were inseparably connected with the honour, and bethinking himself of the strained relationship between Herod and himself, he accepted it as a fitting opportunity to bandy compliments all round, and to heal all sorenesses; and thus, "as soon as he knew that Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod." Herod, in turn, was gratified with the graceful compliment, and when he saw Jesus he questioned Him in many words; "but He answered him nothing." Herod, mocking Him, "sent Him back to Pilate." "And the same day," adds the Evangelist, significantly, "Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves." This was in harmony with all that had preceded and all that followed in this impious transaction. Jesus was put to death by a combination of opposite and hostile forces. The Pharisees and Sadducees were brought together, Judas and the chief priests became united in unholy alliance, and Pilate and Herod joined hands over innocent blood.

So far as the case has been stated, one would think that, when all was over, the difficulty in the way of permanent union would be the apportionment of the relative merit of each in the combined effort of securing so happy a consummation. But is it so? *Who will accept the responsibility?*

Probably Judas. It was he who had made the crucifixion possible by his betrayal, and who led the armed throng to the place where they might find Jesus and take Him captive. He surely will assert his claim to pre-eminence. Listen! "Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned—*rejoiced greatly?*—oh, no!—" *repented* himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that." Having uttered these words of anguish to the chief priests, probably as they led the procession on the way back from Herod's court to Pilate's, and having suffered the coarse, ungrateful, and cruel rebuff that drove him to desperation, he, with hell in his heart and the price of innocent blood in his hand, rushed headlong through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, and up the fifteen steps where the Levites were wont to sing the Songs of Degrees. There, because able to proceed no farther, he stood madly at the Gate Nicanor—where penitents had for ages received those words

28 *Who will Accept the Responsibility?*

of forgiveness and blessing which he should never hear ; and where, thirty-three years before, Mary had presented the Holy Child Whose blood he had betrayed—and, with the agonizing despair and bitter vengeance of a lost man, threw the thirty accursed coins over the Court of the Priests, over its altar of burnt offering and its brazen laver, over the steps of the priests ; they went hissing through the air, and rang the knell of doom upon the marble floor of the Holy Place. After this act of burning insanity he rushed down the valley of Hinnom, climbed its slippery slopes on the other side, and on the summit hanged himself—hanged himself probably with the girdle in which he had carried the price of blood ; but the girdle that could not carry the price of betrayal could not bear the betrayer, and so it snapped, hurling its quivering burden over the rocky steeps, down, down into the valley of Gehenna—“to his own place.” *He* will not accept the responsibility ; he rushes despairingly from it :

“ Mad from life’s history,
Glad to death’s mystery
Swift to be hurled—
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world !”

“ Ah !” says some one, “ that is not surprising. He had been a disciple. If nothing else would strangle him, memories of a sacred past would. But the chief priests and scribes will not be susceptible to any of these enervating influences.” Let us see. Will they accept the responsibility? Hearken to their reply when Judas shrieked the words, “ I have betrayed innocent blood !” —“ What is that to us? See thou to that.” They shrink desperately from any share in the responsibility of this deed of blood. They rid themselves of the betrayer by their supercilious sneer ; but they cannot rid themselves of the price of blood. Judas has made that impossible. He has gone, but the thirty pieces of silver are still in the Holy Place! The priests or Levites cannot offer sacrifice, wash their hands in the laver in their court, and, above all, they cannot burn incense, place the shewbread upon the table, or light the lamps of the Lord without seeing those cursed coins everywhere. They are beneath the table of shewbread, round the altar of incense and the golden candlestick, yea, resting against the very veil that divides off the Holy of Holies—everywhere, as eloquent witnesses of the deed of blood. What priest shall touch these accursed coins? Who

shall pick them up? As they look at them they see on these silver shekels on the one side an olive branch, symbolizing peace, and on the other a censer, signifying prayer and praise, and words that now sound like cruel irony, "Jerusalem the Holy." Holy! when the pavement of its Holy Place is covered with coins, which, with all their symbolism, have ceased to be sacred, but are the price of innocent blood! When these coins are collected, how can they be used? The man who bore the bag and was a thief, who had never found difficulty in appropriating coins before, has failed with these. Can it be that the chief priests and scribes, who have a wondrous capacity in this direction, will also fail? Let the narrative speak: "The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood." The law demanded that the offering of money unlawfully gained should be restored to the giver, or devoted to public use. But the giver has gone. What shall be done with the money? Observe, even the chief priests call it "*the price of blood.*" The words "innocent blood" had gone forth from Judas. They had heard him shriek them in a wild frenzy, as the pallor of despair and death passed over his face. They now repeat, "Price of blood!" What will they do? Buy a graveyard—a cemetery—but note, "to bury *strangers* in." They had been taught to extend to the stranger hospitality on his journey, kind treatment in sickness, and honourable burial in death. They will fulfil the Law of Moses, and buy a cemetery for strangers with the price of blood! What shall they call it? The old name is "Potter's Field;" but they will call it by a more appropriate name now—"A place to bury strangers in." But public opinion will not accept the blasphemous misnomer. The multitude will echo and re-echo the word "blood." "Wherefore that field was called the field of blood unto this day." The chief priests and scribes may bury strangers in it if they wish; but they cannot bury their responsibility, their blood-guiltiness. The field of blood shall be the constant witness of an unburied, unforgotten sin.

But what of the Pharisees? More orthodox in creed and more pious in speech than the Sadducees, the priests, and scribes, they have done this deed with the conviction that they were performing service to God. They will accept the responsibility. Oh, nay! They are the first to shirk it! From the

time the plot was complete, from the moment the conspiracy was fairly on foot and likely to be carried out, we read no more in the Gospels about the Pharisees. They suddenly and finally, so far as the Gospels are concerned, disappear!

Surely Herod will not shrink! It was he that beheaded John, and thus deprived the world of its greatest man. The word "blood" may terrify others, but it will not terrify him. Besides, this Great Sufferer has treated him with silent scorn, and when he has been most patronizing in his questionings, has "answered him nothing." Did ever any one else treat him with such withering contempt before? Ah me! This dauntless One reminds Herod of another whom he had beheaded, but who had been rising from the dead ever since. Thus, though stung to the heart by the humiliating treatment he has received, and doing all he dare do in resenting it by mockingly arraying Jesus in a gorgeous robe, he will accept no share in the responsibility of His death, but will "send Him again to Pilate." Conscience makes a coward of *him*.

"Not so Pilate," replies some one. He had no memory to intimidate him as Herod had, and no religious compunction concerning blood like the chief priests and scribes. He was a Roman, who had freely shed blood, and, unlike Herod, had no misgiving about any of his victims rising again. Yet in the presence of this Prisoner *he* pauses. His hesitation is increased by the message from his wife: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." He knew, moreover, that "for envy they had delivered Him." The subsequent narrative is the record of a persistent struggle between conviction and policy, until at length, giving way to the fear of the people and seeking to shirk all responsibility, "he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." This speech is but the echo of what had already been uttered. "Innocent," said Judas; "Innocent," repeats Pilate: "Just person," said Pilate's wife; "Just person," echoed Pilate: "See thou to that!" shouted the chief priests and elders to the betrayer; "See ye to it!" now comes back to them like the echo of perdition from the lips of the Gentile judge. Even *he* will not accept the responsibility, but hurls back at the conspirators their own words; and as the final and most expressive protest which he could give, he washes his hands ere he delivers the Christ unto them, and says: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."

Who, then, will accept it? There is one man who surely will do so. He is the centurion who has presided over the execution. He had, doubtless, previously presided over many others; he and "they that were with him" had witnessed many agonizing deaths, and heard strange utterances at such times, and had remained unmoved; but now, when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done (or, according to Mark, "saw that He so cried out"), they feared greatly, saying, "Truly, this was the Son of God." Even the Roman centurion and guard protest, and shrink from all responsibility in this awful tragedy!

There are some, however, who *will* accept the responsibility. They are *the multitude*, who in a frenzy of excitement accept the awful issues from which their cowardly instigators shrink. It is the old and ever-recurring story. Leaders and rulers *incur* the responsibility, and the excited and misled throng *accept* it. The multitude exclaimed: "Release unto us Barabbas," *and they have had him ever since!* They also shouted concerning the Christ: "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," and fearfully was that prayer answered! This was one of the heaviest burdens that weighed upon the heart of Jesus as He checked the sympathy of the women, and exclaimed: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me; but weep for yourselves and for your children." The answer to the invocation of the maddened throng, following their wilful rejection of God and His Christ, came in that protracted siege of Jerusalem, which stands unparalleled in history for its horrors.

But did the others escape the responsibility from which they shrank? Judas, we know, hanged himself. Caiaphas was deposed soon after this. The house of Annas was destroyed in one brief generation by an angry mob, and his son scourged to the place of murder by the very children of those who now shouted "Crucify." Herod died in Spain in exile and dishonour. Pilate was soon stripped of the procuratorship, banished, and, according to Eusebius, when wearied with misfortunes, killed himself. One tradition states that, having ascended Mount Pilatus, he plunged into the dismal lake which occupied its summit; and even now, according to popular belief, "a form is often seen to emerge from the gloomy waters, and go through the action of one washing his hands; and when he does so, dark clouds of mist gather first round the bosom

32 *Who will Accept the Responsibility?*

of the Infernal Lake (such it has been styled of old), and then, wrapping the whole upper part of the mountain in darkness, thus presage a tempest or hurricane, which is sure to follow in a short space." All this is mere tradition, but underneath is the deep conviction that, when Pilate washed his hands more than eighteen hundred years ago, he did not wash away the blood-stains, but that they remain to-day to witness against him. He and all who took part in that transaction vainly strove to rid themselves of the responsibility of their deed.

This is an historical fact, but it is also typical of what has been going on in the world ever since. To-day, as in the days of His flesh, men crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame; they "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of Grace." Are our hands clean? We can pierce His side with the spear of scepticism; we can pay Him the mock homage of those who will call Him Master but not Saviour; yea, though our orthodoxy be undoubted, we can nail Him to the cross with even the five points of doctrine, or, like the disciples of old, we can go every one to his own while the world is crucifying Him. Oh, to stand near the cross like John and the women, bravely endure its reproach, and recognize in the Crucified One our Lord and our God! If we do this we shall enter into the certainty that the love of God triumphs over the wrath of man, and makes it praise Him most of all, in the cross; and that while the world has nothing but shame and confusion of face to draw from the cross, we shall exclaim with Paul: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "Who is he that condemneth? 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." The worst in man and the best in God have met in that cross. "See thou to that!" is the angry, cruel rebuff of every crucifier to his fellow as he looks into the face of that Crucified One. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" is the rapturous assurance of every penitent as he stands at the foot of His cross. Which shall it be with us? See to it that in your homes, in your offices, in your warehouses, in your shops, in your pulpits, everywhere and at all times, you are "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto *salvation* to every one that believeth."

IX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—“A LIVE COAL.”

“A live coal.”—ISA. vi. 6.

PERHAPS some of you children can tell me what a *live* coal is? Yes, that little girl is right; a *live* coal is “a red-hot coal.” In my text the seraph spoken of had a “live coal” in his hand. Now I cannot imitate that seraph, but I have at present a small piece of cold, or *dead*, coal in my hand. You can all see it. There it is. It is not very attractive in appearance; it is black, and not very comely. It is proverbially dirty. I cannot touch it without soiling my fingers. Altogether there is nothing very prepossessing about it. But if you place this with a number of similar pieces into a fireplace and kindle it, it will burn brilliantly and send forth warmth and bright cheerfulness. A fireplace filled with *dead* coals is a very uninteresting sight—you conceal it with a screen; but a grate full of *live* coals makes the home bright and cheerful on dark wintry nights. Thus all depends upon whether coal is on fire or not.

Now I want you to remember that this lump of coal *has been got from the depths of the earth*. It has been buried for many thousands of years. Men who profess to know a great deal about it tell us that long, long ago huge forests and gigantic shrubs and grasses grew beneath a burning sun, that in time these forests and huge growths were flooded and buried, and that as ages passed by they were covered more and more and pressed together by the weight above them, until they have been changed to large coal-fields. What a waste all this appeared to be! But in these later times, as the human race multiplied and commerce extended, so that all the forests of the world could not supply men with sufficient fuel, we have been led by God to dig deep for the coal which has been so long treasured up by Him for our use. Learned men also tell us that the heat of the sun as it shone on those primeval or ancient forests has been in a marvellous manner kept in the coal, although we cannot trace it by feeling, and that all that is required is to apply fire to it to call out the fire that is hidden—or asleep—within the dead coal. When that fire starts into life again the coal is in one sense “alive.”

Thus this dark uninteresting lump *will send forth a bright gleam if you only put fire to it*. Now I have often seen in back slums and alleys a dirty uninviting lump of a boy, who has, under more favourable circumstances, sent forth a deal of warmth and

brightness. Down deep there was a warmth that burst into a flame when he came within the warmth of a glowing love. Some kind word or genial smile or warm grip of the hand has kindled affection and sympathy within him, and we never knew until then how much of warmth he was capable of manifesting.

The coal, however, in burning only gives out the heat it caught long ago and has been keeping quiet ever since. *So you see that we are very dependent upon the past*; we have to go to very old storehouses for coal to cheer us in these cold countries on winter days and nights. God, too, has graciously ordained that coal shall be found in vast coal-fields just in those parts of the world where fires are needed most, and not, as a rule, where little or no fire is needed. How good and wise is He!

Again, this coal *can only be of blessing to us to the extent that it is burnt and consumed*. We like to see coal all on fire; yes, but remember that the lump of coal sacrifices itself in order to be a source of warmth and comfort to us. I wonder how many of us have learnt that lesson? How many a cold, selfish, uninteresting boy has been touched by the love of Christ, and his face has become aglow with love, and his life has been spent for the sake of others! If you learn of Jesus, you will learn to do all this for His sake. You will become a *live coal*—a cheerful and bright blessing to all.

Lastly. This lump of coal *has in it everything that is in the choicest diamond*, and a little more. I had intended borrowing a diamond ring before entering the pulpit this morning, but I forgot to do so. That is one of the differences between some of my people and myself; they have diamonds on their fingers, while all I have in my hand is a lump of coal. I am afraid that if I suggested to some gentleman present an exchange of this piece of coal for a diamond he would look rather black at me, and yet there is nothing in the diamond that is not in this coal. The parts of the diamond are differently arranged, and it has not some of the impurities to be found in coal; that is all the difference. The diamond is pure carbon—the coal is impure carbon; yet no one as yet has found out how to convert the coal into diamonds. Only God can do that. Thus, too, no one can make of a sinful man a pure saint but God. *He* can; and does this every day. Those who have been sinners of the deepest dye are changed by Him from glory to glory, until they are pure enough for Him to reckon them among His jewels and to place them in His crown.

X.

SERMON—QUARTUS A BROTHER.

“And Quartus a brother.”—ROM. xvi. 23.

THIS chapter is a postscript—or rather a series of postscripts—to the Epistle to the Romans. The Apostle does not seem to know how to bring his letter to a close. His loving sympathies sweep over all bounds. At the end of the fifteenth chapter he appears to close his message and utters the final word “Amen,” but still he feels that he has not said all that he desired to say, and he begins again and yet again before he succeeds in checking the further outflow of his thoughts and feelings.

The greater portion of this chapter is taken up with personal salutations to and from Christian believers. The word translated “greet” or “salute” in the Authorized Version occurs eighteen times in this chapter. This detail surprises us at first sight. Why should so much of an inspired Epistle be taken up by mere greetings and by the names of those who even at that time were but partially known, and of whom we are almost totally ignorant? But the more we consider the subject the more we are impressed with the fact that among the many things which our Lord restored from their lost condition were salutations. The sickly elaborateness and insincerity of Eastern greetings in the time of our Lord, and indeed to-day, are too well known to need description. Few things strike a European as being so hollow and meaningless as these.

Now *the Christian religion has from the outset vindicated the sacredness of salutations* by surrounding them with hallowed and thrilling associations. It was ushered in by an ancient Hebrew greeting, “Peace;” but on this occasion the word was chanted from the heavens by “a multitude of the heavenly host.” The word which had thus proceeded from angelic lips gathered round itself a sacredness and high significance which those who accepted the story of the incarnation could neither ignore nor overlook. Again, the Christ Himself took that word upon His lips in sending the seventy on their mission: “Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall return to you again” (Luke x. 5, 6). Thus did He lift the old worn-out salutation to the high level of an evangel and the exalted dignity of a beatitude. He breathed new life into

the shrivelled carcase of a hollow custom, and it became a living thing. Again, in His last address, which He gave to His disciples in the upper room before His cross and passion, He repeated the same word as His final benediction: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Again, when He rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, probably in the same upper room, "the doors being closed for fear of the Jews," the risen Lord repeated the salutation which He had already transfused with heavenly meaning: "Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you" (Luke xxiv. 36). Finally, the last act of the Christ ere He ascended to His heaven was to bless His disciples—a blessing which we feel assured contained the old familiar word "Peace." That word had ushered in His advent; it now signalized His departure. The epilogue must be worthy of the prologue. The last note of that harmonious life shall be like unto the first note of the angelic song that announced it: "*Peace—Peace.*" How otherwise could the life of the "*Prince of Peace*" begin or end?

Thus a salutation to a disciple of Christ, especially in the case of an apostle of Paul's insight and keen sensitiveness, signified something very sacred. The word with which the life of Christ began and ended was worthy of an honourable place in the beginning and ending of apostolic messages.

Further, *the enforced separation and, in many instances, isolation of the early Christians helped to impart to salutations the significance of benedictions.* This separation, by making necessary the writing of the Epistles, enriched the world to the end of time; it also helped to maintain the sacredness of Christian greetings. In such pathetic circumstances salutations could not degenerate into meaningless observances. These were the circumstances which brought specially to light the generous sympathies and the marvellous versatile qualities of the Apostle Paul. Among the most valuable portions of his Epistles, from a human standpoint, are the personal references which he makes to his companions, and to the faithful brethren and sisters whom he knew, and whose names he loved to record. We cannot read this chapter, for instance, without seeing what a large heart the Apostle possessed. Other chapters may better reveal his gigantic intellect, but this and kindred ones are those which show to us his gentle and loving spirit. He appears here as one who can

enter into the fullest sympathy with the thoughts and emotions, the joys and sorrows, of a wide circle of brethren and sisters, however obscure their lot and lowly their work. In this chapter he greets Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, male and female, alike. Except in the Son of Man, "never before nor since," as Dean Stanley somewhere says, "have the Jew and Gentile so completely met in one single person" as in Paul. Always with the same unique exception, Dean Stanley might have added that never did man and woman, rich and poor, cultured and uncultured, meet so completely as in the great Apostle of the Gentiles. His salutations quiver with *human* tenderness, sensitized by Christian love and Christian tribulation. The greetings called forth by the cruel persecutions and separations of those early days still live and throb with the pulsations of undying sympathy and love in Paul's Epistles.

In this chapter his love for his fellow-believers makes him anxious to enter into a detailed statement of the happy relations and feelings existing, not only between the two Churches in Corinth and Rome, separated far by sea and land, but also between himself and individual members of the Church in Rome, as well as of the kind greetings sent by those who were near him as he indited through Tertius his sublime Epistle. One can imagine Paul, all but blind and unable to write himself, dictating this letter and closing the fifteenth chapter with "Amen," and then exclaiming, "But I have forgotten to send them my love!" The Apostle would then proceed to send salutations to the good sisters and brothers in Rome, name by name; loving all, yet with a discriminating appreciation. I imagine Tertius looking significantly upon those around, as if to say, "What a wonderful memory, and what a large comprehensive heart!" Still the Apostle would go on. A smile of affectionate wonderment would then pass over the faces of those who were present, until at length they felt that they too loved those whom in some instances they had not even seen. Paul had said such good things of the Christians in Rome—"who have for my life laid down their own necks;" "who bestowed much labour on us," etc.—that it would be hard for those who heard him not to catch the flame, and love them as did the Apostle himself. Paul once more says "Amen." "Nay," exclaims Timothy, "give them my love." "And mine," says Lucius." After others have spoken, Tertius exclaims, "Let me send my love." Last of all Quartus meekly asks that his name

too may be added. Thus there was no chance of closing until these names and others of the little group who had gathered round Paul had been added to his own.

In the latter case he mentions the names of Timothy, his fellow-labourer; and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, his kinsmen. Tertius, who writes the Epistle, sends his own salutation. Then follow the names of Gaius, one probably well known to the Churches for his generous hospitality; Erastus, a man of high position and influence, the city treasurer; then occurs the name of Quartus without any sign of conscious transition in the narrative from a great name to an obscure and unknown one. This is the name with which Paul's series of greetings closes, and by which the Christians in Rome are led up to the final ascription of praise in which the Epistle culminates.

We know nothing of Quartus beyond what is stated in these words. It is evident that the members of the Church in Rome knew no more of him than we do. Commentators are, as a rule, satisfied with passing over the name in silence. Tradition, on the other hand—proceeding on the supposition that Quartus must have been an important man or Paul would not have added his name to the illustrious ones that preceded, or indeed given it a place in his Epistle—asserts that Quartus was one of the seventy. It is further stated that he became bishop of Berytus. Tradition, as a rule, secures good positions for those favourably mentioned, however incidentally, in the New Testament. There is nothing, however, to show that Quartus was ever promoted to a see, or that he was even presented with a living. He was a disciple,—nothing more.

Quartus appears before us as *a man who gains nothing from social antecedents or surroundings*. Mark gains prominence in the Scriptures through his mother; Rufus and Alexander, by being the sons of Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross; James by being the brother of our Lord; but Quartus enjoys no such advantage. He is as solitary as he is obscure. He appears to lack, too, the prominence which wealth or exceptional gifts or success bring with them. He was not even the firstborn of a family. There is an amount of sentiment and interest gathering round the first child which gradually vanishes as children multiply in a household. Fond parents well-nigh exhaust the list of heroes or heroines in giving a name to their firstborn. They are less ambitious with regard to the second,

and so on in geometrical progression. It was so with regard to Tertius, so called probably because he was the *third* child, and Quartus, who owed his name to the significant fact that he was *fourth*. His parents had lost all sentiment, and appear to have had neither the time nor the disposition to find him a name that had any poetry in it, and so they labelled him 4. It is humiliating to our manhood to be known only by a number. I say this with regard to Quartus, notwithstanding the prosaic custom of those days to count children as so many digits. Numerals cannot represent men. Hence it takes a great deal to reconcile a man to the thought of being treated as identical with K156 in a police force, or being called merely 22 at an hotel. It is a humiliation for a man like Quartus to pass through the world in the character of No. 4. If a man must be an ordinal, let him be *primus*—No. 1—but to be only No. 4!

But see how *Paul makes this prosaic arithmetical name breathe and live. Quartus, a brother.* This appeals to one of the deepest instincts in our nature. The history of the ages consists in a twofold struggle—man yearning for a consciousness alike of sonship and brotherhood. The Gospel meets the former by revealing God as our Father, in relation to Whom we have sinned and forfeited our filial right, but in regard to Whom we may yet be restored into the privilege of sonship and heirship. But next to the *filial* yearning is the *fraternal*. In all ages since Cain slew his brother man has been longing for the restoration of brotherhood. Various have been the attempts to secure this. How can the ideal become a reality? Nationalities, castes, classes, clubs, cliques, represent desperate attempts to establish brotherhoods. The Gospel, on the other hand, announces a twofold brotherhood. First, it emphasizes the fraternity of the race. “God hath made of one blood all nations to dwell on the face of the earth.” But beyond this brotherhood, which has been shattered by sin, it announces the possibility of another. Through trust in Christ and His atoning work we receive anew “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” This brings with it the spirit of brotherhood, since “One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren.” This fraternity admits of no distinction of nationality, condition, or sex:—“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no

male and female: for ye are all one *man* in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 27, 28, R.V.). Only in such a brotherhood can men like Quartus be heard. The tendency of Christianity in all ages has been to give a voice to men of his type, who can claim a hearing nowhere beyond its pale.

I can imagine these names being read to the little community of Christians in Rome. Those men and women would first of all listen to Paul's greetings. How surprised some were that the Apostle remembered them, and others wondered he had not said a little more about their value! At last the names of others who sent salutations were read. "Timothy" was greeted with many nods and smiles; "Lucius," etc., a nod or two; "Tertius," a nudge of satisfaction by a brother to his neighbour; "Quartus," a look of surprise, then the question, "Who is he?" "It's a *Roman* name," said an old brother, who had not quite forgotten his Roman pride, though he was a Christian. Then the words were read—"a brother." Ah, that was enough, and every heart responded to his salutation! Thus the unknown Quartus enriched the apostolic message and gladdened the hearts of the Christians in far distant Rome with his brotherly greeting from Corinth. What a wonderful tie was this brotherhood, uniting those who had never seen each other, and would never look into each other's faces this side of heaven! Who knows how much of blessing went forth from the heart of Quartus in that simple salutation! And who knows how urgently that Church in Rome needed it all!

To-day, as then, there is a ministry of love in which we may all engage—not least those of the type of Quartus, who are not great enough to gain any prominence among their fellows, but who have the grace to say a kind word at the right time. The greatest Apostle would to-day consider, as he did eighteen centuries ago, such a word, humbly and lovingly spoken in the name of Christ, worthy of a place in his Epistle. Brethren, such men as Quartus and Barnabas—the son of consolation—have a noble place to fill in the Church of Christ and among His honourable men and women. Shall not our Christianity express itself in our Christ-like disposition and gracious ministry? Let the mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, when reviled, reviled not again; and thus may the world learn that those who bear His name have shared His spirit since they have been at His feet and learnt of Him.

XI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—“THE FOWLS OF THE AIR.”

“Behold the fowls of the air,” etc.—MATT. vi. 26.

THE Lord Jesus was anxious that even the fowls of the air should not be overlooked. There is no danger of little boys or girls overlooking any pet fowl or bird which they own; but the fowls of the air, which are not owned by any one, often remain unnoticed. Especially is this the case in wintry days, when their songs are not heard, and when poor songless birds remain perched upon the trees in the biting east wind or nipping frost, having given up all search for food, since the snow everywhere lies thickly on the ground. Our Lord would have little children think even of those birds which have little about them to win notice, as well as those which have rich plumage and sweet songs wherewith to win our favour.

Now Jesus, in His teaching, calls attention only to two birds in particular. But I imagine some little child saying, “I should like to know the names of those birds. How beautiful they must be, and how sweet their song, for Jesus to pay them such honour!” No; He Who paid special attention to men and women who were neglected and despised by grander folk had an extra thoughtfulness for poor despised and neglected birds. 1. One bird specially mentioned by our Lord is the *raven*:—“Consider the ravens” (Luke xii. 24). One strange fact about the raven was that it was the only bird of its particular order which the law of Moses pronounced unclean. Yet Jesus would have us consider that poor despised bird, and teaches us that *God feeds* it. Again, there has been a very general and ancient belief that the older ravens are very neglectful of their young, and that Job (see chap. xxxviii. 41) and the Psalmist (see Psalm cxlvii. 9) refer to God’s tender care of the young ravens which are so cruelly neglected by their parents. Whatever may be said about that, we know that the ravens are not very charming birds. Like some people, whatever you do for them, all they can do is to *look very black* and *croak*. They are also great eaters, and have very voracious appetites. It takes a great deal to satisfy ravens. *Their* great danger is to die of hunger, since what would content other birds cannot satisfy them; yet “*God feedeth them.*” 2. Jesus speaks, too, of the *sparrow*. Now, the sparrows of Palestine, like ours, have nothing specially to recommend them—a grey coat and a shrill chirrup, that is all. *Their* danger consists chiefly in

being caught in nets and sold for food. The raven was not in danger of this because it was unclean. But the sparrows are sold by thousands in the East, and very cheaply. Our Lord exclaimed, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" (Matt. x. 29). And again, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?" You see that in the second case the fifth sparrow was thrown into the bargain. Even the seller did not reckon the odd bird; *but our Father does*,—"one of them" shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

Both the raven and the sparrow belong to an order of birds who have not the strength of the birds of prey, and who, on the other hand, have not the fixed food of other birds; yet "your heavenly Father feedeth them." Notice He is the *God* of the raven and the sparrow, but *your heavenly Father*. You have learnt of Jesus to call Him, "Our Father, Who art in heaven." Then you never need be anxious and doubt His care for you. How much dearer are you in His sight than the fowls!

XII.

SERMON—THE FORERUNNER AND HIS LORD.

I. JOHN'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING CHRIST.

"And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ," etc.—JOHN i. 19, 20, 26, 27.

OUR text divides itself. In it we find (1) a Great Question, and (2) a Great Answer.

I. *A Great Question.*—1. There was something in *the man* to whom the question was addressed that called it forth. Speaking generally, every man is an enigma. One of the credentials of our Lord's divinity was that "*He knew what was in man.*" Next to God, the greatest of all mysteries is man—*the genus homo*. We touch something very much akin to God when we touch man; one at first made in the image and after the likeness of God, and who even now everywhere bears strange traces of that exalted relationship. Man is fearfully and wonderfully made. It is not surprising that he asks great questions concerning himself, and that others are awakened to earnest inquiry at the sight of him. There are many men, however, who go through life without being challenged. They are men of the regulation type, who have not only as many eyes and ears as other people, but as many notions, and of precisely the same kind, as the average man. They never, by any chance, supply a martyr, or a hero. Society

can run them into any mould it pleases. What they lack in robustness they possess in adaptability. Thus the world deals gently with them, and allows them readily to pass the bar of public opinion without ever being cross-examined.

There are others whose strong and striking individuality is an intolerable annoyance to a slumbering, self-complacent community. They are the heroes, the reformers, and, if need be, the martyrs of the ages; men whose existence the world challenges at every turn. Their very cradles, like that of the fabled Hercules, are surrounded by serpents, demanding of them that they should justify their existence. Such a man was John. There was an individuality about the man which distinguished him from all others; hence he was ever put on his defence, was questioned and cross-examined. "Who art thou?" "What sayest thou of thyself?" "Why baptizeth thou, then?" There is no escape for such a man from the clutches of professional scrutineers and self-constituted classifiers.

The botanist in his rambles passes by hundreds of flowers without pausing to look at them. A momentary glance is enough. He has seen so many of the kind before. But now and then he sees a flower which excites his curiosity. He takes out his pocket lens, and with many a keen, scrutinizing gaze he asks: "What art thou? What sayest thou of thyself?"

This was the principle upon which these religious scientists came to John and asked, "Who art thou?" He did not belong to their schools, had not graduated in their universities, and had not been classified in their catalogue of men and of professions. He was a son of the desert, and had come upon them with the startling suddenness of one of Elijah's visits. He looked like one of that grand succession of men who were the glory of the nation's ancient history, but who had not been seen for the last four hundred years. Had the age of the prophets returned? Did God of a truth speak again by the mouth of inspired men after four centuries of sullen and wearisome silence? What of that strange voice that thrilled all who heard it? Did ever prophet speak like that man? Were not his utterances more scathing, more convincing, and more inspiring than even Elijah's messages? Yes—No—Yes. Even learned men were divided among themselves. They knew not how to estimate that man, or what to do with him. In what niche could he be placed? Such a man is an awkward one for classification. He is a class in himself. He stands alone, and cannot be bracketed with others.

2. There was something in *the times* that called forth this question. The great heart of mankind throbbed at this time with intense expectation. Look at the then *heathen world*. All religions and philosophies had alike ended in a query. The unknown God—the last deity of Athens whose altar Paul saw—was a huge note of interrogation ; nothing more. The world at this time asked questions as it never did before, and, perhaps, as it never has since. Humanity was in an intensely expectant, inquiring mood. There is nothing more infectious than inquiry. It is carried in the air and wafted in every breeze.

Look, again, at the *Jewish people* at this time. They had grown weary of the stereotyped platitudes of the Rabbis—platitudes which did not inspire the teacher and which certainly never satisfied the hearer. The ancient seers of Israel had degenerated into scribes, and the prophets had subsided into schoolmasters—honourable vocations enough in themselves, but poor substitutes for the diviner callings which had become obsolete. Men could not help contrasting those degenerate days with the days of the prophets, nor help asking, “What ! is this the consummation of all? Are all our inspiring prophecies, grand institutions, and impressive ceremonies to end in this miserable commonplace?” It was at this time that John came,—came from where the mightiest of God’s ancient prophets had been wont to come—the wild solitudes ; came with a face like that of a prophet, a voice like a trumpet-blast, and an eye like the eye of day ; came with a thrilling message upon his lips, every word of which quivered with living fire ; and so thousands exclaimed, “This is a prophet ! This is Elijah ! This is that prophet ! This is the Christ !”

There was not only freshness, but also a glow about John’s utterances which the people had never before felt. The Rabbis excelled in rigidity and frigidity of style ; they were the religious refrigerators of the age. We, too, have known some men who have been greatly gifted, but whose huge intellects were always on an Arctic expedition—somewhere in the region of the North Pole on a voyage of discovery. Their thoughts are given in a crystallized form, very precise, mathematically accurate ; but oh, so cold ! They would have excelled as Rabbis ; they would have taken the highest seats in the synagogue. There are others, like John, whose thoughts have caught fire, and are poured forth in speech like molten metal in a high state of fusion. Some one has given it as a characteristic of genius that it has the power

of setting itself aflame. One thing we know—the highest style of thought is the thought that glows. John's burned; "he was a burning and shining light." Some of the cool, calculating dispensers of platitudes, wearing broad phylacteries and bordered garments, looked very profound, and shook their narrow, bigoted heads ominously. Others, who could read human nature and the signs of the times a little better, exclaimed: "Any amount of head-shaking and frowning on your part will not account for this miracle of a man. While you shake your heads He shakes the multitudes." John's words to those religious dictators, too, were not of the flattering kind they were wont to receive. "Ye generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Who is the man who dares speak thus? They are puzzled and confused; they will give much for the discovery of this man's power, and still more for the discovery of his weakness. Perchance he may betray it in his answer. Hence, with mingled feelings and motives, they send messengers to ask him: "Who art thou?" It was but natural that the spirit of inquiry which his ministry awakened should first of all be exercised upon John himself.

II. *A Great Answer.*—The question asked was a most difficult one to answer. It is not a very hard task to give our estimate of other men—at least, judging from the facility with which most of us perform it—but every one who has the least delicacy of feeling left in him must know that one of the most difficult tasks which can be imposed upon us is to give a correct estimate of ourselves. This is one of the greatest tests which can be presented to any man, especially to a man of John's popularity. If there were any littleness in him, it would show itself now; and I am inclined to think that the scribes and Pharisees who sent him the test question well knew this. John had often summed up the characters of others with searching insight, noble daring, and consummate skill. What about his estimate of himself? It takes a still greater man to correct an exaggerated estimate of oneself. It is not every one who has the opportunity to do so, and to the great bulk of us that lack of opportunity is a mercy in disguise. It was not so in the case of John.

1. John answers *negatively*. How much of the energy and time of a teacher is taken up in the preliminary but important work of correcting false estimates, and in giving the emphatic negative to men's preconceived notions! "I am *not* the Christ," etc.

2. He answers in the affirmative. Negatives can only lead,

after all, as far as the threshold of truth; not a step farther. No true teacher ends with a negation. The human heart cannot be satisfied with it, not even with regard to an ordinary subject, much less the highest themes of Gospel preaching. Hence John closes with a direct and emphatic testimony.

a. Concerning himself. (i.) He speaks of himself as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." He claims no personality of his own. He is but the channel through which the thoughts and messages of Another are given—"a *voice*" only. A gentleman heard two distinguished ministers one Sunday. Recording his experience, he said: "In the morning I could not see the Master for the man; in the evening I could not see the man for the Master." That made *all* the difference. John was like the latter minister: he bade men "behold" his Lord.

(ii.) He bases this estimate upon a prophetic utterance. Isaiah only noticed the voice and the message it conveyed, and took no note of the person. John would not do otherwise.

b. Concerning Him for Whom he had been mistaken by those who esteemed him most. John does not stop with the question asked. He is not confined by its limitations. They had asked him who he was. He told them also who his Lord was. Some men shame us out of the smallness of our questions by the greatness of their answers. Every true preacher, like John, finds his way through every question to Christ.

There are three things said here about the Christ.

(i.) He is *near*.—"Among you." A great difficulty has been experienced in every age in attaining to a due appreciation of the near. The world has always valued the distant. Man considered "the heavens" with the Psalmist, hundreds of years before he considered "the lilies" with the Christ, just because the heavens were so far and the lilies so near. For the same reason botany is a very young science as compared with astronomy. The telescope was invented before the microscope, although the latter has been thrust before our eyes in every dewdrop. On the same principle, God has been supposed to be far away. It required an apostle to exclaim—and the exclamation came like a revelation to the Gentile world—"God is *not far* from any one of us." We all look too far away from God. Yet, the Lord Whom we can love and trust must be near. "Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth?" asked Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple. This was the representative cry of the human heart for an

incarnate God. Under the old dispensation God had been spoken of as "visiting" the earth. The Shechinah symbolized His glory and His presence, but would He "*dwell*" on earth yet more fully and gloriously? The incarnation gave the answer. The consummation of ancient revelation was "Emmanuel, God with us." One *among* us:—"There standeth One among you." Here John becomes a preacher of the Gospel.

(ii.) He *stands*. "There standeth One among you." Not one who hurries through as a passing stranger, but one who pauses at our very doors waiting to be invited in. In Holman Hunt's well-known picture, "The Light of the World," which represents Christ as standing patiently at the door, you can see no handle or latch by which the door may be opened from without. It can only be opened from within. All the Great Saviour can do—mysterious as it may seem—is to "stand" "and knock," and let His voice be heard.

(iii.) He is unrecognized. What a subject would be the unrecognized visits of Jesus Christ! Here were men spending their energies in trying to find out who John was, and all the while John's Master stood among them unrecognized. How pathetic those words of John the Evangelist were! "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." How striking the antithesis! And how true still! The world has been long in finding out even its natural resources—the treasures that lie ready for use in the bosom of the earth, or the subtle and invisible energy that throbs everywhere, and has for millenniums been straining at the leash ready to go on man's errands to the distant parts of the globe, waiting only for man to let it loose. When we remember this we wonder less that God and heaven—yea, Jesus Christ Himself—should be so near, and men know it not. Yet, what pitiful and culpable ignorance on our part! How much of our attention, alas! has been fixed on secondary and transitory objects, while the Great One from Whom are all things, by Whom are all things, and to Whom are all things, is allowed to pass through the land—ay, to stand on our very thresholds—as a wayfaring man and an unknown stranger? This is the saddest fact of time, and will become the most crushing condemnation of the Judgment Day.

This message, after all, was but preliminary to a greater. Yet in the fuller message the men would be reminded of this. On the morrow John said: "This is He of Whom I said"

(verse 29). “*This is He.*” It was a *saying* before ; it is a *personal presence* now—a *prediction* before, a *realized fact* now.

“One among you,” said John at first ; but “the next day,” as he saw Jesus coming to him, he exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.” The first announcement was indefinite—“One”—yet it was inspirational, and as such it awakened hope. It ushered in a fuller and more emphatic message—“Behold.” John made it impossible for them to ignore the Christ any longer. Every true preacher must be also a “seer,” as every true prophet was. It is our work to make it impossible for men to ignore the presence of Jesus Christ. My message to you is :—“There is One among you ; *He it is.*” Among you, touching your life at every point, and seeking to bless you in all your experiences. My task is a sacred one and full of responsibility, but it also brings far graver responsibility to your doors. Professor Huxley, in lecturing to his students, once related an incident connected with a visit of his to the Highlands of Scotland. Amid the solitudes of that wild country he one day picked up a moss-cup. He took out his pocket lens and looked at it. While he looked he heard some footsteps close by. They were the footsteps of a shepherd, who seemed to be intensely interested in the stranger. The professor asked him whether he would like to look at the moss-cup through the lens. He readily accepted the offer, and gazed eagerly. His eye opened wider and wider. His whole soul seemed to look out in wonderment. He looked at the professor and asked : “Can this be a moss-cup ?” Being assured that it was, he asked if he might look again. At length the lens and moss-cup were handed back to the professor, but the shepherd appeared transfixed. He was silent ; then shrugging his shoulders, heaved a deep sigh, and exclaimed : “Oh, sir ! I wish ye had never shown it me.” “Why ?” asked the professor in astonishment. “Because I do tread upon thousands of them every day of my life !” was the pathetic reply. We, too, bring our little lenses to bear upon Divine truths and human responsibilities ; the lenses, we know, are feeble in power, but yet they reveal enough to add greatly to your responsibility. Will it ever be that any one here shall say to me, “Oh, I wish you had never shown them me !” and when asked, “Why ?” will reply, “Because I have trodden under foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith I was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace ?” God forbid !

XIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON WHEELS.

“O wheel!”—EZEK. x. 13.

THIS was a very extraordinary piece of machinery that Ezekiel saw in a vision. He was filled with wonder, and as he looked on his astonishment was increased by a voice he heard exclaiming, “O wheel!” Now I cannot explain the vision which Ezekiel saw. I will only say that the appearance of wheels working within wheels was just the one to impress him with a sense of great mystery.

We read of wheels very early in history, and often see them represented on very ancient monuments. They are among those things which people used in early days, and which do not get out of fashion as the world grows older. Wheels are in greater demand to-day than ever they were. They are very important parts of all kinds of machinery, and are employed for various uses; in fact, we could not get on at all without them. If we look into any machine when at work, we are sure to see a wheel or two busily engaged. Well might we exclaim with surprise at its presence everywhere: “O wheel!” For instance, here is my watch. It consists mostly of wheels. The second hand, minute hand, and hour hand are all turned round by wheels, which by their united work tell us the exact time. Now why does your little baby brother like to have a watch? First, because he likes to hear it “tick, tick” as he puts it to his ear. There would be no ticking apart from a wheel which goes round and is stopped at every tick. The little baby wants you to open the watch, so that, like little Tod in that interesting book called “Helen’s Babies,” he may just “see the wh-e-e-e-ls go wound.” But I must not dwell upon the endless interest to children that is connected with wheels. There are, however, a few reasons why I think very highly of them, which I will mention.

1. The wheel, as a rule, *moves round one central bar of wood or iron*, which we call an axis, or axle. Around that strong bar the wheel is fitted by what is called a nave, in which the spokes which reach the outer circle are firmly fixed. The wheel turns steadily round this powerful bar. Now it teaches us a lesson in this respect. Our lives should have one strong principle, about which they should move just as the wheel does round its axle, and never turn aside in the least. We

have seen some people who have, for instance, such love for truth that they never depart from it. Everything they say and do moves round that love of truth. How beautiful are such lives!

I know there are some wheels which have not their axle in the centre. They are called eccentric wheels. They bob up and down in a very strange way. Yet the engineer turns them to some use, such as lifting up the valves that let off the steam. Now there are some boys and girls who have a strong principle, such as honesty, truthfulness, or sympathy; but this principle is rather awkwardly placed in them; it is not in the centre. We speak of them as being very good, but so eccentric. Well, we must make the best use of them. The all-important thing is that they should have a true heart; we will forgive the rest, and try to forget their peculiar ways.

· · 2. The wheel often *bears the burdens of others*, and thus helps the world to go on. This is true of many kinds of wheels; but I will only speak now of those which you see every day under all kinds of conveyances on railways and in our streets. How patiently they turn round and round, often along dirty roads, in order to carry the heavy burdens laid upon them! There is a conveyance used for training horses which we see sometimes, and in which the wheels have nothing to carry. Whenever I look at that, I seem to hear the wheels cry out: "Do let us carry something! we are ashamed to be trundled along the street like this, without any burden to bear; put any load upon us, and we shall be glad to do what we can, but do not let us go on in this silly fashion." I wish some people who never yet have carried a burden for another would just learn a lesson from those wheels, and not be satisfied until they have helped others to bear their heavy loads. I want you children to be, like the wheels, always ready to render a kind service to others: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ."

3. There is many a wheel that *is satisfied with working out of sight*. For instance, the wheels of the clock or watch go on doing their work although most attention is paid to the hands which they turn rather than to themselves. Occasionally a little wheel gets impatient of being out of sight and of never being noticed, so it snaps, and the whole machinery is stopped, and for a brief time it gets all the attention. Perhaps that was what it wanted. But the experiment is a dangerous one, because probably that little wheel will now be replaced by another

which will be less likely to snap. There are plenty of little people like that wheel—quite as small and quite as silly. If they cannot secure notice in their little circle in any other way, they will gain it by snapping, and by stopping the machinery if they can. There are many in the world who could learn a great deal from wheels that work patiently out of sight. They are willing to be *flywheels*, which everybody can see and admire; but not to be little wheels, which do their work unnoticed by anyone—*except by the Great Engineer, Who knows them well, and what important work they are doing.* There are others who are satisfied with the thought that this Divine Engineer is pleased with them because they do just the work He wishes them to do; and know that He is “no respecter of persons.”

4. The wheel *only asks of us a little oil to encourage it to go on.* The other day I was passing along the sea front, and I heard the wheels of a perambulator crying piteously for just two drops of oil; but the nursemaid was as deaf as a post, and did not hear them, and the poor wheels went on squeaking. There are some good, kind people who will do all they can for the sake of others; but occasionally they want a little oil by way of encouragement; a kind word or smile, that is all. Ah, they often get it from the Master! His smile encourages them to proceed; and, next to *His* approval, nothing gladdens their heart as much as a kind word from us. Shall we not give that word? Remember that in so doing we become like Jesus Himself, and that “kind words will never die!”

XIV.

SERMON—THE FORERUNNER AND HIS LORD.

2. THE TWOFOLD TESTIMONY CONCERNING JOHN.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”—JOHN i. 6-8.

“He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.”—JOHN v. 35.

WE will briefly dwell this morning upon the character of John the Baptist as summarized in the words of John the Beloved, and of our Lord Himself. These estimates—especially as given in the Authorized Version—are paradoxical in form: are they contradictory in sentiment? The fact that both are

recorded by the evangelist seems at the outset to intimate that he saw no contradiction in them. The Revised Version, too, largely diminishes the paradoxical aspect of these two statements. We notice—

I. *John's estimate* of his namesake, the Baptist. "There was *a man* sent from God," etc. We are at once impressed with the robustness of these words. The evangelist could think of no nobler name by which to call this heroic prophet of the wilderness. It does us good in this age of superficiality thus to be brought back to the sturdy simplicities of life. It is refreshing in days like these, when every scullery-maid talks about her lady friend, and every errand-boy speaks about the other young gentleman round the corner, to read these words concerning one of the greatest born of women—"There was a *man*." The Revised Version reads—"There came a man, sent from God." There is nothing said here of the birth save as an *advent*, and of the life save as a *mission*. The birth of John was the arrival of a man, and the Baptist was one of those great men whom God sends to the world in order to enrich it, and without whom it would be poor indeed. This conception of a divine mission into the world, which was also an enrichment of it, is in harmony with the teaching of the ancient Scriptures. Inspired men loved to think of God as taking care of the world and ever supplying its needs out of His infinite resources. He Who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth is also represented as ever sending "the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills," and as sending forth His Spirit and renewing the face of the earth. The words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," find their counterpart in the words, "My Father worketh hitherto." The record of God's creative fiat in the far distant past is supplemented by that of His ceaseless activities in giving and sending still. Thus, when John speaks of God as "sending" into the world, he is using a phrase familiar to everyone who has read the ancient Scriptures. He Who sent the springs was the One Who also sent His prophets and seers. Here is expressed the noblest conception of human life—a *divine mission*. Why do I say human? for "angel" only means one *sent*! Elijah spoke of God as the One before Whom he stood—stood ready for the word of command, so that he might go forth to do God's bidding. "Apostles," as the word shows, were men "sent forth." Our Lord Himself constantly uttered words like these—"My meat

is to do the will of Him that sent Me ;” “ As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.” Thus prophets, apostles, angels, yea the Son of God, have found the highest significance of their work in the fact that they were *sent*.

Now *the highest form* in which God has blessed the world throughout the ages has been in *the form of a man*. There always has appeared to be a divine economy in sending *men* into the world—men in the best and highest sense of the word, that in which Jeremiah uses it :—“ Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man.” A *male-child* is an abundant gift to the point of superfluity, as we are sometimes disposed to think ; but a *man-child* is a gift rare enough. Walk along our sea front. What caricatures of men you find ! See that lean, lank young man with pale yellow face, his hair parted in the middle, looking through his eye-glass into vacancy, as if vacancy had long ago looked into him and was now only claiming back its own ; that young man is without a single noble ambition to fire his spirit or an honourable work in which to engage, yet he puts on airs as if the eye of Europe was fixed upon him. At one time he was a *male-child*—a *man-child* never ! *Men* do not arrive in the world in battalions, but one by one ; great men once or twice in an age ; giants like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, John, Paul, once in a millennium. When therefore we read, “ There came *a man*, sent from God” (R.V.), we do not find in these words an anticlimax, as may at first appear, to the sublime words which precede them, and with which this Gospel opens ; but we begin a story that has in it the possibilities of an infinite ending. He Who sends *a man* may in the train of that gift send the *God-man*—Who will take not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.

We observe in the next place that the glory of John’s life consisted, not in the fact that he was the Light, but that he had to *bear witness of that Light*. The word translated “ Light” here signifies “ sunlight,” the light that is underived, the light as it comes from its source. John was *not* that Light ; but he came to bear witness of it. How can that which is not the light bear witness of it ? This is precisely what is taking place every day. Light is that which, while it reveals other things, is in itself invisible, and becomes visible only by being reflected by the objects which it reveals or illumines. I remember once watching the sun rise when I was a lad among the

hills of Wales. At first the grey light gradually diffused itself through the darkness, then a mellower tinge gave warmth and glow to the morning twilight ; at length, lo ! a mountain peak far nearer heaven than its companions was suddenly lit up and made to gleam through the gloom. I could not see the sun whose smile had transfigured that mountain summit. I was not tall enough. But my tall old friend, the mountain, signalled to my boyish heart that already he could see the sun, and that if I watched patiently I should see it by-and-by. I watched, and at length I saw the fringe of the halo that shades off the brightness of the eye of day ; then, as I heard a veteran once say, I saw his eyelash appearing above the range of hills, then a part of the eye, and more and more, until the lower eyelid rested upon the horizon and a flood of glory streamed o'er all the land, transforming everything it touched with the subtle beauty of the skies. Now not only the mountain peak, but every flower in its delicate blush or pallid beauty, every blade of grass with its uplifted finger, every dewdrop with its glistening eye, every crag with its deeply furrowed brow, and every stream with its gleaming bosom, bore witness of the light. Again I looked up, and the old mountain summit seemed to exclaim, "There, see for yourself!" This, I think, illustrates the words of the evangelist. The Baptist, like the lofty mountain peak, caught the Light ere as yet it had dawned upon the world, and as his face reflected the splendour of His rising he exclaimed, "There cometh One." At length the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings—the Light that lighteth every man coming into the world—and as its beams streamed upon the lowlands of the world, and touched with their warm life-giving glow those who for weary centuries had sat in darkness and the shadow of death, he who had hitherto said, "There cometh One," now consummated his mission in the one word "Behold!" by which he bade men look and see for themselves. Brethren, I know of no higher conception of human life than that we should bear witness of the Light and of the Truth. In this, man becomes most like his Lord, Who Himself exclaimed, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth."

II. *Our Lord's estimate* of the Baptist's character and work. "He was a burning and a shining light," etc. John had borne clear and emphatic testimony concerning his Lord. Now

the Christ bore witness concerning His forerunner. John had been cast into prison, and had outlived his popularity. The multitudes were now as inclined to under-estimate the prophet of the wilderness as they had been a little before to over-estimate him. They had swung like a pendulum from one extreme to the other. Our Lord vindicated him and reproved them. "He was a burning and a shining light." He was a lamp, and as such he shed only a derived or borrowed light, but a light nevertheless which lit up the surrounding darkness and *burned* as it shone. The figure "lamp" (R.V.) suggests not only the earthly receptacle of the light, but also the expenditure of wick and oil in every ray of light that is shed. Thus John was a *burning* as well as a shining light. This is true of every noble man. There are plenty of men ready to shine who are not prepared to burn; but it is a law of life that he who shines must burn. There is no light shed without consumption of energy and life. The Christ Himself when in the flesh was consumed with the zeal of God's house. It is a platitude, with regard to our bodies, that every vigorous movement is made at the cost of expenditure of heat. It is so in a higher sense. No man sheds a light into the heart of his fellow without impoverishment of nerve and tissue. This applied with special force to John the Baptist. His heart was aflame with a great purpose. He was not a man of phlegmatic temperament, who could not be moved by anything short of an earthquake. He was a man of intense enthusiasm, and therefore a source of searching light; he burned, and therefore shone. In nature light, as a rule, is but fire etherealized; it always seems to be so in the spiritual realm, and pre-eminently in the case of John. "He was a *burning* and a *shining* light." Every ray of light he shed into the surrounding darkness was at a terrible expenditure. He was fast consuming energy and life. Yet men but little realized this. His ministry was to them a pleasant song. They were entertained by his oratory, and charmed in many instances by his manly outspokenness and scathing satire. His utterances were inspiriting, and were a welcome break upon the monotonous platitudes of the Rabbis. But beyond this the ministry of John was to a large number of people meaningless. They danced in the light which he shed—danced as men did in the glare of a lamp or torch procession—but little realized what priceless energies were being consumed every moment to supply the light for their merriment. This was the charge which Christ brought against

the men who had not profited by the ministry of His great forerunner. It is similar to that which God brought against Israel in the days of Ezekiel:—"Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them" (Ezek. xxxiii. 32, 33). This is the burden of the ages. Men of God burn by inches to send forth light into a dark world; and as the result, even in cases when their ministries are generally approved, the approval is too often but the empty applause of a host of patronizers, who are kind enough to acknowledge that they have been pleased and gratified. Away with such hollow compliments! Servants of Christ live to greater purpose and at too high an expenditure of resources to be satisfied with mere plaudits from those who have failed to benefit by their ministry. "We live," said the Apostle, "if ye stand fast in the Lord." The Christian minister lives to the extent that his ministry works a mighty reformation in the hearts and lives of men. That result is worth living for; nothing else is. The Rev. Wade Robinson, late of this town, on going to his study one evening, lit one of two candles. During the night it was consumed. The following morning he entered his study; nothing remained of the candle which had been lit save a little dust in the socket. But that one which had remained unlit lay there as placid and as cold as ever. Mr. Robinson paused and asked himself which of the two candles he would rather be. This was his answer; and nobly did he emphasize it in his brief but brilliant life—

"Better, I said, to live and waste in living,
Than live in useless sleep;
Who gives to others what is worth the giving
Cannot both give and keep."

How do *we* stand in this respect? Has the light of God through manifold ministries been all lost upon us? Are we still sitting in darkness, receiving no light, and therefore reflecting none? Or has "God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"? Lord, in Thy Light may we all see light and walk in it!

XV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—NOAH'S ARK.

“Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.”
—GEN. vi. 22.

EVERY child here this morning has often heard of Noah's ark. Indeed, it is difficult to enter any nursery without seeing some imitation of it, and of the various animals which it contained. Some of you have spent many happy hours in taking the different creatures out of your toy ark, and in placing them on the nursery table, which you suppose for the time being to be the dry land after the Flood has subsided.

But when we read the account in the sixth and seventh chapters of Genesis, we begin to realize what an enormous ark that was which Noah built—larger probably than any vessel which has ever been constructed excepting the Great Eastern steamship. We are all filled with wonder at such a vessel having been built so early in the world's history.

As we read the story more carefully, however, there is something in it that surprises us even more than the size of the ark, and that is the greatness of Noah's patience and faith. He and his sons were probably one hundred years building the ark, for people lived to a grand old age in those days. Now I can imagine that some people said, when Noah began to build the ark, “Have you heard the last news? Noah says that there is a big flood coming that will drown us all for our sins, so he is beginning to make an ark on a very big scale. Poor Noah! he was a very decent preacher, but he will be a poor hand at ship-carpentering. The ark he builds will not hold together till he finishes it.” Then the laugh would go the round of mockers, “Aha! aha!” Others said nothing; they were afraid that there was too much truth in what Noah had told them. There was no doubt, they thought, that he lived very near to God, and perhaps God had really told him all about the Deluge that He would send. But as time passed by, and nothing seemed to interfere with the usual course of the seasons, they began to think that poor Noah was sadly mistaken. Meanwhile he and his sons were busily engaged in constructing the ark, and people in passing by would sneer at the old man and his sons, and say, “Why don't you build the ship somewhere near the sea? you don't expect the tide to come up all this way for your special benefit, do you?” or, “Is the ship almost ready? Who is going to be the captain?” Noah answered nothing, except that

every blow of the hammer told them that the Deluge was so much nearer to them than ever it had been before. Oh, how eloquent was every knock that they heard in the early morning before some of them were out of their beds! Yet they said, "Poor Noah! he is up very early; we wish he didn't disturb other people who want to sleep; but, there! he means no harm; he is right enough at heart; he is only weak here" (pointing to their heads); "he is a man of one idea. That craze will ruin him; he has sunk almost everything he has in that ship of his. He is buying timber and pitch far and near; he can't continue much longer." I am afraid, too, that naughty boys and girls, for want of better teaching, would sneer at the old man and his sons, and call the ark "Noah's Folly."

But there were other people of whom I have sometimes thought. I remember that when I was a child I was asked who Noah's carpenters were. I searched the Bible in vain for their names. And yet, I believe, with those who have gone very carefully into the matter, that Noah and his sons had many helpers in building the ark. But these were paid for their trouble. I can imagine their being asked, "Where do you work now?" They would answer, "For Noah." "What! on the ark?" "Yes, on the ark. I do not believe in the craze, you know; but then I earn bread and cheese for my wife and family, and that is all I care about." So things continued for many years. Many were born and many died meanwhile. When the ark was finished, what sport the people made as they watched Noah taking the animals into it. Noah and his family went in and closed the door. At length, the fountains of the great deep were suddenly broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened; and our Lord tells us that the people "were eating and drinking . . . until Noe entered into the ark." Think of the terrible sorrow that came to all of them when too late! Think, too, of those who had helped even in building the ark, and yet were never saved by it, because they did not believe! I wonder whether any of us by giving our pence to the Missionary Society and other good institutions, have helped to build an ark by which others have been saved, and yet at last will be lost ourselves, because we have not trusted in Jesus Christ and His salvation. He will come again and call us to render an account for all our deeds. Blessed are those who will welcome His coming and be ready to receive Him!

XVI.

SERMON—THE BIRTH AND CORONATION OF OUR KING.

“Unto us a Child is born,” etc.—ISA. ix. 6.

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”—MATT. ii. 2.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a King, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.”—JOHN vi. 15.

“And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews!” etc.—JOHN xix. 2, 3.

OUR subject is, “The Birth and Coronation of our King.” In the four passages which I have read for my text we have—

I. The prophetic announcement of a Royal Birth.

II. The eager quest for the Infant King.

III. The premature proclamation of the King.

IV. The unintentional coronation of the King.

I. The prophetic announcement of a Royal Birth:—“Unto us a Child is born,” etc. These words of the prophet were germinal. They expanded in meaning as the ages moved. Yet, in the later centuries of the Old Dispensation, scribes swaddled them in parchments, and hid them in gloomy archives. Like the grains of corn which men put into the sarcophagi of the ancient Egyptian kings, and which remained there unproductive until a hand took them and sowed them again in the earth, and thus let the latent life that was in them spring forth and ripen unto harvest, so these words of Isaiah were in later days buried in the coffer of their synagogues, until the angels caught them up, and made them blossom into song over the fields of Bethlehem:—“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.”

Thus, as I have on a former occasion* endeavoured to show more fully than I can now do, the hope of the Jewish people centred, not in the visitation of angels, but in a *birth*. Again, “Son is given.” The birth was to be exceptional. The Child was to be pre-eminently a *Gift* from God, not a product or offspring of our race. In its brightest ages humanity failed to produce a Saviour, a King. But in the case of this Child “the government shall be upon His shoulders.” This was to be the birth of a *King*. The central object of the Jewish religion was a throne having an Invisible King seated upon it. God was the King of Israel, and human kings were accepted only as His visible representatives.

* “Sacred Themes and Famous Paintings,” pp. x.-xiii.

60 *The Birth and Coronation of Our King.*

But how far the real fell below the ideal! They therefore looked forward to One Who would fulfil their hopes in Himself; One Who would have a shoulder strong enough to sustain the weight of government, the burden of rule. Such an One must bear great names. In ancient days the name of a child was supposed to be descriptive of that child, or to have some relationship with the wearer, and not to be, as in our time, a mere badge. There are to-day some small men who own so many names that we are nauseated with the superfluity of their initials. But this Great One filled His names, albeit they were so complex and comprehensive. The first—"Wonderful"—supplies the keynote to all that follow. We are asked, "Can you explain these names?" Yes, to the extent that we can explain the Child Who bears them. "How do they harmonize?" They harmonize in the Child. In the old days of faith the hopes of Israel thus focussed in a birth. This people—and above all the mothers of the nation—expected most from cradles. They would have proved untrue to their grand history if they had not. They remembered what a basket of bulrushes had once contained on the banks of the Nile: who should tell what another cradle, though it be but a manger, might contain?

II. The eager quest for the Infant King. I have spoken of the predictive announcement by Jewish prophets, and the centuries of silence which followed the subsequent utterances of other prophets. The first break upon this solemn silence was the angels' song. The second was a strange question that came from the Gentile world. The Jewish prophet had announced, "Unto us *a Child* is born." Eight hundred years later Gentile sages challenged the announcement across the silent centuries with their thrilling enquiry, "Where is He that is born King?" Here we find the point of coincidence between Jewish and Gentile expectations. The hope of the world, however darkly and unsatisfactorily expressed, has been in a birth—in an incarnation. The birth of a King too. "Where is He that is born King?" asked these men, with passionate longing to know where they might find Him: "Tell us where, and there is no journey that we will not take, no difficulty that we will not surmount, no treasure that we will not lay at His feet." The question of the Magi was in broad outline a representative question. This has been the burden of all ages. Mankind long for a monarch—some one who has a royal nature, upon

The Birth and Coronation of Our King. 61

whose head they can place the crown, and at whose feet they can pay their tribute. These wise men sought to "worship" this King. Who shall limit rigidly the meaning of that word upon the lips of these mysterious pilgrims?

III. The premature proclamation of the King. Again, after the song of angels and the inquiry of the wise men, there was a prolonged, although in this instance an incomparably shorter, silence. At length our Lord emerged out of obscurity. Now we read a record which shows that a thought of His Kingship once more took possession of the hearts of men. But what were the circumstances? Our Lord had just performed the miracle of the loaves. Of all forms in which the miraculous power of Jesus Christ found expression this was *one* of the most popular, and to a certain class *the* most popular. Men were readily attracted by every manifestation of superhuman power; they longed to be startled by something wonderful; but excepting the miracles of healing and life-giving, never were the multitudes more charmed than by those wonderful exhibitions of ability to provide for them a meal free of charge. Those miracles exerted a strange fascination over a certain class of men who have not yet quite died out of the world, known as "the disciples of the loaves." On this occasion the miracle produced a profound impression upon them. They became very enthusiastic and intensely theological, and began at once devoutly to expound the prophecies. "Those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." There are species of men who never become rapturous, and in whom devout feelings are never awakened, except by the thought of a gratuitous meal; but who in prospect of that favour have a superfluity of unction, and are able to unravel all mysteries and explain all predictions. Whenever we come into contact with these dear pious persons, the petition involuntarily springs to our lips, "Good Lord, deliver us." These were the people who at the close of this miracle of the loaves sought to take Jesus by force and make Him King! Repelled by their cheap enthusiasm He departed again into a mountain Himself alone. What a welcome relief to Him when He turned His back upon the herd of grinning sycophants and looked honest nature once more in the face, and saw truth written, however ruggedly, upon the everlasting hills and the hoary mountains! But He was not so easily rid of this unholy

62 *The Birth and Coronation of Our King.*

tribe upon whom He had turned His back. Such people are cursed with a cruel persistency. Oh! the result is terrible when you try to get out of their way. They appear to be almost omnipresent. Seas will not separate them from you. On the following day they found Him on the other side of the lake, and with special unctuousness asked Him, "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" Jesus answered them and said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles" (not even from curiosity, but from selfishness), "but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." Thus did He with graphic speech expose the hideous sham, and express in withering words once and for ever His contempt of such a following. The Saviour of men is shocked and repelled; He will never have His Kingship based upon bread-making, and His throne upheld by a cheap loaf.

And this is only one phase of a more comprehensive truth. Jesus would not have His Royalty brought into the same plane as that of the Cæsars. He would not be a king or a ruler of the ordinary type. He would not be numbered as one among the many monarchs of the ages. His Kingdom was not of this world. The world had no honour to confer upon Him which He could accept. At the very outset of His public career He confronted this temptation and overcame it. From the mountain height the tempter, pointing to the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, said, "All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." His reply then, and to every subsequent suggestion which sought to set aside His loyalty to the Father, to frustrate the great plan of His life as the Redeemer of men, or to ignore the Cross that would at length constitute His true throne, was "Get thee behind Me, Satan!"

IV. The unintentional coronation of the King. After this unworthy and unsuccessful attempt to proclaim Christ as King, the thought died again into silence. Nicodemus, at the outset, had said, "Thou art the King of Israel." Later on, blind men caught the right idea when they exclaimed, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God perfected praise when, after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the children proclaimed within the Temple what the pilgrim throngs had only proclaimed on the way and without the gates, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Thus it is that, as we draw near the end of our Lord's recorded life, the conception of His kingship once more comes

The Birth and Coronation of Our King. 63

uppermost. But wherever He goes during the closing scenes of His life, we hear the word, sometimes in praise, sometimes in derision, "King"—"King." Pilate caught it, and asked, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Jesus, in harmony with His usual course not to repudiate a title which others, swayed by various motives and passions, ascribed to Him, immediately said, "My kingdom is not of this world," etc. Pilate answered, "Art thou a king, then?" A king without a sword and without soldiers to fight in his defence! He seemed, to the stern governor, who represented a kingdom of iron, to abdicate the essential functions of a king. Rome had subdued the world by her legions. This idea of kingship was a new one, just dawning upon the world. Yet this was the Kingship of the Christ. He had no sword, no soldier. He based His Kingship, not on force, but on the power of submission to the point of a perfect sacrifice. He had previously said—and there was a tone of triumph in the utterance—"I have power to lay down My life; I have power to take it up again." He based His Kingly claim upon that twofold power. Hence, as the end drew near, He moved with steadfastness toward the Cross as to the culmination of His hope. Hence, too, in the Gospel, the condensed narratives expand as we draw near the Cross. The life grows in meaning as we approach the close. In the Gospel we now find detail and emphasis which we have not previously traced. As we come near to Calvary the narrative assumes royal proportions, as if at length we are destined to see the King. Hence, when the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and put it upon His brow, this did not come as an unexpected event. Jesus bowed His head, and accepted it. This crown was the only one that the world could then weave for His acceptance. There is no doubt that everything was done by the rough soldiers of the Roman Guard in mockery and scorn. The crown of acanthine twigs was plaited and placed upon His brow; and the old scarlet war-cloak, with its purple laticlave, was thrown upon His shoulders in wanton mimicry of an imperial coronation. The words, "Hail, King of the Jews!" were repeated with a cruel sneer, and the superscription was written in contempt; but in all His Royalty was announced. How often does the jest of one generation become the solemn creed of all succeeding ones! and how often is scorn the nearest approach to conviction, the last effort of men who strive hopelessly against truth! We know

64 *The Birth and Coronation of Our King.*

that in this case the sneer of the Roman soldiery has become the solemn creed of succeeding generations. We exclaim, "Hail, King! Thy sacred brow bore the only crown which man could place there, and Thou couldst accept—a crown of thorns, symbol alike of our own sin and misery, and of Thy Royalty, Who hast become our King by becoming our Redeemer. Thou art our Prince and our Saviour—our Prince *because* our Saviour."

We have read the tradition concerning Helena, the mother of Constantine, finding the three crosses, the crown of thorns, the nails, and the superscription; and of her identifying the Cross of Christ by the miracles it wrought on the dying and the dead. We have also read of these relics being handed down from emperor to emperor as the choicest heirlooms, of the nails being placed as jewels in the crown of emperors, and of the supposed crown of thorns, after a chequered history, being sold for £54,000. This story reveals a degrading superstition, yet it emphasizes one all-important fact—that the world has changed its opinion of the Cross since Christ died upon it. It can no longer be an instrument of torture. Our Lord has transformed it into a thing of glory. What the soldiers affirmed in coarse jest the world growingly accepts in earnest. When He exclaimed, "I have power to lay down My life," etc., He added, "Therefore does My Father love Me because I lay down My life." Therefore do we, too, love Him. Heaven and earth, God and man, meet at the Cross as the focussing point of love. As yet we do not see all things put under our King, but we see Jesus for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour. Hitherto the world has chosen its Cæsars and Barabbases. Yet there have ever been manifest strange signs of a tendency toward universal sovereignty. This has a deeper significance than we are apt to think. *The Times* not long since said that the world is now looking for some *one* man to be a leader and guide. The world has been looking for a King in all ages, only that the quest becomes more intense as centuries speed by, and all this points to the Sovereignty of the Christ Who shall reign for ever and ever. All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him, Have we accepted Him as *our* Lord and *our* King? Oh, "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him!"

XVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—LITTLE FOXES.

“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes.”—SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 15.

IMAGINE yourselves living in the East, where there are vineyards walled around, and each having a watchtower within its enclosure. In spring-time the vines blossom along the numerous terraces, and the young grapes begin to form. There is nothing more beautiful and fragrant than a vineyard in the time of bloom. It is so full of promise ; and yet apart from great watchfulness the owner will be doomed to disappointment. Foxes abound in the neighbourhood, and they are very fond of grapes. The little foxes especially are very destructive, for they do not wait till the fruit is ripe, but destroy it while it is green and tender. They often come under cover of night, and, entering the vineyard stealthily, lie quietly among the leaves and spoil the fruit.

Thus, long before the grapes are ripe, the vines are in many instances stripped of their clusters, and even in other cases the bunches are seriously injured. We can, therefore, understand with what feelings the owner of the vineyard would say: “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards ; for our vineyards are in blossom” (R.V.). It is important that no time should be lost. There are many reasons why the *little* foxes should be caught. (1) Because, being little, they are apt to be overlooked, while they go on doing no end of mischief. (2) Because the little foxes become big ones if we do not kill them when young. (3) Because it is easier to catch them now than by-and-bye.

Now, although in one sense we have no vineyards in this country, yet in another sense we have very valuable ones. Our characters and lives are vineyards, of which we should take the greatest care. It is spring-time with all of you children. Your lives begin to blossom like the vines of which I have spoken, and in some cases the blossom is gradually giving way to the young tender grape. This is a charming time in life ; but, just as the vineyards are specially threatened in the spring, so are your characters now. There are foxes, mostly *little* ones, ready to come in and spoil the clusters just as they are beginning to form.

Let us just try to find out a few of these little foxes. We can already see one peep at us.

1. The little fox of *Disobedience*. There is a little lad here with blue eyes and golden curls ; laughter lurks in the corners of his mouth, and merriment twinkles in his eyes, and often leaps forth in a hearty shout ; but I can see one little fox spoiling the vine. Its name is *Disobedience*. It appears to be very little first of all ; we only know it is there by an impatient shrug of the shoulders, or perhaps a cross look, or the sharp answer "Wait a minute," or "Ask sister to do it," and last of all by a daring "No," in response to some loving request on the part of parent or teacher or guardian. The little fox is rapidly destroying the clusters of fruit which should make that life very beautiful. That lad grows, and the little fox, if not killed early, grows too. The boy becomes wilful and wayward. His face loses all its merry brightness, and his heart its genial warmth. He gradually becomes a sullen, self-willed man. The little fox is rapidly doing its work.

2. I think I can see another little fox, called *Selfishness*. It is busily engaged in spoiling a fine little fellow in one of our pews. That lad is strongly built, and usually stands erect. Every step he takes is firmly planted. He makes up his mind to win the prize at school, and he *does* win it. He is not easily discouraged. A big boy teases him. He says to himself : "Wait till I am a little bigger," and one bright day he gives that boy a sound thrashing. There is a great deal in this little lad that promises to make a man of him ; but there is one little fox that eats away at his character. That boy begins to get less sympathetic. He says that he has to fight his way, and he thinks that everybody else should do the same. He is fond of the song "Paddle your own canoe." He cannot see why he should help others ; nobody helps him. Everyone, he thinks, should look out for himself. Thus he grows up to be hard and selfish. He has forgotten the words he learnt in the Sunday-school or at his mother's knee, "Little children, love one another," or, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And thus a life that would otherwise be charming is gradually spoiled. At last all the bloom and beauty are gone.

3. There is another little fox busily at work. This time a bright, cheerful little girl is the victim. She is very clever at her lessons, and makes a very agreeable companion. She gets

into difficulties sometimes by being too lively. Then the little fox begins to spoil her character and to make her less truthful. First of all she tells only half the truth. Gradually there is less and less of truth and more and more of falsehood. Or it may be that she has to tell a thrilling story. She thinks it would be much better if she added just a little to it here, and touched it up a little there. Gradually that bright child loses her love for truth, and with it her good name, and by-and-bye no one will believe or trust her. That little fox is very insinuating in doing mischief, and is determined if possible to ruin her life. But we must pray that in this and the other cases to which I have referred these dangerous little creatures shall not be allowed to do their evil work, and we will exclaim: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

But we have not finished yet with this subject. There are other foxes, which I have not named, that lurk among the children. On a future occasion we must continue our search until we find them.

XVIII.

SERMON—THE STORY OF DELIVERANCE.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry," etc.—PSALM xl. 1-3.

OUR text describes in detail the mightiest change which can take place in the life of any man. It is a marvellous summary of the extremes of experience. The direst misery and the most ecstatic joy meet here. Yet the story is incomplete. Unlike our Lord in the parable of the prodigal son, the Psalmist does not give the tale of *declension* save in its final stage. He does not tell us how he got into the pit; he is satisfied with stating the fact, and then giving the details of his marvellous deliverance. An old divine in Wales once told his friend that he was about to publish a sixpenny pamphlet on a very important subject. "Indeed," replied his friend, "what may the subject be?" "How sin entered into the world," answered the divine. "Well," said his companion, "if I were you, I would make it a shilling pamphlet, and in the second part tell us *how to get sin out of the world.*" The story of the Fall is a poor tale, without the story of the Recovery. The Psalmist here had no time to dwell upon the long record of sin and folly that led to and culminated in such misery; he depicts in a few effective

touches the degradation and hopelessness of the condition into which sin had brought him, and then gives a graphic recital of his wonderful deliverance. The story divides itself into three sections :

I. It tells us of David's distress. To a better understanding of this it is important to notice the figure employed to describe David's condition. He is represented as being in "the horrible pit" (or the pit of tumult, or destruction, margin of R.V.) "and the miry clay." There can be no doubt that reference is made here to the pitcher-shaped cisterns, which in the east were dug and cemented in the earth ; but many of which, in process of time, became useless through age, and could no longer hold water. These damp receptacles—which only retained the mud which was deposited in them by the floods each rainy season, and thus often became the home of slimy reptiles—were not unfrequently used as dungeons, into which those men were cast of whom their fellows desired to rid themselves. This was a horrible and degrading punishment, and illustrated to the vivid imagination of the Psalmist the wretched condition into which sin had brought him. The shape of these subterranean dungeons, narrowing suddenly, as they did at the top, into a small opening which an ordinary slab might cover, rendered the conception of hopeless misery still more impressive. This is the figure by which David describes his sinful and helpless condition.

Now—

1. The first thing that David did in this condition was *to cry*. The first expression of urgent need is a cry. It is the language of the infant.

"An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."

This was a time when even he who was afterwards to become the Psalmist of Israel could not formulate his petitions or articulate his prayers, but could only *cry*, and let God interpret it. His prayer was a terribly *urgent* thing—a *cry*, a shriek that rent the air. It was that which condensed into itself the whole energy of David's soul.

2. He "*waited patiently* for the Lord." This completed David's conception of prayer. *The urgency of the cry* is here supplemented by *the patience of the waiting*. The litera

translation is: "Waiting, I waited." Urgency passes into persistency here. Precisely the same thought is expressed in Ps. v. 3:—"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up." The directing of the prayer must be followed by the looking up. Prayer is *active*—it is *a cry*. It is also *passive*—it is *waiting patiently*. To pray is *to be urgent*; to pray is *to be quiet*. Urgency becomes well nigh omnipotent when it has learnt patience. Brethren, Godward and manward, there is "everything for the man who can wait," when once he has cried in earnest.

But how many a man has cried and never waited for the answer, but has run away from it; and how many a man has expected some favour from the sky who has never urgently cried for it! Prayer is the blending of these opposites—*crying*, as if every moment were an eternity; *waiting patiently*, as if eternity itself were but a moment.

II. Our text relates God's deliverance.

1. *He "inclined" unto him.* The story of Divine deliverance always begins with the narrative of Divine condescension. The stooping ever precedes the uplifting. The New Testament begins with the record of God coming down to man, it closes with the story of man ascending to God. The former is the condition of the latter. In every life redeemed by Him the same truth applies. God with the tenderness and love of motherhood stooped over us to hear and to lift up. That was the *beginning*. Who shall tell *the ending*!

2. *He heard David's cry.* Among the dark facts of life there are few things more tragic than unheard cries. What a book that would be which registered the unheard cries of London, or some other great city for one brief night! Yet no cry lifted up to God in penitence is unheard in heaven. The sympathy that stoops is quick to hear. David found it so; and all who look to David's God shall have a similar experience.

3. *He delivered him.* The inclining and the hearing led to the uplifting. The Lord's arm was not shortened that it could not save; it reached the very bottom of the pit, and lifted David out of it. Deliverance, too, came in the hour of hopelessness, and came from without. David possessed no power to ascend; he only sank deeper and deeper into the mire the more he struggled. The uplifting power was God's, and His alone. The experience of Jeremiah when cast into a dungeon where

“ there was no water, but mire ” into which he sank, and from which he could only be brought out by others (Jer. xxxviii. 6-22), is a striking illustration of the hopelessness of our condition by sin, until God shall draw us out in response to our cry of misery and helplessness.

4. Having lifted him up, *He set him upon a rock.* The contrast here between the miry clay that had mocked his tread, and the rock that now sustained it, is complete. No sense of insecurity is more perplexing than the one, there can be nothing more re-assuring than the other. It is a fearful thing when a man realizes that for time and for eternity he has nothing upon which to stand; and there is nothing that can inspire his heart with courage like the conviction, that amid the changing character of this transient scene, his feet are firmly planted upon the Rock of Ages, God's unchangeable love, and His faithful Word.

5. *He established his goings*, or enabled him to take a firm step. Elsewhere (Ps. xviii. 36) David exclaims, “ Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, and my feet ” (Heb. *ankles*) “ have not slipped ” (R.V.). By the ceaseless and unavailing struggle in the miry clay and the dark, dank pit, David had lost the use of his limbs. The Lord, who had lifted him up, had also lifted up the hands which hanged down, and the palsied knees, and made straight paths for his feet, that that which was lame be not turned out of the way (or, *put out of joint*, margin R.V., Heb. xii. 12, 13); but rather be healed. He who taught Ephraim taught David also how to walk, taking him by his arms. He drew him with cords of a man (or, *leading-strings*), with bonds of love; but David, unlike Ephraim, knew Who it was that had healed him, and exulted in the assurance. His Lord had not only brought him up out of the mire of sin, but had also taught him to walk in newness of life. The feet have now found new strength for new service.

6. *He gave him gladness*—(i.) “ *A new song.* ” Now that David is taught how to walk he finds that he is also taught how to sing. The *walking* and the *singing* go together. That which God hath joined together let no man put asunder. “ Thy statutes have been my song in the days of my pilgrimage,” exclaimed the Psalmist (Ps. cxix. 54). Observe that by this deliverance David was shown how to turn old gifts to higher uses. The feet that had *struggled* in the mire are now *established* on the King's highway, and the voice that hitherto

could only *cry* can now *sing*. This song also is *new*. God gives nothing second-hand to the restored sinner. He gives the best robe, and a *new* song. I have a bird at home that has a song of its own, akin in tone to that of his fellows, but yet distinctly his. No other song is exactly like it. God gives a new song to every bird, that which shall never be another's, but shall die with the bird that owns it. Think you when He fills the hearts of His redeemed ones with the rapture of a new life that He fails to give to each a song that is fresh from His own heart and that shall become peculiarly his to whom it is given? Brethren, there are no duplicates of the song, which as God's redeemed ones we sing. David's song shall never be mistaken for another's, nor yours for that of any of your fellows.

(ii.) This song was *one of praise*. The highest type of music is that of praise, and the highest theme of praise is that of deliverance. How is it that the master musicians of the world must come to the grand old Book for their themes?—simply because there is no book that tells of deliverance, or breathes the spirit of praise, like this Book. You must come to "The Creation," "Israel in Egypt," "Elijah," "The Messiah," "The Redemption," and similar sacred subjects for your oratorios. Your grandest chorus must have "Hallelujah" throbbing in almost every bar. I shall never forget once hearing the "Hallelujah Chorus" sung in the Colston Hall, Bristol; I exclaimed, "Can the song in heaven be sublimer than this?" Ah me! I had not heard, nor have I yet, the full rapture of that song as sung by the redeemed ones of all ages, lands and climes, or I should not have asked that question. Only in proportion as we enter into the meaning of our *Redemption* and catch the inspiration of *praise* can our song even *faintly* represent theirs. David sang this "new song," "even praise unto our God." This song was his own, but how gloriously has it blended with the songs of God's saints in all ages! In heaven it shall still be his, but it shall also add fulness to the harmony of the greater song, in which every voice shall take its feeble part, and find its infinite counterpart.

III. The result of this deliverance. There is a sudden transition here from the past to the future tense. The past has an intimate bearing upon the future, and the individual on the many. No man's conversion is an isolated fact, producing no influence over other lives. No man lives unto himself. The

witnessing of this uplifting in David's life must exert a mighty influence over others.

1. *It will produce fear.* Fear is the first feeling awakened within sinful man by the presence of God. From the day of the Fall until now, when the Lord draws near guilty men hide themselves among the trees. Fear takes hold upon them. It is inevitably so. Every manifestation of God is a source of terror to the ungodly. But this fear need not be final, it may and should become the prelude to something nobler.

2. *It will at length inspire trust.* "Many" will conclude that, if God has delivered David out of his great sin, He can save them. Thus, elsewhere, the testimony of the Psalmist concerning his patient waiting and its reward is changed into a tender, loving exhortation that comes like a symphony, awakening trust and hope in the fearful hearts of others. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. xxxvii. 7). This is the Divine method; God makes prophets, psalmists, and apostles of His converts. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. *Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy* (Ps. cvii. 2). If the redeemed do not "say so" who can? Their very redemption is in itself an eloquent fact. Every conversion to God is a new argument for trusting in Him. Paul writes to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. *Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.*" (1 Tim. i. 15, 16.) Paul was forgiven not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of generations then unborn. No man is saved for his own sake merely. Redeemed men are called to be witnesses to others. Can you testify to this deliverance? Do you rejoice in God's salvation? The world shall know it. Your neighbours, at least, shall see, and many shall fear and trust in the Lord. Blessed is he whose fear has passed away, because perfect love has cast it out. "The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom," "but Love is the *end* of the commandments."

XIX.

SERMON FOR YOUNG AND OLD—THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

“Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions,” etc.—JOHN xiv. 1-3.

Let us consider: I. THE EXHORTATION. II. THE ANNOUNCEMENT. III. THE PROMISE.

I. *The Exhortation*: “Let not your heart be troubled.” It is given to *troubled* souls. With what fluency some of us can exhort sorrowing men! And yet there is no task in life which requires more grace and tact to perform it aright. What a wonderful way the Christ had of addressing the sorrowing! When He met the funeral outside the gate of Nain, and saw the suffering and widowed mother following the bier whereon was laid the body of her only son, He said unto her: “Weep not.” These words had been worn threadbare; they had been repeated a thousand times before; they had been among the stock phrases of comforters in houses of mourning and at funerals. But on His lips how differently they sounded! And the voice that said unto the living mother: “Weep not,” was the voice that said unto the dead son: “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise;” and the hand that touched the bier was the hand that gave back to the bereaved mother a living son. So here in our text, the voice that says unto the disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled,” adds: “In My Father's house are many mansions,” etc.

But observe that He Who comforts troubled hearts on this occasion is the great Sufferer of Whom we read, in the twenty-first verse of the preceding chapter, that “*He* was troubled in spirit,” and Who a very short time after this exclaimed to His disciples: “*My* soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt. xxv. 38). One of the paradoxes of the Gospel is that the “Man of Sorrows” alone can comfort sorrowing men, and that consolation can be born only of grief.

“Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” This is the true sequence of belief. Let it be distinctly understood that, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ, belief in God involves belief in Himself. Here the Master claims of the disciples a larger faith by reason of the faith which they already have. “Ye believe in God.” That is a great deal with which to begin. Belief in *God* is a great point gained toward the attainment of full and Christian faith. It carries so much with it. Abraham commenced with that. “He believed in the Lord;

and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. xv. 6). The disciples had hereunto attained; but now the Master demanded more of them. Brethren, if men believe in God, we claim their belief in Christ. We have in such faith something upon which to build. But when we meet the man who has learnt to believe nothing, and in nothing, except himself we hardly know what to tell him. There are no acknowledged data upon which to proceed. There is no depth of earth, in which the seed of truth may find root. The message of my text, therefore, is to men who have already learnt to believe. "Ye believe in God, believe in Him Who is the effulgence of His glory. Ye believe in the sun, believe in the light that streams from it, and let it gladden your heart."

II. *The Announcement*: "In My Father's house are many mansions." This comes to us like a break upon the previous reserve of revelation concerning this subject. In the Old Testament there is practically nothing said about heaven. The vision of the prophets did not extend beyond the Kingdom of God on earth. It was reserved for Christ to bring life and immortality to light by the Gospel.

Again, our Lord, in His earliest sayings, gives scarcely a hint concerning heaven. In the Sermon on the Mount He presents, in graphic outline, His ideal of true Christian character, and depicts the virtues and heroisms which are to be its glory and its great reward; but, excepting such a phrase as "They shall see God," there is scarcely an intimation which may be construed as referring to Heaven. In that sermon our Lord dwelt upon the Christian life on earth. Not until He spoke the words of our text did He speak about heaven, and then only to His disciples, who had been matured by long training and years of service for the reception of those intimations which were to be given them.

These words, too, derive a special significance from the circumstances connected with their utterance. Within an hour or so Jesus would cross the Kedron and enter His Gethsemane, and thus bring to a close for ever His public ministry among men. Henceforth He would not speak to the multitude as He had hitherto spoken. Even to His disciples He would *appear* only on special occasions. He now closes His Personal ministry with a tender farewell address, of which our text forms so prominent a part.

And these sentences were uttered by Him while He was

still the homeless One, without a place whereon to lay His head, and in an hired upper room in one of the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Jesus had startled men by His contrasts before now ; but, perhaps, never more agreeably than He startled His disciples on this occasion. The homeless Christ had a home in the heavens. He spoke now as the Heir of all things, as One Who had vast possessions yonder. He had previously alluded to the Great God as His Father ; He now talked of heaven as the Father's house. The thought of heaven, the dwelling-place of the Most High, might have filled us with an overpowering awe, had it not been for the tender name by which He has called it. How wonderfully does He bring the most awful of Divine things within the scope of our affections, and thus within the reach of our trust !

“Many mansions,” or, according to the margin, “*abiding places*,” places that will remain. The child asks you when you give him anything : “Can I have it *to keep* ?” It is the immortal spirit within him that speaks. Here our Lord satisfies this undying craving in man by speaking of *abiding places* in the heavens—not of tents, which you no sooner erect than you pull down again, giving back to the waste that spot which for a brief night you have associated with yourself as your hearth and home, but of *abiding places*, from which we shall “no more go out for ever.” Some time ago I revisited the village in which I was born. I looked for the chapel-house where as a child I spent many happy days. To my surprise, it was no longer there, but another house had been built on the same site. Then I turned to the garden where I had often played ; but, lo ! the greater part of it had been added to the adjoining graveyard. “Ah !” said I, “there is no permanent home on earth, and no garden in which sooner or later, graves are not dug ; but in my Father's house are many *abiding places*.”

“*Many*.”—Heaven is not only vast, but also diversified. It is not the small, uniform, narrow, exclusive place, only large enough to accommodate a select few—a dozen or so—which some good folks would have it be. When Infinite Love speaks of “many” it *means* many. It always reckons on a large scale. But you say God has His elect. Be it so. Yet that is no reason why they should not constitute a great multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues.

Possibly Jesus was at this time overlooking from this upper room the courts and chambers of God's house *on earth*. In the Temple there were different courts, all within hearing of the high priest's benediction; but, in addition, there were around these courts numerous chambers of different dimensions, in which the servants of God who were engaged in the service of the Temple, from the high priest to the humble porter who kept the gate, found an abode. The Saviour intimated that in the home above there would be a still richer provision. Although all His servants would be engaged in the ministry of the higher Temple, no one would be confined to a narrow space. Every one would possess as much of heaven as he could occupy. But it is ever thus. God gives to the full; only our capacity to receive limits the gift. Some one present complains because he has no more joy. Brother, make room for it, and you will get it. There is so little heaven on earth because we make so little space for it. God gives here as much of heaven as we can receive; He will give according to the same rule yonder.

"If it were not so I would have told you." This is a saying in parenthesis. Our Lord performed some of His greatest miracles and uttered some of His divinest words in parentheses. Among them we find this. It is one of those sayings which reveal to us, as it would seem incidentally, an important phase of our Lord's character. He would conceal nothing from them which they ought to know, however much of pain and sadness the utterance might cost Him. He had not spoken to them about heaven; but He would have told them if, in demanding their service, He had no *reward* to bestow. Thus His very silence was eloquent. We lose much by not learning from the silences of Jesus Christ. Had he ever deceived them? Had He called them to discipleship under false pretences? Had He not spoken much of the Cross and but little of the Crown. Had He not told the young Ruler a truth which was as hard for Himself to utter as it was for the rich youth to receive? Had He not said to His disciples at the last supper: "There is one of you who shall betray Me," though that saying had wrung His heart. Had He not told the over-confident Peter: "This night thou shalt deny Me thrice," though every word had pierced His very soul? And yet could it be possible He had been guilty all along of a misleading reserve. Nay! a thousand times, Nay!

“If I go.” *Go* is a cold word. It tells of parting. There is a sigh of desolation in it, like the moaning of the wintry wind as it sweeps through the leafless branches of the trees in the dead of night. It was a sound which filled the heart of the disciples with sorrow. They thought it the coldest word they had ever heard from Him. It seemed to hang like an icicle upon the lips of the Christ. Only the consciousness that He was going to prepare a place for them made the idea it conveyed bearable. “I go to *prepare*” are His exact words. To go, then, does not mean to forget. Christ’s exaltation is an exaltation to service. No trouble will be too great for Him in our interests. “Prepare.” God evermore is engaged in preparation. He did not place man on earth without having first prepared the earth for him, and as the ages move we are more and more impressed with *the extent* of the preparation. From this analogy we can understand better the meaning of the word “prepare” as applied to heaven. And by its aid, too, we can see better why our Lord should speak of “*abiding places*.” A home which takes so long in preparing cannot be a transient one. In the Divine economy there is always a sublime relation between the means and the end.

“*A place for you.*” Christ here speaks of heaven as a place. Where is it? We look up and say: “There.” Men in every age have pointed upward to heaven. Jesus Himself looked up when he looked towards heaven. All this is, to say the least, very natural. All the good in sunshine and in shower comes from that direction. It is not strange, therefore, if people will look above them for heaven. Dr. Dick, the astronomer, believed that, as there is a centre to every system, so there is a centre to *all* the systems, and that such centre is the capital of the universe and the home of God—the Father’s house. That, I suppose, would be an astronomer’s best conception of heaven. Jesus tells us that heaven is the place where He is, and where His redeemed ones will be.

III. *The Promise*: “If I go, I will come again,” etc.—This is the promise of a return, of a “come” which will succeed the “go.” “I will not leave you orphans,” exclaims Christ, in the same discourse; “I will come to you.” Nor will He leave them lonely or homeless: “I will receive you unto Myself.” This is our Lord’s conception of heaven.

1. His highest conception of *His own* heaven. Without His redeemed ones heaven would not be a heaven to Him.

He will be satisfied when He shall see of the travail of His soul—not before. He would not be separated from those for whom He died. To have them with Him was, at least, *an element* in the joy set before Him, and for which He “endured the Cross, despising the shame.” Heaven cannot be a home to Him if His kindred be not there.

2. This is His highest conception of *our* heaven—to be with Him. In the seventeenth chapter He prays: “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory,” etc. He offered this prayer for His disciples, who had seen Him as He appeared among men. But they had only seen His glory in part. There was far more to be revealed. The Apostles realized this. John commences his first Epistle thus: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life . . . declare we unto you.” Observe that he does not profess to declare *all* the Word of Life, but “*that of the Word of Life*” *which they had seen*, etc. John had previously spoken in his Gospel of having “beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” In these words the Apostle had struck off at a tangent into the infinite—the glory *as of* the Only Begotten. Thus he just indicated the unknown quantity, for he could not work out the equation while on earth. So now, when about a hundred years old, the aged man, who in earlier days had leaned upon the bosom of his incarnate Lord, and who of all the disciples knew most about Him, could only say: “*That of the Word of Life . . . which we have seen*”—so little had he seen of Him compared with what *He was*. As the dwellers in the Arctic regions see only a ball of fire just above the horizon for a brief period, and have no higher conception of the king of day, so John and the other Apostles had seen but dimly, through the mists of our Lord’s humanity, Him whom they would perceive and realize more fully in the glorious future.

“With Me.” Our Lord’s description of heaven is very comprehensive. John speaks of heaven as the land where “there will be no more death;” and those of us who have felt the nearness of that dread Presence because of the chill shadow which he has cast over us, as he snatched from us our best and loveliest ones, rejoice to think of heaven as the place where

death will never enter. Elsewhere, the same Apostle alludes to heaven as the world where there will be "no more sea;" and those of us who have dear ones across the seas, and who, at the time when we yearn most for their presence and fellowship realize that the mighty ocean heaves or the wild billows roll between them and ourselves, love to think of heaven as the place where there will be "no sea" to separate. John also writes of heaven as the land where there will be "no more night;" and those of us who know what it is to wait through the long weary hours for the lingering dawn, rejoice to learn that in the land of day there will be "no more night." These and other figures come to us with special force in different seasons of life, and we are grateful for them. Each presents to us that phase of bliss which is specially adapted to meet our peculiar sorrow. But this definition which Jesus gives includes every blessedness. Heaven is the place where He is. And, as we rise to the higher level of Christian experience, we shall find more consolation in this assurance than in any other.

There we "shall see Him as He is." Here we see through a glass darkly; there face to face. When the boy leaves home for school, among the last presents which his mother gives him is her own likeness, with the request that he shall often look at it, and think of her who will continue to love him, notwithstanding the distance that will soon separate them. The boy treasures it, and often, when far away from the home of his childhood, he looks at that likeness and sees his mother therein. What a safeguard against sorrow and temptation is that portrait! The boy sees more of love and tenderness in it than any one else could. But the time comes when he returns home, and the first to welcome him on the threshold is the very mother whose likeness he has so treasured. Where is the likeness now? Ah! that is forgotten, for he sees her face to face. There is no longer any need of the portrait. Our Saviour, too, has given us in His Word and in His Ordinances a likeness of Himself, which will be helpful and consoling to us for the period of separation which the word "go" covers; but when we "see His face" we shall forget all about the symbols and portraits in the vision of "Him as He is."

When that takes place whose joy will be the greater? His or ours? Tell me, you parents, when your children return home for their holidays and meet again beneath the parental roof, and gather around your table, which is the greater joy—

theirs or yours? Surely yours. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and the larger the heart the greater is its capacity for joy. So the joy of the Redeemer will be greater than that of the redeemed. His will be the joy of giving, and ours the joy of receiving. Hence ours will be but the echo of His. We are told that if two lutes fashioned alike and tuned in unison be placed in the same room, and one be struck into melody by a minstrel's hand, that the other, untouched, will reverberate the tones in gentle echoes. Brethren, when in the home above the heart of the great Saviour shall send forth the music of its love, our hearts shall be so attuned to the harmony of the Divine nature, that they will echo and re-echo to all eternity its varied cadences and rapturous strains; and so great will be the numbers of the redeemed that the vision of John shall be realized: "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: . . . And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

What are your prospects and mine regarding this matter? Our gracious Lord having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Our trust is in Him, and in His accomplished work. This was the one inspiring hope of Paul and of the early Christians. David Roland, of Bala, a quaint Welsh preacher, alluding once to Paul's having excelled in the Jews' religion above his fellows, spoke of him as owning extensive business premises, with an imposing frontage, which bore, in large, glowing letters: "Saul, circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee," etc.; but he added, that after Saul had met with Christ on the way to Damascus, he closed his famous premises, took down the glowing letters, and exclaimed: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count *all* things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law." May this be our confidence, and may it continue to be ours until this life shall close, and the Master bid us enter into His joy.

XX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—OTHER LITTLE FOXES.

“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes.”—SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 15.

IN our last address we promised to continue our search after little foxes which we had no opportunity of finding just then. We on that occasion found three :—1. *Disobedience*. 2. *Selfishness*. 3. *Untruthfulness*.

Now there are others quite as dangerous. I can see one already. This makes a *fourth*.

4. It is called *Indolence*. It is very near that little girl who does not like her lessons, and who shirks all the work she can. She is, perhaps, not very strong ; but is sometimes stronger than she thinks, and could do a great deal more than she does if she tried. But when she feels a little tired she immediately indulges herself, stays in bed late in the morning, and lounges about during the day. A little work goes a long way with her ; and, as she grows up, the less she does the less she will want to do, until at last she will persuade herself that she can do nothing. You have heard of the man who was lying lazily on the sofa, and earnestly wished that was hard work ; for, he said, he could do such a lot of it. I have seen little people who very early in life have wished there was no hard work for them to do. As they have grown older, the little fox of *Laziness* has gone on spoiling their promising life, and taking away from it all its beauty and strength. The sluggard's existence is a misery to everybody. Beware of that little fox *Indolence*, which goes by other names, or *aliases*, to escape detection, such as *Sluggishness*, or more often, *Laziness*. It is such an ugly little brute, and does not deserve to live !

5. I now just catch a glimpse of another little fox, called *Discontent*. This one is very near a little boy, a quiet little lad, who is not very clever, but who thinks very early in life that he is neglected, and that his excellences are overlooked. He imagines that he has not as good a chance as some others to succeed. His little companion's pencil, or book, or home, is better than his own, and so he goes on grumbling, but doing little else. Thus, in years to come, as he grows to be a man, he becomes envious of other people who get on, and thinks that everybody is against him, when it is everybody's duty to help him. He looks to all his relatives, and makes great claims upon

their sympathies. But nothing gives him satisfaction—no situation and no home. Like the hermit crab, though he has a decent shell of his own, he is always looking out for somebody else's shell—perhaps that of some rich uncle, who may soon die, but who never seems to die. Thus he goes on through life dissatisfied and miserable. His life has been ruined by the little fox *Discontent*.

But I must proceed, for I see his half-brother :—

6. A mischievous little fox called *Sulkiness*, which I detect on the opposite side of the gallery near a clever, brilliant, but haughty little fellow. The fox has already taught that little boy to sulk, and on one occasion in a vile temper to walk out of the nursery and slam the door after him, with a countenance that looked as dismal as a London fog, and a frown on his brow like a thundercloud, as black and as ancient as if it had lodged there since the days of the Deluge. Now this slamming of the door is called by one writer a "*wooden oath*;" and so it is, just as a girl's looking into a shop window and pretending to be charmed by a bonnet, instead of noticing a friend, is an acted "*lie*." If this small fox is allowed to work away undisturbed, things will go on from bad to worse. Even last week the little fellow got into a dreadful sulk over his dictation or his long division sum. So when he becomes a man he will fret and fume over every little difficulty or disappointment, and will stupidly try to have his revenge in sulking with everyone who will come near him. The result will be that everybody will despise him and keep at a distance from him.

But I can now see another very dangerous little fox :—

7. Its name is *Dishonesty*. That little fox is wondering where it can go. Surely there is no child here who will let *that* little creature approach him! And yet I think I can see a small boy at whom the fox is looking. That little fellow has on one or two occasions in school looked over the shoulder of his companion to see how he has done his sum. I am afraid, too, that he has copied, and had recourse to other dishonourable tricks. By-and-by, if he does not watch that fox very closely, he will become a dishonest man—perhaps at first take a shilling that is not his, and then more. Ah! if that little fox is not strangled, who can tell the result? Judas was first a thief, and then he betrayed his Lord and hanged himself.

Well, I can see other little foxes, such as *Conceit*, *Love of*

Pleasure, and many others ; but our time is now gone. There is One Who can guard us from them all, and help us to slay every evil passion and habit. Let us look to Him Who said, "Suffer little children to come unto Me ; for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

XXI.

SERMON—THE HANDS OF GOD.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."—HEB. x. 31.

"And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait : let us fall now into the hand of the LORD ; for His mercies are great : and let me not fall into the hand of man."—2 SAM. xxiv. 14.

"Into Thine hand I commit my spirit."—PSALM xxxi. 5.

THESE words in the order in which they have been read present to us the sequences of belief. They represent in brief outline the successive crises in the history of every godly life, as they do the different eras in the history of Divine Revelation. What strikes us, however, as anomalous, is the fact that the first stage of belief is given us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, whereas the last is given us in the Book of Psalms. But the more we look into these passages the more clearly we see that the former is reflective, whereas the latter is predictive, in spirit and expression. The Epistle to the Hebrews was doubtless written by one inspired by the Spirit of the Christ, and rejoicing in the fulness of the hope which He has given us ; nevertheless, as it was written to Jewish Christians, the presentation of Christian truth is therein largely based upon the Hebrew conception of God, according to the Revelation which He was pleased to give of Himself to His chosen people in ancient days. Hence this Epistle abounds with references to the nature, contents, and circumstances of that Revelation. The context of the first verse just read by us is a striking illustration of this. On the other hand, the last words of my text, taken from the thirty-first Psalm, are distinctly Messianic, and as such were honoured in that they were repeated by the Christ Himself on the Cross in the moments of His final triumph over the foe and peaceful surrender into His Father's hands, thus receiving upon the Messiah's lips the highest significance of which they were capable, but which was only faintly predicted in their first utterance by Israel's greatest Psalmist.

We therefore take the words of our text, in the order read,

as expressive of the Divine Order of Revelation, and of the development of a godly faith in the heart of the believer. We find here a threefold conception of THE HANDS OF GOD, and upon these rest the relative estimate of God Himself.

I. It is represented as "*a fearful thing* to fall into the hands of the living God." This is a conclusion primarily arrived at from the revelation given of God on Sinai. The phrase is Hebraistic in form as well as in spirit. It represents the impressive and august theology of Moses. It is a natural and faithful deduction from the Law. The Revelation which God gave of Himself on Sinai was that of *holiness* as an essential attribute of His nature, without which it was impossible to please Him. All the circumstances connected with the giving of the Law were intended to emphasize this central truth, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us. The Mount burned with fire, and the giving of the Law was associated with blackness, darkness, and tempest, the sound of trumpet and the voice of words—a voice so terrible that those who heard it entreated that they should hear it no more. The Law and the ceremonial details which were given to Moses, and by him delivered to the people, alike accentuated the fact that God was "terrible out of His holy places"—that He was "fearful in praises, doing wonders." The very mountain which He touched was thereby made sacred, so that no feet save the feet of those whom He summoned to His presence dared touch it with impunity. The righteous indignation of God as expressed toward the rebellious endorsed this awful conception of a just and jealous God. At the heart of the Jewish religion was this conviction: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Moreover, this was not a transient phase of truth. It is as true to-day as ever it was. This is the first conception which we all must have of our relationship to God, when once we realize His holiness and our sinfulness. Fear is almost as old as sin. The one came immediately in the train of the other. "I was afraid," said Adam when he had sinned; and that phrase expresses the feelings of every man when he has been brought face to face with his God's broken law. I reminded you last Sunday that guilty man from the days of Adam until now has been hiding from God, and that fear is essentially the first feeling that takes possession of him when he becomes conscious of his guilt. Now there is an element of promise in this fear.

It is the "*beginning* of wisdom." The "fear of the Lord" was prominently taught under the Old Dispensation, because God was teaching men *the first principles* of godliness. In the individual experience of His people this still applies. Every one of us has to go through the spirit of the Old Dispensation into that of the New, if ever we are to enter the New. The first conception we have of God when we repent is that He is "holy" and "cannot look upon sin." That begets within us a fear, and we tremble at the thought of God. "I remembered God," said Asaph, "and was troubled." That was when he thought that God's "mercy had clean gone for ever." Man is always troubled with the remembrance of God when he cannot see mercy in Him. Now His mercy is not the first thing we do see in God; hence the first effect produced by the Spirit of God in man is "trouble." Just as when the Spirit in the beginning "moved upon the face of the waters," and there was no longer the dead stillness of primeval chaos, but a commotion which, although it ushered in a new creation of light and order, was yet terrible in itself; so when the Spirit moves over the chaos of our benighted natures, which hitherto have been still in death, the first effect produced is a "troubling" of the depths of our being, and then the shining of a new light, which, while it predicts a new creation, at first only reveals the terribleness of the disorder, and extorts the cry of a new consciousness from the troubled heart of man: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

II. The second passage in our text speaks of falling into the hand of God as being *a safer and more desirable thing* than falling into the hand of man. This represents a transitional advance from fear to confidence. *Now* the hands of God do not appear so terrible as they first of all seemed to be. At least they are not *the* most terrible hands. Observe here the repeated use of the word "hand" as applied to God. The figure is pre-eminently human, the hand being one of the evidences of our nobility, and that which gives us supremacy over nature and the lower creatures of God's hand. It is the symbol of power and of rule. Man keeps all things in subjection with his hand. Now *the hand* is the figure applied in our text to God. Inspired writers were not afraid to humanize God inasmuch as man was above the creature, and to that extent bore a stronger resemblance to his God. *God has hands*—so this Book tells us. Of course this is a figure to express a great

truth; but let us not lose sight of the meaning of this figurative speech. What was the teaching of the Hebrew writers with regard to the hands of God? In Psalm xcv., verses 4 and 5, we read: "In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land." There the hand is the symbol of *creative force*. Does it symbolize anything else in the Scriptures? Hearken: "Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thine hand" (Ps. xlv. 2). There it is the symbol of *retributive justice*. Again: "Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. cxlv. 16). Also: "Let Thy hand help me" (Ps. cxix. 173), and "Thy right hand upholdeth me" (Ps. lxxiii. 8). There it symbolizes *sustaining power*. Again we read: "His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory" (Ps. xc. 1), and "Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people" (Ps. lxxvii. 15). There the hand and arm represent God's victorious and *redemptive energy*. Now when we come to the New Testament we have the figure of the hand repeated, and especially in connection with God's saving work. Read, for example, John x., verses 28 and 29: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Here the word symbolizes sheltering, or *preserving care*. These are but a few representative passages; but we have read enough to see how God's hands can gradually cease to be terrible in our sight. David realized this in part before the prophet Gad, but more fully in the Psalm from which we have taken the closing words of our text. We see the progressiveness of this confidence concerning God's hand, or hands, in the ninetieth Psalm: "In His hands are the deep places of the earth. . . . His hands formed the dry land. . . . We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." The hands in which are the deep places of the earth, and which formed the dry land, are no longer associated with the ancient terror to those who know that they are the sheep of "His hand." In other words, David and other saints, even in the hour of calamity, chose to fall into His hands, "for *His mercies are great.*" Thus, then, we trace the transition from a state of dread into a state none the less reverent, but more calm and trustful. Here was a choice given to David, who had

numbered his people when he ought to have trusted in God. He had fallen back upon numbers as a source of confidence, instead of trusting the God of his fathers. The prophet Gad came to him, and presented to him three terrible alternatives. This was the trilemma in which David's sin had placed him: "Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me." Famine for seven years; fleeing before his enemies for three months; or pestilence for three days! What was David's answer? "I am in a great strait: let us now fall into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man." David could not think that the hand that had framed the earth and sky, and which had so fearfully and wonderfully made him—the hand that had been so tenderly laid upon him in bygone days, lest he should wander too far to return, and that which had hitherto given him nourishment, and upheld, redeemed, and preserved him from every foe and danger—would now forsake or deal hardly with him! Nay, "Let us fall," exclaimed David, "into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great." That is the second step in the life of every godly man—when he learns that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, but that even the judgments of God are merciful.

III. The utterance of David, which expresses the highest act of devotion and of filial trust, and which found its full meaning on the lips of the dying but triumphant Christ: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The "God" of the preceding verses of my text is spoken of now as "Father." The spirit of adoption has vanquished the spirit of bondage. It is the filial heart that now speaks in its own calm and loving accents. This became gradually the motto of David's life, and finally of his dying hour. This is the confidence which God seeks to breathe into us. How often do we doubt Him when we ought to exult in the assurance of His love! In ancient days Zion said: "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." What was the answer? "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Then after the appeal to motherhood comes the appeal to the hand: "Behold, *I have graven thee upon*

the palms of My hands ; thy walls are continually before Me" (Isa. xlix. 14-16). In the forty-fourth chapter of the same prophecy, and the fifth verse, we read concerning those who were to become the Lord's : "One shall say, I am the Lord's ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord" (or probably, "mark on his hand, 'JEHOVAH'S'"). The devotees of ancient times wrote the names of their gods upon their hands. But observe how the order is inverted in the assurance which God gives to Zion. He graciously exclaims : "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." The tattoo marks in the flesh cannot be removed without disfigurement ; hence by this figure the portraiture is represented as being permanent. Whenever God opens His hands to satisfy the needs of His creatures, He must see Zion graven on the palms in indelible lines. Can *we* not say, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit," morning, noon, and night. To the godly man the tenderest hand in all creation is God's, and the touch of that hand is the most sympathetic. Hence this is his motto for life and for death. When at last he falls on sleep and says "Good-night" to the world, he also looks up and exclaims, "'Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit ;' I sleep in peace, until I shall awake and greet the morn ; then I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."

Brethren, it is not an accident, believe me, that Christ in suffering for us should have had His hands pierced. The ancient figure must find a new significance on His Cross. The hands that made the world, that shall triumph over every foe, that provide for the wants of every living thing, that have wrought our redemption, that guide us every step of the way and preserve us from all evil, are *pierced hands*, bearing still the marks of agony and of a sacrifice even unto death. There are no hands so gentle and tender as those which were nailed to that Cross. To-night, and here, those pierced hands knock at the door of many a heart, and He Who wore the crown of thorns exclaims in tenderest accents :—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." Open, O aged ones ; it may be the last offer :—

"Open, O happy young, ere yet the hand
Of Him that knocks, wearied at last, forbear ;
The patient foot its thankless quest refrain,
The wounded heart for evermore withdraw."

XXII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN.—LITTLE BOATS.

“And He spoke to His disciples that a little boat should wait on Him because of the crowd, lest they should throng Him.” (R.V.)—MARK iii. 9.

“But the other disciples came in a little boat (for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits off), dragging the net full of fishes.” (R.V.)—JOHN xxi. 8.

THESE are the two instances in the Revised Version of the New Testament in which we read about “*little* boats.” These were occasions on which small boats were specially required. Larger vessels would not have answered the same purpose. You have often watched from the Sea Front those great steamers which sometimes have come within sight as they have steered their course down the English Channel, and wondered to what distant part they had been chartered. Many of them, we know, have to traverse thousands of miles of water before they reach their destination. Again you have looked nearer the shore, and have seen a large number of small vessels—yachts, fishing craft, pleasure boats and others. If you think for a moment you will see that the small boats and the large ships have all their uses. You will also come to the conclusion—

I. That there are some things which large ships can do, and which little boats cannot accomplish.

1. *The large vessels can carry heavy cargoes*, whereas small boats can contain but very little. A ton weight would sink many of the little boats you see. But they are not therefore useless.

2. *The large ships can cross great seas and wide oceans*, and battle often with the wild hurricane and the great waves that sweep their decks, while little boats have to keep near the shore, especially when storms rage and the sea arouses itself into a fury. But you will also conclude—

II. There are other things which little boats can do, and which large ships cannot accomplish.

Little boats can come very near to the shore even when the water is shallow, so that you can step into them without much trouble, whereas in shallow water large ships strand long before you can reach them even if you are carried pick-a-pack. Again, if the captain or any of the crew of a large ship wanted to come ashore, there are many places which can only be approached by small craft. Hence it is that large ships carry little boats which are hoisted by sheath and pulley from davits,

or projecting beams on the sides or stern of the vessels. These small boats are often the means of saving the lives of those on board a ship, when it has struck a rock, or for some other reason has foundered. Thus, no large vessel is allowed to go to sea without having the necessary number of small boats. Notice that our Lord, in the first verse of our text, "spoke to His disciples that a *little* boat should wait on Him because of the crowd." He asked for a *little* boat because a larger boat could not come near enough for him to step into it. So that the Teacher and Saviour of men asked for a *little* boat to enable Him to preach the Gospel without being pressed by the throng. What an honour was conferred on that small vessel! In the second verse of our text we read that a *little boat* was also used by the disciples when they wanted to bring the draught of fishes to land. Observe that they "came in a little boat—for they were not far from the land." They would not have used a small vessel if they had been far from land, but being near the shore they could not very well use any other than a *little boat*.

Now, there are many little boats in our day which are of very great use. How often has the life-boat gone out into the darkness and the storm to rescue those who on board a large vessel are shooting rockets into the air as signals of distress to those on shore! Yet the life-boat is but comparatively a small vessel.

Again, when a ship comes up our Channel the captain soon looks anxiously out for some one who knows the reefs, quicksands and shallows better than he himself does. By-and-by, to the delight of all on board, a little boat appears in sight; that little boat brings the pilot for whom they have signalled, and who will steer the course of the ship safely to the right port.

Then again, you have often seen a tug-boat tow a large sailing vessel into harbour. At first sight what a fussy and precocious little thing the tug-boat appears to be, with its paddle-wheels going round at an enormous rate!—but it is doing very valuable service to that huge vessel, which, in narrower waters and near the shore, dares not spread its sails and cannot steer its course into port.

Now, there are little boats, as well as larger ships, on the sea of life that have their uses. The little boats are children, and the big ships are men and women—fathers and mothers. The little children cannot carry much weight of care and knowledge

like their parents, nor can they go out far into the sea of life and battle with its storms. Fathers and mothers have to do all that. But there are a thousand ways in which the little children can be helpful to the parents in the storms of life (how earnestly I hope that you will be !) and there are many ways in which they can be useful in the service of Jesus as bigger folks cannot be. The Saviour speaks often to-day as of old "that a *little boat* should wait on Him," and uses little children, as He did little boats, to help Him to do His great work. What an honour He confers upon children when He calls them into His service, when out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He perfects praise, and when He says to big important people, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"! Oh that the children's Saviour may use all of you in His service and for His praise!

XXIII.

SERMON—PAUL THE READY.

"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also."—ROM. i. 15.

"I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—ACTS xxi. 13.

My subject this morning is *Paul the Ready*. The verses which I have read emphasize a characteristic which is more or less manifest throughout the whole narrative of Paul's life. He was a man of great decision of character. In the capacity of persecutor "he breathed out threatenings" as a volcano in its wild play breathes out fire. When first of all the Lord met this furious persecutor and conquered him, his impetuous, vehement nature, anxious that not a moment should be lost in indecision, found expression, according to the Authorised Version, in the words, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This question, I know, is omitted in the Revised Version, yet the prompt enquiry which it expresses is in harmony with the fact elsewhere stated by Paul himself, and is so far expressive of his distinctive characteristic,—“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to

Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal. i. 15-17). There is a decision about this life which at once charms us. Paul did not even go up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles before him. He had no time or inclination for that. With a glorious independency which is the outcome of a Divine calling, he *immediately* went into Arabia, away from human consultation; and there in the birthplace of the Law he learnt the grand comprehensive meaning of the Gospel. *Immediately* when a new light shone upon his path and into his life, those things which had been gain to him, he, without any parleying or delay, counted loss that he might win Christ; *forgetting* those things which were behind, he reached forward to those things which were before.

Now consider what a change that moment on the way to Damascus wrought in the life of that great man. There are some who change their creeds as easily as they do their coats, since their beliefs always sit loosely upon them. But Paul ever lived and acted in right earnest—even when he was in the wrong. There was always a high and laudable ambition to excel in his religious life. Hence he profited in the Jews' religion above many his equals in his own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers. Thus, when that moment of severance from all his past history came, it came with a shock that made the very foundations of his life vibrate. It was a decisive separation from all that had hitherto been considered most promising in a progressively illustrious career. He was the rising man of his age, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. The brightest hopes of his school, if not indeed of the nation, clustered round his personality. He was *the one* living person of volcanic energy and fire in a dead age. But in an instant a mighty change takes place. The fire is taken out of his breath and driven back to his heart, henceforth to express itself in a holy zeal which shall not burn others but only self. No sacrifice shall be henceforth too great for him to offer. The question of the hour is, whether he will at once give the "no" to the "yes" of his preceding life. The answer is prompt and emphatic. Is he so suddenly to disappoint bright hopes, and to expose himself to the charge of fickleness just at a time when he is making for himself a unique reputation? In this, as well as in the more literal sense of the words, he conferred not with flesh and blood. "*Immediately*" was the

keynote of his new and great severance from all his past career. Oh, what a lesson we find here for some of us who have been at "hawk and buzzard" all our life as to whether we will say this or do that—even when impressions of right have deepened into convictions—lest some one should form an unfavourable estimate of us! Paul with the decisive stroke of the moment cut the bridge that joined him to his past life of so-called success and glory, and gave the lie to the hollow semblance. Oh, it is hard thus to contradict one's past, and to bury one's former self. It is hard—impossible for small natures—to dare to be inconsistent, even when inconsistency is the only form which the true can assume in relation to a false past. Herod beheaded the greatest man of his age, lest, forsooth, he should break his vow! Poor, miserable reptile!—as if his word were worth John's head. Ah, there are men in the world to-day who think that the surest sign of greatness is to adhere to past resolutions, even when they are as cruel as they are crude. In this new and fuller light the past of Paul's life was dead, and only fit to be buried. *Immediately* he buried it. He was ready for the sacrifice—without counting it a sacrifice, but only dung—that he might win Christ.

Again, in addition to being prepared at great cost to take a fresh start in life and to enter upon a new service, Paul was "*ready*" to accept any form of service that presented itself to him. "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." Paul had preached the Gospel in other great cities of the world. At this time he was in Corinth, a Greek city built by Julius Cæsar upon the ruins of a nobler city. Corinth had lost its former celebrity, and now consisted of an admixture of population—Greeks, Romans, and Jews—whose ambition, unlike that of the Athenians, did not rise above the greed of gain. That ambition was largely gratified in this new centre of commerce; and the Corinthians, although they had not the wisdom of the ancients, had, what in their eyes was almost equivalent, the ancient *pride* of wisdom. It was from this Greek commercial city, where ancient Greek wisdom was substituted by a vulgar and blatant boasting in a glory which had vanished, that Paul wrote:—"I am debtor to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." He had already touched a great variety of character and nationality. He was now ready to go

to the metropolis of the world ; ready to face the mightiest imperial force that, in ancient history, swayed its sceptre over the nations ; ready to enter into single combat with that great world power that had made civilized and uncivilized people tremble and cower in its presence. Why is it that he is so ready to go to Rome also ? Because of his mighty confidence in the effectiveness of preaching Christ. He exclaims in the eleventh verse :—" I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established." There was something that Paul felt he could give them by preaching, which he could not impart by writing epistles. Think of that ! Paul was an inspired man ; and, of all the epistles he ever wrote, I suppose that the Epistle to the Romans—comparing spiritual things with spiritual—is acknowledged to be the masterpiece of his writings ; yet he felt that if he could go to Rome and *preach* the Gospel, he could bestow some gift upon the Romans which even this Epistle could not impart. Ah me, what a passion Paul had for preaching and what belief in its efficiency ! Every true preacher knows what this passion means. Underestimate the possibilities of preaching to the preacher, and his whole nature is aflame with a holy jealousy. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the power of God. The Master has called into requisition the human voice ; and that cannot be surpassed in the great work of making known the love of Christ to men. Type is dead ; the human voice throbs with life. Even inspired epistles could not compare with inspired utterances. The heart of truth, apart from special spiritual enlightenment, pulsates in the spoken as it does not in the written message. " I long to see you "—exclaimed Paul to the Romans. He claimed brotherhood with all men. His sympathies were no longer exclusive. They were as broad as the world and as deep as human need. There was no type of service which he was not ready to render. He became all things unto all men, that by all means he might save some. This was the ruling passion of his life. He was a vessel made meet for the Master's use, and specially fitted for blessing the Gentile world. Hence he longed to go to Rome because he knew that he had something worth giving the Romans when he arrived there. He adds—" That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." The gift that he will impart will have a reflex

action ; it will strengthen and comfort the giver as well as the receiver. Again Paul says—"That I might have some fruit among you also even as among other Gentiles." He was ready to go to Rome because he knew that the Gospel would produce fruit in Roman hearts as well as in others. The seed of Truth germinates in every receptive heart whether it be Greek or Barbarian. Paul was ready to go, for he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for it was the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. Power! Rome symbolized power. The virtue (*virtus*) of the Romans represented the might of the sword. The virtuous man was the soldierly man. Paul would teach them a nobler virtue. He was *ready* to test the might of the Cross as against the power of the sword, ready to bring the energy of a merciful God into touch with the force of destructive man. He was ready with this assurance of divine power to stand in the midst of the Roman Forum, or the licentious Suburra, and preach the Gospel before Emperor and prefects, patricians and plebeians, and challenge the united might of the Imperial City to turn back his message,—*Paul the Ready.*

Again, as we look into this great man's life we see that he was ready to *render patient service even when that was ill-requited.* We are not dependent upon the questionable reading in the Authorized Version of 2 Cor. xii. 15, to illustrate this. The former part of the verse is enough—"I will most gladly spend and be spent (margin, *spent out*) for your souls" (R.V.). We know what treatment Paul received at the hands of those for whom he was prepared to do so much. The word translated "most gladly" means "*most sweetly.*" It only occurs in the ninth verse and in one text in the whole of the New Testament. There are many men who are able to expend their energies on a thankless service, but few who are able to do this "*most sweetly.*" Paul did this with a face that was as radiant as a sunbeam, and a voice as gentle as a benediction. Again, for *this* difficult service we find,—*Paul the Ready.*

He was ready to step aside out of the rush of liberty and the enthusiasm of service, and "be bound" if the Master willed it. Many a man who has preached like an archangel has well-nigh broken his heart "when bound"—bound by adverse or disabling circumstances. John the Baptist touched the extremes of life—the wilderness and the palace—and did not lose his balance, but rebuked king and peasant alike. Yet when he

was shut up in a dungeon he was perplexed, and could not understand why he was not permitted to witness the fulfilment of his own announcement, and why he, whose spirit was as free as the air, should be bound at Machærus. The fire of God was burning within him to the white heat of a painful impatience. Here, however, we find Paul going up to Jerusalem as a Greater One had done before him. He knew that he was to suffer there. Agabus had just announced the fact within the hearing of all. "When we heard these things," writes Luke, "both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" Break Paul's heart! Yes, by mistaken sympathy—similar to that which proved almost too much for Christ Himself to bear, when He exclaimed, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me,"—but not by the terror of bonds, "For," he added, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Here again we have *Paul the Ready*.

He was ready for even more than awaited him in Jerusalem. He was the soldier of Jesus Christ. It is an essential characteristic of the soldier that he should be *ready*: ready to suffer and if need be to die. Paul did not die at Jerusalem. If tradition be true he died outside the walls of Rome. It mattered little to him where or how he died so that he died in the Master's service. At *this time* he was ready to die. Ready before the summons came, so that he could exclaim to Timothy, "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come." (R.V.) When Paul gave himself to Jesus Christ, he gave himself entirely to Him. He was the slave of the Lord Jesus—a slave without reserving a single right,—whether living or dying he was the Lord's. Oh to be ready! Ready when the Master calls us to duty; ready to render every service within our power; ready to step aside from the rush of life into its solemn hush; ready to be bound and ready to die, when He calls us. Paul was always ready, looking for and hasting unto the coming of Jesus Christ. Nothing that God sent him found him unprepared. In life, in death, he was *Paul the Ready*. God grant us the same watchfulness and a similar reward!

XXIV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—TWO BASKETS.

1. THE ARK OF BULRUSHES.

“And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink.”—EXOD. ii. 3.

“And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”—2 COR. xi. 33.

I WANT to show you that in history two baskets at least have rendered very valuable service. The first helped to save the life of Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, when as yet he was but a little child, three months old; the other preserved the life of Paul, the greatest apostle, just at the beginning of his public ministry. Thus these baskets are well worthy of notice, and I have no doubt that if people could only find them to-day they would be considered very valuable relics.

We will now try to learn a few things about the *first basket*—namely, *the one which Jochebed, the mother of Moses, made for her boy*. Moses was born in very troublous times. The Israelites were in bondage, and it was ordained by law that every little Hebrew boy who was born was to be drowned; so that there should be no men among the Israelites in future days to resist the power of the tyrant. Jochebed thought that her little boy was far too good to be drowned. “When she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.” She came to the conclusion that he was a *very charming baby*. Your mother came to that conclusion about you, thought you were the best-looking baby she had ever seen except your brother, and so she kept awake many a night to watch over you and to nourish your tender life. The neighbours perhaps wondered what she could see in you, but she was only surprised that other people did not love you as much as she did. The mother of little Moses, like yours, saw a great deal in him worth loving, thus she hid him for three months.

But it is a difficult task to hide a baby. The little darling will cry occasionally, and exercise his lungs in different ways, and Moses was as fond of that diversion, probably, as most children. Thus there was danger of the little fellow’s voice being heard outside the house by the Egyptian detectives, who were constantly on the look out for little Hebrew baby-boys.

At this time people in Egypt used to make little baskets, bassinettes, and a great many other useful and ornamental articles, of “bulrushes”—or rather the *papyrus*, that grew

abundantly on the banks of the Nile, and the various canals throughout Egypt. Probably Jochebed had made a beautiful bassinette for her little baby, but now she had to turn it to a slightly different use. She had to make a little boat of it, so she daubed it with "slime"—that is, either the mud of the Nile, which when quite dried becomes waterproof, or bitumen—"and with pitch." What care she must have taken in doing this! and when she had finished, how keenly she would look into all the corners and see if there was a small hole anywhere through which the water might enter! Then, I think, she would manage to find sufficient water in some secluded spot upon which she could float the ark, and thus find out any possible leakage; and last of all she would put little Moses in it, and see whether it would bear him, or whether, if he turned over in his bassinette, it would topple over. Having satisfied herself on these points, and many others that would readily occur to her, I imagine her taking up the little basket and its precious burden in the dead of night, and taking Miriam with her. She could not trust any one else to place little Moses near the water. Miriam was only about twelve years of age; while Amram, the father of Moses, although he had a share in hiding the child during the past three months (see Hebrews xi. 23), had not the necessary tact to place Moses now just in the right place among the flags (or *weeds*) on the river's brink. Fathers are puzzled on such occasions: they cannot tell where to put babies and bassinettes; mothers must do that, especially in a difficult case like this.

Jochebed laid the little ark among the weeds and bulrushes that grew by the river's side, very near the place where she had noticed Pharaoh's daughter and her maidens take their walk after bathing. She had also heard that Pharaoh's daughter—so tradition tells us—was a married lady who, having no children of her own, was nevertheless very fond of them. Hence she put the ark just in a place where it might appear that it had drifted on the stream. She felt sure that if that royal lady but once saw her bonny babe she would be sure to love the child. So she told Miriam, "My child, I must leave you now, for the day is dawning, but God will take care of you and your little baby brother. I have made the ark of bulrushes, for they say that crocodiles have no liking for this plant. But there are no crocodiles near this place, or Pharaoh's daughter would not so often visit it. Besides, there is One above who took care of

Joseph in the pit, brought him to this land and made a ruler of him. That God will take care of your brother, and—who shall tell!—perhaps He will make another ruler of him, and a deliverer of His people.” Many were the instructions given to the child how she should watch afar off, and yet be near enough to hear and see, and what she should say to any one who might find the child ; and then a silent prayer from a mother’s heart would ascend to heaven for the two children as she kissed them and bade them a fond *adieu* in the darkness of that night.

You know the history :—“ And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river ; and her maidens walked along by the river side ; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it. And she opened it and saw the child ; and behold the babe wept ”—the old trick of babies, and much honoured in the observance to-day—“ And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” This was just what the mother of the child had expected. Miriam, finding that her mother’s anticipation was fulfilled, was encouraged now to draw near, and do just what her mother had told her. She thought she knew a capital nurse for Moses, and said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “ Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee ? ” She felt that no one could nurse a Hebrew child like a Hebrew mother—and especially one mother she knew. You know the result : how Miriam was sent and Jochebed was permitted to nurse her own baby-boy, and was paid good wages for her trouble.

Ah ! Jochebed was quite right. It was by faith that she had hid her child, and when she put Moses in the ark of bulrushes, and placed that ark on the river’s brink beneath the heaven of God, she knew that not only Miriam, but also God Himself, would watch over that child. God wanted a man who would be the deliverer of His people from bondage, one who should give to them His law, and lead them through the wilderness Canaanward ; hence that little basket of bulrushes was to Him a special trust. The mother’s fondest hopes were far more than fulfilled in that child’s life ; and little did Miriam realize how great that little child was to become.

Thus the story of a little basket, made by a mother’s loving hand and daubed with mud and pitch, in humble style, is the story of a mother’s love, and a sister’s watchful care, being honoured of God by a wonderful deliverance. Now, the God

who took care of little Moses amid the many dangers by which he was surrounded, takes care of you, will suffer no evil to befall you and no plague to come nigh your dwelling. Probably He shelters you with a father's care, a mother's love, and a sister's or brother's sympathy, but in any case He watches over you Himself, and with such a Guardian what have you to fear!

Next Sunday we hope to have a little chat about the second basket of which we have read this morning.

XXV.

SERMON—THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

“And He delivered him to his mother.”—LUKE vii. 15.

THUS ends the story of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain from death to life. All culminates in this brief, expressive phrase.

It is interesting to notice the variations through which this narrative proceeds. That shall be the course which we will now take.

On the preceding day our Lord had healed the centurion's servant at Capernaum. This incident added special interest to His movements, and meaning to His presence: “There went with Him many of His disciples, and much people.”

He approached an insignificant village, the name of which is not to be found elsewhere in the Scriptures. Ascending the mountain slope from the great plain of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, by a rough and narrow road, He drew near to the gate. The road is well known to-day, and, as things are in the East, it can scarcely have undergone any important change since the feet of the Son of man trod its rugged ascent. During that day our Lord had already walked eighteen weary miles. The sun was drawing near to its setting when He approached the gate of Nain, and when a funeral procession emerging from that ancient archway wended its way toward the sepulchre.

This story of grief must largely remain unwritten. Even inspired records of sorrow only reveal its fringes. Yet this narrative is exquisite in its touches. It grows upon our vision the more we look at it.

First of all, we have here a *distant view of sorrow*—the world's cold, prosaic way of recording tragedies—“Behold, there was a *dead man* carried out.” The narrative is as chill as the corpse! It sounds at first like the remark of a careless

onlooker who can witness a funeral as unmoved, and as unconscious of its touching meaning, as if he saw a waggon-load of timber pass by.

We advance but a step, and how the whole aspect changes ! From the cold, distant, prosaic method of narration our eye alights all at once upon a delicate touch that *imparts a tender grace and pathetic significance* to the picture—" *The only son of his mother.*" This is immediately succeeded by another touch—" *and she was a widow*"—that lights up the whole scene, so that we seem to *see* the procession, and to *hear* the deep sigh of the widowed mother, and the solemn heavy tread of the bearers, and our hearts throb with sympathy in *some* measure at least as the heart of the Christ did more than eighteen hundred years ago.

We have seen at a distance a solitary hill surrounded by mist and resting beneath the shadow of a great darkness. There it stood, a huge black mass, as cold and dreary as if it were the mount that skirted the Valley of Shadows. There is no line visible save the rough outline of the hill itself between ourselves and the dull sky. But all at once a soft yet revealing light scatters the mist and dispels the gloom, bringing into relief every furrow and hedgerow, and the varied bloom of flower, gorse, and heather ; yea, touching with its own radiance even the tears of clouds so recently shed in darkness upon every blade and petal, and converting them into gems of day, thus transforming the whole scene into one of exquisite beauty. So here, at first, we have a gloomy, indefinite picture. We see a dismal procession, yet no feature is visible, all is enveloped in gloom ; but gradually a light descends, and a sorrowing widow, bearing upon her brow the deep furrows of many a care, and now bereft of her only son, is seen in the procession surrounded by loving sympathisers, and the very tears upon her cheek are made to reflect the tender radiance of that Sun of Righteousness Who has risen upon her sorrowful life with healing in His rays.

Now, that which imparts a pathos to a funeral procession generally is not the thought of the dead as much as *the sight of the living*. On this occasion it was the presence of the living, lonely widow that touched the heart of Christ—" *When the Lord saw*"—not the covering which contained the dead body, but "*her,*" that sorrowing, agonising mother from whom death had taken all that had enriched her affections and made

happy her home: "When the Lord saw *her*, He had compassion on her."

How far Christ's own circumstances—being, doubtless, at this time Himself the Son of a widow—made this scene all the more affecting to Him, we can but imperfectly conjecture. Did the vision of the cross, and the sorrowing mother standing by, come up even now before His view? Who can tell?

"When he *saw her*"—the heart of the Christ responded readily to the *sight* as well as to the *sound* of misery. He blessed this sorrowing one, unsolicited save by those tears shed in silence and desolation. Indeed, in Gospel narrative there is no instance given of any one *requesting* Jesus to give *life to the dead*. Here His power and love seemed to surpass the most daring faith.

It is to *the mother* that He speaks the first words, and *afterwards to the son*.

"Weep not." There were plenty to tell her that; many, no doubt, had done so. There is no scarcity on such occasions of generous friends who flippantly repeat these words. It is the stock phrase of comfort at funerals. If a man can say nothing else he is supposed to say that. But on this occasion the words were uttered by a Voice that had heart in it, and were supplemented by a deed that was charged with Omnipotence. It is the Almighty One as well as the Infinitely Tender One that speaks *now*.

"And He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still." "*Touched*." He has *healed* men by *touching* them: can He raise *the dead* to life if He but "*touch the bier*"? Let the sequel tell. "They that bare him *stood still*." They could not help it. There was Divinity in that touch—a touch which, accompanied by the word of power, made *the living* motionless and silent as the grave, and the *dead one* spring up with the energy, and speak with the vigour, of perennial youth. "They that bare him *stood still*—and he that was dead *sat up and began to speak*." How wonderful the transforming power of Christ's touch!

Now it is instructive to notice what Christ did with those whom He healed and restored to life. This is a typical case.

"He delivered (*gave*, R.V.) him to his mother." It is generally true that Christ's miracles assumed the character of *gifts*. Human hearts and homes were enriched by them.

Review His miracles, and you will find a tender significance connected with almost all of them. This is specially true in this instance. The miracle is wrought in order to fill the vacuum in that mother's heart, and the empty chair in that deserted home. *The pith of this miracle lies in the restoration of the son to his mother.* We are not so much impressed by the boon to the dead as by the blessing to the living. Indeed, it does not appear that Christ would raise any one to life *for the sake of the dead* as much as for the sake of the living who were left behind. The three restorations to life recorded in the Gospels are the restorations of *young* and *valuable* lives, *missed* respectively by father, mother, sisters.

Thus the references to the mother, and to Christ's compassionate look and consoling word, give a clue to the motive which prompted Him to work this miracle. When He places His hand upon the bier and exclaims, "Young man, I say unto thee arise," we feel the touch of His power, but when He speaks to the mother, "Weep not," and then consummates the deed of might in giving back to the widow her only son, we seem to feel the throb of Christ's heart.

"To his *mother*"—the one who had the greatest claim upon him, and the one who needed him most. That was all Christ did. He did not even "improve" the occasion by "reading a portion of the Word" and "offering" an exhausting prayer. There are some good people who never give sixpence to a poor man with which to buy a loaf, without pulling a very long face of full regulation length, and inflicting upon him a sermon an hour long and a prayer about half the length and equally tedious. They thus make the poor man pay handsomely for the loaf. The Master never did this. When He healed the sick He did it without a lengthy epilogue on the misery of sin; the utmost He said was, "Thy faith hath made thee whole (healed thee), depart in peace." He let *the deed* speak for itself. The Rabbis thought this a very secular way of doing good, and a great many pious people to-day would think the same.

"He gave him to his mother"—*and then passed on, drawing no attention to Himself.* He felt there was no room for a third, not even for the great Restorer. Let the mother be alone with her son. How exquisitely delicate is this withdrawal! Brethren, no man ever blessed others who was not himself blessed in a large degree with *delicacy of feeling.* This is one of the many graces in which the great Saviour of man excelled all others.

By this withdrawal what a hint He gives others to withdraw ! “Let no one intrude upon the sacredness of the mother’s fellowship with her son,” was the practical lesson which the example of Christ taught all who witnessed it. He also sent him away from the inquisitive throng, from the danger of being lionized, and thus so soon having the delicate bloom of that restored life taken away. That were far worse than death. Let the young man walk home from his own funeral with his aged mother leaning upon his arm, and let all others stand at a distance. Let his mother tell him her joy in such a way as that no other ear shall hear the story.

The home and its associations occupy a prominent and sacred place in Christ’s miracles. This is a striking instance. To Jesus that young man borne upon the shoulders of his companions to the grave was not merely “a dead man carried out,” but “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” He read the story of the bereavement, as that sad procession drew near, in the sombre light of the last dying embers on the hearth at home. The domestic character of this and other miracles charms us beyond description.

“He gave him to his mother”—significant words, and expressive of a more general truth. How marvellously has Christ restored human relationships ! Sin had largely deprived natural relationship of its uniting bond. A mother had lost her only son and a son his mother. Christ came and united them again. Never since the Fall had mother loved her child as she has since Christ came and exclaimed : “Woman, behold thy son.” Oh, this miracle is but typical of what our Lord has done in restoring lost relationship by His gracious teaching and loving example. He is ever giving us back to each other, since we are constantly losing one another and forgetting our relationship in this world of sin.

Again, how many homes has Christ enriched by giving sons and daughters, who were worse than dead, back to their fathers and mothers ! They had been lost, but the great Healer met the funeral procession, and restored the dead in trespasses and sins to life, so that the earthly parent no less than the Heavenly One exclaimed in the ecstasy of joy, “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet : and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again ; he was lost and is found.”

XXVI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—TWO BASKETS.

2. THE BASKET LET DOWN BY THE WALL.

“Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall, in a basket.”—ACTS ix. 25.

“And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”—2 COR. xi. 33.

You will remember that my subject for last Sunday was *the ark of bulrushes*, or the basket in which Moses the great lawgiver was placed when he was but a little helpless infant three months old. To-day I call your attention to another basket, to which I then very briefly referred, one which received Paul, the greatest apostle, in an hour of extreme danger, just as he was about to enter upon the great work of his life. I have read to you the only two references to that basket in the New Testament. One is made by Luke, the other by Paul himself.

Last Sunday I spoke a great deal about *a mother's love*, as shown in the story of the ark of bulrushes; to-day I, first of all, want to speak to you about the *faithfulness of disciples* in connection with the basket about which we have just read. Saul at this time was in a very awkward plight. He was in the city of Damascus; and he himself tells us that the governor, under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend him. In addition to that we find, from Luke's account, that the Jews of Damascus took counsel, and that they “watched the gates day and night to kill him.” What a poor chance Saul had of escaping! His death seemed to be certain. But it is marvellous what love can do. We saw last Sunday what a mother's love did; we shall now see what the love of disciples could accomplish for the man whom they accepted as their teacher and guide. They knew all about the lying in wait for him, so they met probably in the house of one of their number who, as was frequently the case in Eastern cities, lived in a house on the outer wall. One inventive genius among them dispelled all doubt as to what could be done, by saying, “There is no possibility of escape by the gates, for they are closely watched night and day; the only way is to let Saul down by the wall in a basket.”

Now, they used baskets in those days, as they do to-day in Damascus and other Eastern cities, for lifting things to the top of the wall from the street below. There were windows opening to a small platform, which was surrounded by a railing or balustrade. To-day a basket, having a few coins in it, is often lowered from the window to the street beneath to some vendor who is selling provisions, and when the articles in return are put into the basket, the housewife draws it up. It was probably a basket often used for such purposes that was taken by the disciples on this occasion. Paul tells us that he was let out through a window. I can imagine what precautions were taken before he was lowered. The old rope was probably replaced by a new one, which was tied most carefully to the two handles of the upright basket or hamper. Then, when all was ready, those Christians peered through the darkness—for Luke tells us it was by night—to see if any one was near. At length Saul stepped into the basket, and the disciples cautiously lowered the basket and its precious burden. When the basket was fairly over the railing and suspended beneath, I can imagine the apostle whisper, "Keep a firm grip," and I think I hear one of the disciples quicker than the rest replying, "If thou hadst been still a persecutor we should probably let go now, but now thou art everything to us; trust us, it is a love stronger than life and mightier than death that grips the rope."

Now, many a man would have thought it *beneath the dignity of an apostle* to leave Damascus by night through a back window, and to be lowered in a basket which had been used for carrying the provisions of the poor household on the wall. The great apostle did not think so. "But," exclaims some one, "Paul had already been caught up into the third heaven. Is it possible for him to undergo this humiliation after such an exaltation—to be dropped down in the dark, through a window, and over the wall after being lifted up so high! Shocking!" Remember that this is another instance of Paul being able to do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth him. He had learnt in whatsoever state he was therewith to be content.

Little did the basket-maker or the rope-maker realise to what uses their work would be turned in this instance! If they had known, and had also realised, how great Saul was to become, they would—if they were at all like some modern tradesmen—have put on their billheads "Patronised by the Apostle Paul."

But they little knew how their *humble callings had touched the highest dignity* in being associated with the escape, and thus preserving the precious life of the great Apostle for the Church of Christ and the work of God. Humanly speaking, if it had not been for this basket we should not have had Paul's Epistles. But how poor we should have been without them! Thus does God often connect the greatest things with the humblest means—the rescue of a lawgiver and an apostle with two wicker baskets. Thus, too, does God honour the love of mother and the fidelity of disciples by showing a way of escape just at the time when deliverance was hopeless.

Dear children, learn the lesson that into whatever difficulty you may be led for conscience' sake, that whatever dangers may surround you, and however poor the means of escape at your disposal, He who saved Moses and Paul by means of two baskets can, in most unexpected ways and by the humblest means, give you deliverance from all danger and all evil.

XXVII.

SERMON—JOSHUA AND "ANOTHER GENERATION."

And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that He did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.—JUDGES ii. 6—10.

THESE verses teach us—

I. *The power of a great man to adapt himself to changing circumstances, and to be equally great under varying conditions.* Joshua was a man of great resource and exceptional versatility of genius. When "Moses the servant of the Lord" died, and left behind him such a terrible blank, it was Joshua who, when as yet a young man, filled the gap at that critical juncture in the nation's history. After that, for many years his life was inseparably connected with the thrilling experiences through which the nation had to pass in entering the land and conquering it. His majestic presence and commanding voice

stimulated the energies of a warlike nation. The long series of military exploits and brilliant victories at length prepared the way for the distribution of the land and the direction of the thoughts of the people to peaceful pursuits.

This transition from war to peace, from martial victories to the dull routine of husbandry, brought with it a crucial test to both leader and people. Many a man great in conquest is a nonentity in peaceful times. The great warrior does not always make a great statesman, indeed seldom does so, especially when, as in the case of Joshua, he has to lay down the sword because it is no longer needed. We have striking instances of this in our own and other national histories. Many a man has kindled a passion in the breast of armies which he has not been able to quench at will—Napoleon the Third to wit. Joshua, on the contrary, was the moral ruler of the nation in peace as well as the military commander of the army in war. The words with which the sixth verse begins are expressive: "When Joshua had *let them go*"—when he had relaxed his mighty grip of them—"the children of Israel went every man *unto his inheritance.*" The great warrior still exerted an all-powerful spell over them. The disbanded soldiers accepted their lot in the spirit of submission and promptitude. There was no convulsive transition from war to peace. His own example in retiring from prominence into obscurity, and accepting a share of the inheritance, exerted a great moral influence. The Romans are said to have conquered like savages and ruled like philosophic statesmen. Joshua, too, excelled in war and peace. Perhaps he was greatest in peace, because "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." Contrast Napoleon in St. Helena with Joshua at Timnath Heres.

II. *The formative influence of one great life in giving character to an age.* Such men as Joshua are necessarily exceptional. There is a Divine economy in the sending of great men. Like miracles, they must not be allowed to degenerate into commonplaces. There is a reserve in producing great leaders: they come one in a century—in some instances, one in a millennium. Men of the Joshua type are sent to give a character to their time. The history of the world is largely the history of single champions. There are plenty of heroisms out of sight—often kept too much out of sight—which are not brought into the prominence they deserve; but when every

allowance has been made for such, there is generally some one commanding typical hero or reformer around whom the narrative of the age revolves. We need not read much of history to find that in all ages almost every great movement has begun with and centred in some one commanding person. You have only to record the lives of certain great men to present the leading features of their time. They have projected their own personality and breathed their own spirit into their age. To have done so, what energy must have been condensed into that one brain and heart, and into those few brief years of active life! Who can measure the potentiality of a single great life lived prominently among men? It often forms a new era; is always an incalculable force, an unknown quantity; and is among the greatest gifts of God. Great men unseal hidden springs. They are born to rule and to make history.

In this instance we have a man whose influence to the last did not wane. It was said of one great man who died not long ago, "If he had died sooner he would have lived longer." Some men outlive their influence. Not so Joshua. "The people served the Lord *all* the days of Joshua."

Again, Observe that he made centres of influence of others. The power of our life may be measured by our inspirational force—that is, the energy we beget in others. The greatest man, master, general, is the one who energises others most, and thus gets most out of them: the man whose heroism or greatness is infectious—or, if you will, contagious. All who come into contact with him are touched by it. It was so in this case. "The elders that outlived Joshua" became possessed of an enthusiasm which they had caught from him. Brethren, it is an inestimable boon to come into contact with such a leader. This has proved to be the turning point of many a life. How many characters have kindled their fires at the hearth of *one* great man!

How much *passes away* with such men as Joshua! A light dies out. We learn what a marvellous place they filled by the blank they leave behind. And yet they brought more than they ever took away. They have left lasting good. There is a posthumous influence about such men. "They buried Joshua,"—but you have not finished with a man like Joshua when you have buried him. Not when you have *buried* him? No, not when you have *buried* him. The disciples of John came and

buried their teacher's headless body, but Herod heard the headless prophet speak *after* that, and said—"It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead." Who shall say that so far as Herod was concerned John was not constantly rising from the dead? "But, Herod, thou sawest his head in a charger, and thou knowest that his disciples buried his body." "He is risen," is Herod's sullen reply. "We did not finish with that miracle of a man when we beheaded him, and buried him. He is risen! He is risen! He is risen!" "Herod, thou art a Sadducee. Thou dost not believe in the resurrection." "Bury my creed," replies Herod; "this is John the Baptist whom I beheaded. He is risen from the dead."

So Joshua, though dead, yet spoke. His influence lived after him. It was a long time vanishing. I went the other day to what is often known as Sortaine's Chapel in our town. I saw his name upon the memorial window; but what was more, I felt his spirit in the place. I understood why thirty years after his death men call the place still his. The whole air is charged with his presence, and so long as there are men who remember the eloquent and inspired utterances of that great man he will live in Brighton. So with regard to others—men like Robertson, from whose views we often differ, but whose noble gifts we admire, and whose Christian spirit we would share—men whose names to-day are wafted into our ears by every passing breeze. At least all who saw them and heard them must pass away before the spell of their ministry is gone, if it ever will depart.

Joshua, too, lived, and his faith became the dominant faith of the nation not only as long as he was among them, but also "all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua."

Now I will ask you to observe—

III. *The limitations of a personal influence*—even one of the most powerful kind; for we see here the strange capacity of one age to prove untrue to the best and highest traditions of that which preceded it: "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."

1. This generation suffered from the lack of direct personal testimony. They could not say, "We speak that which we do know, and testify that which we have seen." All they knew was by hearsay, and spirituality must be very vigorous and intense to breathe life into hearsays.

2. Add to this the fact that these people sadly underestimated, and therefore ignored the value of historic record—"knew not," etc. They severed themselves from the past. They were a people unworthy of their ancestry and their privileges, and upon them the thrilling story of the past was lost; they lived as if there were no history, and thus missed one of the choicest means by which God seeks to educate our race. This, therefore, is a sad record; one of startling retrogression. The continuity of ages is broken, the progress of history arrested. These periods of degeneracy and decay are enigmas which we must study and take to heart.

What a dearth of men and principles, and what lack of robustness and force we find in such ages! "They forsook the Lord God of their fathers which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them." Here we have men forgetting their inspiring traditions—the thrilling narratives of Divine deliverances—losing every sense of their peculiar position among the nations, and of the honour for which God had preserved them, and to which they had been called, succumbing to the influences of their surroundings, and descending to the dead level of heathenism.

3. This was an age of ease, and, as such, the least productive of noble manhood. These were poverty-stricken times. The nation was no longer braced by one common ambition, or bent upon one object. They had lapsed into a state of indolence and indifference. Moreover, there was no central supreme power, for they had leaders only in times of war, and the old leader and his subordinates were dead. This was a time when a great character was most needed to save the nation from degeneracy. Such ages often succeed the iron ages of history. I am not sure that we, as Christians, have not lost much of the robustness of the past age. How many children of sturdy Nonconformists have changed their religion because more carriages go to one place of worship than to another—as if, forsooth, the salvation of God and the most glorious visions of heaven were dependent upon four-wheelers!

IV. *What a responsibility is involved in this succession of ages to maintain the continuity*, to be worthy followers of those who through faith and patience have inherited the promises; to be, of a truth, successors of the apostles and of other holy men!

We never can be as if we had no history. We cannot descend to the level of the heathen without being worse than the heathen. By so doing, we give the lie to our history. That age could not be as if there had been no Joshua ; God therefore dealt with it as He did not with the heathen. This principle applies specially to our own age, and to us.

V. *Thank God! the record in our text is only fragmentary.* That age was not a *final* break upon the progress of revelation. History is progressive after all. Span the centuries. Don't let the point of observation be too narrow or near. Ascending from lowlands to highlands there are undulations ; but take a span large enough, and you will find that it is an ascent all the way. So in the history of our race. God has been advancing throughout all time in spite of the "dark ages" of the world, and in spite of human relapses into sin.

All light did not pass away with Joshua and his elders. His name was to be handed down and to find its highest significance in that it should be borne by a greater One than the sons of men, and become "the name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" : and the work that Joshua wrought—great as it was—of leading his people into the rest of the Promised Land after all the wanderings and conflicts of the wilderness, would be but prophetic of a far more glorious work to be accomplished by Him who, bearing his name, would come from heaven with the thrilling message upon His lips, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "For if Jesus—or Joshua—had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God." Thus the life, character, and work of Joshua, so far from being annihilated by the sad relapse into idolatry of the generation that followed, became the basis of saintly hope and aspiration which found their fulfilment in the life, character, and redemptive work of the Saviour of the world.

Oh that we, like Joshua, may be found faithful, like him resemble and glorify our Master, serve nobly our age and generation, and at length receive the approving "Well done!" from the lips of our Lord!

XXVIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON TRIMMING LAMPS.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—
Ps. cxix. 105.

“Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.”—MATT. xxv. 7.

LAST evening, when out for a walk, I saw a postman trimming his lamp. The lamp shone so dimly that he found some difficulty in reading the addresses on the letters. I could not help saying to him, “That is right, my friend: always keep your lamp burning brightly.” He understood what I meant, and expressed the hope that he might do so. I immediately thought that “trimming lamps” would make a good subject for us this morning.

1. The lamp spoken of in the first verse is *the word of God*. How dark would the world be without it! The great difference between us and the heathen is that we have this light, and they have not. We rejoice in the light which God has graciously given in His Word; whereas they despairingly sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. To all who have accepted it, it is a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path. That lamp has gladdened the hearts and brightened the lives of many present. It has shown us how dearly God must love us; how near the loving Saviour is to aid, guide, and save us; how all our friends are the gifts of God, and all the love that our dear parents have towards us is derived from the Source of all love—our Heavenly Father’s heart. Others need this same glad news. Then

“ Shall we, whose souls are lighted Shall we, to men benighted,
By wisdom from on high— The lamp of life deny?”

2. If we are to keep this light burning brightly for our own guidance, and also for the benefit of others, we must ever *keep it well trimmed*. God in olden times attached great importance to trimming the lamps in the sanctuary. There were men set apart for that special duty. The fire with which the wick was kindled in that temple was God’s sacred fire, yet even that could burn brightly only when, in addition to sufficient oil being supplied, the wick was kept clean.

In the second verse which we have read, “*all those virgins*”—even the foolish who had neglected taking sufficient oil with them—realised the great importance of having their lamps trimmed for meeting the bridegroom. I will not dwell now upon the great folly of the foolish virgins in neglecting to obtain sufficient oil. I want to call your attention to what even they, notwithstanding their folly, thought a very important duty—*Trimming their lamps*.

Now God has given to us the lamp of truth, and kindled it from off His own altar ; all that we have to do is to keep it burning brightly. They had no lamps in the streets of Eastern cities, but each one had to carry his own lantern through those dark winding passages. David refers to this, or possibly to a traveller crossing an uninhabited tract of country at night, needing a lamp to trace his path and to guide his footsteps. There is a story told of a man crossing a mountain—in Carnarvonshire, I think—on one stormy night. It was so cold that the man, in order to shelter his hands from the biting wind, put the lantern under his cloak, and as the moon shone dimly through the clouds he thought he could trace his way without the lantern. All at once a gust of wind blew aside his cloak ; the light shone forth and suddenly revealed the edge of a large slate quarry, over which, in another moment, he would have fallen and have been dashed to pieces. He soon retraced his steps, but he did not hide the lantern under his cloak that night again. Ah ! there are many who think that they can go through life—dark and dangerous as the way often is—without this lamp of God's Truth ; they therefore hide it out of sight, or neglect to trim it by constant and prayerful study. In many instances they do not find out their mistake and folly until it is too late. Others have had this light unexpectedly cast upon their path, to reveal to them some great danger ; thus their steps have been suddenly arrested, and they have learnt never to try to do without that light again.

There are many of you children who require the help of your parents to keep this lamp of truth burning in your lives. They have to teach you much about God's love and your duty. Sometimes a little correction is necessary in order to make that light burn brighter in your life. You should be grateful for all this, for it is but trimming the lamp, so that in its light you may know better what way to take, and that at last you may reach the Father's House. Anything that takes off the black smuts—or what learned men call carbon—which dim the light of God's word, is well worth receiving. Your parents will help you largely in this respect.

A word to parents in passing by—the children are not supposed to hear this. Take care that you do all you can by God's blessing to kindle and trim carefully His lamp of truth in each child. In the good old times in Wales it was customary for the chapel keeper on wintry nights to go twice or thrice round

the chapel during the service to snuff the candles. He used to do it once during the sermon, as near as possible between the secondly and thirdly. I remember preaching when I was quite a lad at a small chapel on one Sunday evening. The chapel keeper began his round just as I had fairly found my way into my subject. Every one watched him. I viewed him as a messenger of Satan sent to buffet me. The poor old fellow did his work in jerks, and put out every other candle in the process of snuffing. I have thought that he represented some parents who, by their violent process of trimming, put out all the brightness and hopefulness which God has kindled in their children. I beseech you parents to take care that the lamp of God burns brighter, and not duller, in your child for your interference.

Finally, the little children must watch and pray that as they advance in life, and miss the training they once had from parents, they shall keep their lights still burning for God. He who was *the Word of God*, and *the Light of the World*, said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." If our hearts and lives are kindled with love and truth by His Spirit, we too shall be worthy of that name. "What if this light were to go out?" asked a visitor one dark night of the watchman of the lighthouse off Calais. "Why," replied the man, "if for one brief hour that light were to go out, many vessels would be wrecked and precious lives lost, and from all parts of the world for months to come the news would return that at such an hour the light off Calais was not burning. Sir, lives and property, the character of this lighthouse and my character are all at stake: *as long as I am here that light shall burn.*" May that be our resolution throughout life, God helping us!

XXIX.

SERMON—"A CITY AND A TOWER."

"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech," etc.—
GEN. xi. 1—9.

I HAVE taken these verses for my text this evening because I accept this narrative as the record of the first human effort on a large scale to establish a world empire from which all considerations of God should be excluded.

The story begins with the assertion of *perfect unanimity*—"The whole earth was of one language and of one speech." Everything seems to promise well to this new humanity which springs with such energy from the ruins of the ancient

world. The Flood is now a thing of the past. The family of Noah has rapidly increased; and there is no longer the discord that we find in the narrative of the period preceding the Deluge. There are no divisions arising from the presence of "sons of God" and "sons of men," nor are there any disagreements arising from the presence of different races representing essentially antagonistic characteristics and interests. The golden age has apparently come—similar to that to which some Englishmen love to look forward when the English tongue shall be the one spoken language of the race; only in this case the language does not appear to have been English. Every one understood his fellow. There was no lingual middle wall of partition to separate men from each other.

"It came to pass as they journeyed from the east (margin of Rev. Ver. *in* the east)." The translation adopted by the Revisers in the text—"journeyed east"—is questionable, as the movement seems to have been first southward and then westward from the mountainous range of Armenia to the Mesopotamian plain. This verse records the first great movement of a people in history. In the direction it takes it is typical of the mightiest movements of great peoples ever since, which have by a subtle but mighty law been as a rule from north to south, from east to west, or to strike the resultant line from north-east to south-west. That seems to have been the general current of historic movements. Whether in this instance the whole community went bodily, or only the younger and more enterprising section sought the land which was probably Noah's before the Flood, is difficult to decide. The fact remains that a vast company came down from the hills to the vast fertile plain of Shinar, and established themselves there. The history of this movement so far, then, is intensely interesting. Every other movement of peoples of which we know anything is second to this in order of chronology, and, I think, unquestionably in point of importance.

"And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly." Here we have a *decided advance in civilisation*. Hitherto this people have been nomadic in their habits, dwelling in tents; now they have found a resting-place, and the first impulses of a mighty civilisation laid hold of them. They give powerful expression to the new instincts of an established race. They have in their history reached the inventive stage. This is a time when the old order of things has to pass away, and when probably some one man of

genius, resource, and daring projects a new idea into life, and practically says, “It is not worthy of us to be ever falling back upon the past, and dwelling in tents like our grandfathers. Go to, let us make brick; there are no stones in this vast alluvial plain, but we have to make the best use of what is at hand. We can make something yet of this mud. We will make brick of it.” Here the *inventive genius* asserts itself and triumphs over mud; for remember, to make a brick wherewith cities and towers might be built was in the first case—commonplace as it is to-day—a grand triumph of human genius. What every age wants is to be found here—a leader, a man who could tell his fellows how to develop their resources.

“And burn them throughly.” Inventiveness is here supplemented by *thoroughness*. Is it possible that already they had gone beyond the process of drying bricks by the heat of the sun! We cannot tell. The remains of Birs-Nimrud only contain sun-dried bricks; but in any case, this people believed in *thorough work*.

“They had brick for stone, and slime (or bitumen) for mortar.” Here again we find the principle of adaptation to circumstances, and of making the highest use of materials at hand illustrated. Among the ruins of Birs-Nimrud are found to-day bricks which date far back into antiquity—probably to this period—and which are still held together by bitumen. Babylon, in later days, was built in the same way. The bitumen so clung to the brick that the wall, in many instances, had to give way bodily before any section of it could be separated. Thus the inventive genius is further supplemented here by the *constructive*. “Go to, let us build us a city.” Man is a gregarious animal. He has in all history been seeking his fellows, and small communities have blended their separate fortunes, or got absorbed in larger ones. Here we have the first emphatic assertion of this powerful tendency in mankind. Notice that this is given in the last chapter in the Book of Genesis which is devoted to the history of our race, before our attention is narrowed to the call of Abraham and the history of his descendants. This desire *to combine and to congregate in centres called cities* has been manifest in all ages. Man seems to believe that numbers mean strength, that in the combination of human forces and lives there is a power that is well-nigh omnipotent. Every civilised people has under-estimated its villages, but never its cities. It has always over-estimated them; yet when the villages

ceased in Israel its doom was sealed. Our power as a nation is primarily in our villages. London could not maintain its energy for a century, apart from the fresh blood which the villages of our land send coursing through its veins in the young men and women who are constantly sent to give new impetus to its life, in the terrible process of self-exhaustion in which it is engaged. As, however, cities are thus supplied with the best life-blood of a nation, the strength of empires, in this secondary sense, exists largely in their cities. They represent the storage of a nation's force, and as such are essential to the existence of empire.

"And a tower." Not only a city where men may congregate together, but a tower that shall be a *rallying point*. A great deal of discussion has taken place as to the purpose for which this tower was built. Was it to guard against another flood, or was it built for astronomical purposes? The former consideration may have entered into the prospect, but scarcely the latter. Astronomy, even in later ages, has not awakened within men sufficient enthusiasm to lead them to build such a colossal structure as this was intended to be. Neither do I believe that this tower was for religious purposes. It was rather an expression of human self-assertion in building a structure which should at once be military and monumental. We are told that the words "whose top may reach unto heaven" are figurative. I am not sure that they are. Somehow or other, as long as man is out of heaven he will try to get back into it, even if it be by building a tower. Now, the saddest phase of human sin is the fact that it is the misdirection of the noblest impulses in man. Just as the desire to be like God, when misdirected, led to man's fall, so the misdirection of the desire to reach the heavens and thus claim kinship with the skies led to this masterpiece of folly and iniquity.

"Make us a name." I said that this tower was at once *military and monumental*. We find that generally the military and the monumental go together. The martial spirit that believes in a sword believes also in a tower. Take the monuments in our land: how closely are they, especially the oldest ones, associated with military prowess! Greece, Rome, and modern powers connect war with towers, and bravery with "a name." Ambition underlies the butcheries of all ages.

Thus we have in our text a combination of forces which would appear to promise irresistible progress. Never in the history of the world has a worldly empire had such a favourable start and

such a blending of promising conditions as this had. Here we find a young community of one language and of one speech, full of youthful ambition, brimming over with energy, endued with inventive skill, and with a force of character which carried out their ambitious projects into their extremest possibilities, and of which the Lord Himself said, “Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.” The conditions of success from a worldly standpoint were complete. This story is written because nowhere else do you find such a combination of favourable circumstances for the establishment of worldly empire as here. We thank God for the record; we will study it and see what became of all this conspiracy of genius, power, and numbers to shut God out of His own world. *Is God in the heavens mightier than such a combination of forces as this on earth?* The question must be answered once and for ever, and only God Himself can answer it.

Now, the words which I have already repeated show that God did not form a slight estimate of the significance of such a conspiracy. God’s version of the meaning and importance of this step is the only true one; and only the Divine “Go to” can overmatch the “Go to” of such a determined and dangerous combination.

“Let us confound their language. . . . So the Lord scattered them abroad.” Beneath this bold figure there is an intimation that there can be no atheistic conspiracy on the face of the earth of which God does not take note. God at length scatters the conspirators by confusing their speech. They cease to understand and trust each other. Their distrust of God ends in distrust of each other.

The confusion of tongues resulted in a scattering abroad. Men have told us that diversity of language arises from the separation of tribes; this Book, on the contrary, tells us that the separation of peoples is the outcome of the diversity of tongues. Students of the science of language are now, however, adopting the announcement contained in these Scriptures as the true solution. They end in their pursuit just where they might have begun.

In all this scattering of the people there was the fulfilment of a Divine purpose. God had ordained that the earth should be inhabited. By this penal infliction of a diversity of speech he accomplished his wise and beneficent purpose,—the spread

of mankind over the face of the earth. After this there immediately follows the story of the selection of one man who should become the father of a great people, and through whom "all the nations of the earth should be blessed."

Now we find that in all history, as on this first occasion, every unnatural effort to acquire greatness and power has been at length frustrated by God. Syndicates are under God's curse. God damns them. They are the embodiments of a sinful and criminal effort to suppress the free play of natural laws, and the unfettered exercise of healthy enterprise. They are a revival of the old exploded idea of the Tower of Babel. As of old, so to-day, God will come down, and flood overwhelm selfish and foolish schemes with shame and confusion of face.

Meanwhile God in Christ has something better to teach us than to reach heaven by building towers, or attain unto our highest good by framing syndicates. The hope of man is not by man ascending to heaven and bringing it down, but by God coming down to earth and taking us up. The New Testament begins with the story of God coming down to men; it ends with the story of mankind being lifted up to God. The Gospel begins with a Divine incarnation; it ends with human exaltation to glory by the power of the ascended Lord. The spirit of self-aggrandisement shall not in the long run be triumphant. Through Christ there shall yet be a community whose city shall be the heavenly Jerusalem, and whose tower shall be the Lord Himself. There shall yet be a people who shall become kings and princes unto God; but oh, by what a different path from that adopted at Babel! It shall be by the way of the Cross, by humble trustfulness and patient waiting, by emptying ourselves of all ambition and vainglory, by casting out the spirit which suggested the possibility of the ancient Babel Tower, and which has expressed itself in all worldly empires. Oh to be emptied of selfish ambition, and to realize that he is most like his Master, and therefore greatest, who stoops the lowest and serves the most! Which spirit shall be ours—that which is ever defiantly asserting itself, lifting itself up against God, and which builds its cities and its towers "for a name"? or the spirit of the Christ which for His sake will count no sacrifice too great, if thereby we shall bless our fellows, glorify our Saviour, and finish our course with joy? God give to us the mind of Christ, and mercifully save us from the spirit of the world's Babel!

XXX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—“WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND?”

“What is that in thine hand?”—EXOD. iv. 2.

THIS was a question which astonished Moses. It was a surprising thing to him that God should think anything of a shepherd's crook. It would not have astonished him to hear God speak about sceptres, but that He should call special attention to an old rod that he had carried as a shepherd a thousand times was more than he could have ever expected. “A rod,” answered Moses with surprise.

But God now began to show Moses that he could turn that rod to higher use than he had ever done hitherto. “He said, ‘Cast it on the ground,’ and he cast it on the ground; and it became a serpent, and Moses fled before it.” He never thought that his rod would have come to that, not even with divine power behind him.

Now, although this was a miracle, yet, in one sense, this is repeated in every true life. There are many things put into the hands of little children the full use of which they do not yet know. For instance, when at first you are taught to write a pen is placed in your hand. What an amount of trouble you have before you learn even how to hold that pen! For a long time you do not exactly know how to hold the gift that is given you; and for a still longer time you little know what use you may yet make of it.

When the apostle Paul was a boy in school, and had to learn how to use the stylus, or pen, he little knew what use he would be able to make of his pen in writing his Epistles. So with regard to the apostle John. So also with reference to John Bunyan. When he was at school, a poor boy, he was not taught much, since he was only to be a tinker. But a pen was put into his hand, and it is wonderful what use he made of it in later years in writing the “Pilgrim's Progress.” Who knows? perhaps there is a child here to-day who has only just learnt how to use the pen, and yet thousands may yet thank God for what he will write.

Again, some of you have recently been on a journey by train. Had you looked at the engine before you started you might have seen a man laying hold of a handle, or lever. You might well have asked him, “What is that in thine hand?” Had you done so, he would have replied, “This is the lever by which I have power over the engine and make it to go fast or slow, or by which I stop it.” Thus, by holding just that little piece of iron, the engine-driver is perfect master of that huge and powerful engine.

Again, you go with your father to a telegraph office. He wants to send a message to America. The clerk looks at the message and lays hold of a small handle by which he sends those words along the cable through the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, and they are read in a few seconds in New York.

Again, in times of war, when ships draw near a port, you may find a man in a small room, or shed, who watches until a ship comes to a certain point. He then touches a little button and the ship is blown up in an instant. There is a connection between that little button and a mine of explosives which is hidden in the water beneath the ship; and although that mine may be many miles away from that little telegraph office, a touch of the button by a man's hand at once explodes the mine and works terrible destruction.

It is wonderful to what use even insignificant things can be turned in the hand of a man. We have striking instances in the Scriptures. "What is that in thine hand, Shamgar?" "Only an ox-goad." "Yes, but if thou knowest how to use it thou shalt slay hundreds of the Lord's enemies with it" (Judges iii. 31). "What is that in thine hand, Samson?" "Only the jawbone of an ass." "Yes, but if thou hast faith in God thou shalt slay 'heaps upon heaps,' yea, a thousand Philistines" (Judges xvi. 15, 16). Again, "What is that in thine hand, David?" "Only a sling and a stone." "Yes, but if thou wilt go forth against Goliath in the name of the Lord of hosts, and take aim, thou shalt smite the Philistine, and the stone shall sink into his forehead, and he fall dead into thy hands."

Now, God, who strengthened Shamgar, Samson, and David, can make you strong. When an Arab baby-boy is born, his parents put a little ant into his right hand, and closing the hand upon it say, "May the child be as busy and clever as the little ant." That is the best wish they can utter for their children. But we would put something better than an ant in your little hands. We would have you hold firmly the Bible—the Word of God—and remember all that it tells you of the Saviour's love. We would have you study prayerfully that Book, and live according to its teaching. If you do this, trusting in the Saviour for every needful strength, He will guide and bless you all your days, and at last receive you into His heavenly home. Meanwhile remember the words which this grand old Book contains—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

XXXI.

SERMON—CALEB'S CHOICE.

“Give me this mountain,” etc.—*JOSH.* xiv. 12, 13.

THE distribution of the land was the last public and official transaction of Joshua's life as the leader of the people. It was a task which required great discretion and firmness. Joshua was old and well stricken in years, and there yet remained very much land to be possessed (*Josh.* xiii. 1). Yet at God's bidding, and trusting in the Divine promise that the conquest would be completed, he apportioned the whole. The apportionment was, as a rule, by lot, but there were exceptional instances in which certain unconquered regions were assigned to those who had sufficient heroism and strength to conquer them.

This was the kind of inheritance for which Caleb longed. He referred to experiences forty years before, which were well known to Joshua as his former companion, and with the story of which we are familiar. Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies who had sufficient faith in God to believe in the possible conquest of the country. The other ten had been terrified by the presence of the sons of Anak and other peoples of the land. Caleb sought to still the people, and said, “Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” The others referred again to the giants, the sons of Anak, in whose sight the spies were but as grasshoppers, and thus “made the heart of the people to melt.” The deadly plague which befell the ten, and the nearly forty years' wandering which befell the people, the preservation of the lives of Caleb and Joshua only of all the nation above twenty years of age which came out of Egypt, followed by the ultimate conquest of the land, had been a sufficient vindication of the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of Caleb and Joshua. Now, however, that the land was to be distributed among the conquerors, and there were still a few unconquered, although greatly weakened, districts—and notably the main stronghold of the Anakim of the south, within whose walls the last chief of the tribe held out against the conquerors—Caleb went to Joshua, his old comrade, repeated the story of forty years before, referred to the promise of Moses that he should possess this stronghold, and pleaded that the privilege might be given him to take it. His desire was that it might

fall to his lot finally to overthrow and possess himself of the fastness of the sons of Anak, who forty years before had filled the heart of the ten spies with fear, and terrified the nation, but of whom he had emphatically declared that they could be overcome. The Lord had preserved his life for these forty years—preserved it, as he believed, that he might be permitted to conquer them. Repeatedly, in anticipation of the objection of old age and increasing infirmity which Joshua might bring forward, did this old heroic warrior of Judah affirm that, although he was that day fourscore-and-five years old, yet was he as strong that day for war as he was on the day that Moses sent him: "Now, therefore," he added, "give me this mountain," etc. We know how the subsequent history justified Caleb's faith and Joshua's confidence: how a pitched battle took place (Judges i. 10) outside the walls; how he drove them out, and Kirjath-arba with all its ancient recollections became Hebron.

I. In this choice we find a *revelation of a sturdy character*. Few things reveal men more than the choice they make. Lot's choice stamped his character. The Jews chose Barabbas, and they have had him ever since. The test of the Judgment Day will be the choice we shall have made in life. "Choose ye this day," is the challenge that ever goes forth to men. There is a powerful individuality about the person who selects a mountain. There is nothing finikin about the man who chooses a mountain as his ideal possession. It means climbing and hard work. I knew* a veteran who, late in life, bought a rugged mountain, built his house in one of its hollows, cultivated a portion of its slope, and let his sheep wander for a living over the remaining portion. He was as happy in breathing the clear mountain air, and in climbing the mountain steeps, as Adam was in Paradise. There was wonderful congeniality between him and his surroundings. There was a great deal of rugged grandeur about him. He was a veritable *Petros*, with any amount of rock in his constitution, that showed on the surface here and there in huge projections. In his character, too, there was many a fertile nook where the tender blade and the wild flowers grew in rich and charming profusion. To come into contact with

* NOTE.—Alas, that I should have to speak in the past tense! I refer to my late friend the Rev. J. R. Kilsly Jones, who has so recently passed away. He was one of the most original thinkers, and most striking, fearless and eloquent speakers which Wales has ever produced,—D. D.

that man was as bracing as to climb his mountain, and to breathe the pure inspiring air upon its summit.

In Caleb we have a man of a similar robust make—a man who not only chose the mountainous district of Hebron while others sought the plains, but also chose that mountain while as yet every crevice in its fastnesses bristled with foes of giant stature. Caleb was charmed with the thought of a possession which involved most of faith and heroism in making his own. How grandly his conduct contrasts with the arrogant demand of the tribe of Ephraim—the children of Joseph—who in later days became noted for their arrogance and self-assertion, and of whom we read that sublime irony in the Book of Psalms: “The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle” (Psalm lxxviii. 9). What preliminary display and bounce leading to such a humiliating and untimely collapse! This tribe came to Joshua saying, “Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people?” Note the keen irony of Joshua’s answer: “If thou be a great people, then get thee up into the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.” And the children of Joseph said, “The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron.” Then came the scathing reply: “Thou art a great people, and hast great power; thou shalt not have one lot only, but *the mountain shall be thine*” (Josh. xvii. 14-18). In other words, let them do as Caleb did—take a mountain and make it theirs.

There is something very noble in Caleb’s conception of a possession worth the having, as that which involves toil and heroism on our part. God’s best gifts are after all given on these conditions. It is “to him that overcometh” that the choicest blessings of the Apocalypse are given. The inheritance of the saints in light, like that of Caleb, is to be the inheritance of the conqueror. It was this robust view of life that gave a charm to the characters of the Puritans. Life to them was a battle. They were sturdy men—men intensely in earnest—who had no conception of ease and compromise. The teaching of Christ and His apostles was in perfect harmony with this:—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” “Fight the good fight of faith.” Caleb had caught this essential aspect of

a noble life. The reward of the man who has done well is that he shall do more. To him that hath shall be given. How? The man who works most is called upon most to add to his labours. This is the reward of God's most faithful ones, that instead of being rulers over a few things, with few responsibilities, they shall become rulers over many things with increasing responsibilities. Think you this strange? Yet every promotion in life means additional weight of responsibility if it has any meaning at all. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" exclaimed Our Lord (Matt. xx. 22). Prominence of position essentially involves capacity of endurance.

2. This choice further reveals to us the *continuity of his character*. It is the brave man who stood up before Israel and the ten spies who brought depressing news of the land, and exclaimed, "Let us go up at once and possess it," that now, forty years later, claims it as his privilege to drive the sons of Anak out of their last fastness. You must honour the man who maintains a great purpose for forty years. He is one of those who never seem to grow old, but who have the same buoyancy and heroism to the last. The most permanent thing about man is his character, and it is that which will pass through the grave with us unchanged. At eighty-five Caleb welcomes some more hard fighting. He had done enough to wear out half a dozen ordinary men. There seemed to be endless wear in him. This is the speech of an old soldier. You trace the same man, and he affirms—and gives proof of his affirmation subsequently—that he has the same vigour as of old. Had this record been given without name we could almost have identified the speaker with the Caleb of earlier days. We have seen old steel blades that are of such excellent quality that they are good until they are worn through; so, with regard to this man. Although the surroundings have totally changed, and his life has been chequered throughout, he is still the same man, his voice has the same heroic ring, his walk the same firm, steady, soldierly tread, his arm the same manly strength and magnificent sweep as of old. He had said forty years before that the work could be done; he says it again and wants to do it. Throughout his life we trace one master-feeling, one supreme purpose, one distinctive personality. This unity running through life is one of the glories of a great character.

3. Caleb's choice shows his *hopefulness and faith*. We are not so surprised that when forty-five years of age he should

have taken such a bright view of things, as that *now* in prospect of such a difficult task he should say, "If so be that the Lord be with me, *then*—" This is not the "if" of doubt, but the "if" of great possibilities, of a large hope, and of a mighty faith (R.V.). "It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive," etc. He is willing to risk all upon that "*may be*." He bases all upon what the Lord had promised. Faithful was He that had promised. In the inspiration and strength of that word he would face the Anakim. The promise had been long in coming to fulfilment, but his life and his strength had been preserved just as long: he believed that that strength had been preserved for a purpose. Hence, where others would have seen nothing but impossibilities, Caleb saw a promise of complete victory and lasting possession.

4. This choice shows *Caleb's wisdom*. The mountain fastnesses of the land were the most difficult to win, but having been once won could best be held, and would finally become the greatest centres of strength. It is a general rule of life that what is hardest won is worth the winning most, and is the most lasting good when won. The strength of a life as well as of a country is in its mountain fastnesses and passes, and not in its broad and luxuriant plains. These are the keys of a country and of a life. There, at the foot of Hebron, was probably the Valley of Eshcol, whence the Jewish spies took the large bunch of grapes. Its grapes are still the finest in Southern Palestine. There, too, was the field which contained the rocky cave of Machpelah, where lay the bodies of the earliest ancestors of the race. *This*, too, had been the scene of the most remarkable events in the lives of the patriarchs. He who possessed the mountain had complete command of all these.

Caleb's heroism put all protracted struggle out of the question. There was a decisive battle,—then *rest*. The land had rest from war. Such a position gained is gained for a long season. Such men as Caleb are those who lay the foundations of peaceful and prosperous times. We do not know what we owe to bygone heroes, who, at great sacrifice, have done a great deal of rough work for us.

5. The whole incident reveals *the sacredness which Caleb and Joshua attached to a promise* given by Moses forty years previously. Moses was dead, but the promise lived. Caleb repeated it, and Joshua honoured it. It was greatly to the credit of a statesman in those early days—at least judging from our

modern standard—that he fulfilled the promise made by his predecessor in authority forty years before. To-day many statesmen can scarcely remember their own promise forty hours after they have made it, much less forty years after it has been made by another. Joshua, however, on this occasion honoured the promise of Moses, conformed to the will of God, and gave Hebron for an inheritance to his old and tried comrade.

6. Observe how *the name of a comparatively unknown father is connected with the choice now made by a noble son.* Caleb is usually designated as the “son of Jephunneh.” Jephunneh seems to have belonged to an Edomite tribe, the Kenezites, but all that we know of him besides is that he was the father of Caleb. All that we know, too, of Nun is that he was the father of Joshua. These were two noble sons who made their fathers famous. Young men, take note of that fact. How largely the father’s reputation is in the hands of his son! “A wise son maketh a glad father.” The name of Zebedee is treasured for his sons’ sakes; not so the name of Simon the father of Judas. Mercifully his identity is lost in history among the many Simons who lived in his day. It is enough that the little village of Kerioth should be branded by being the birthplace of the betrayer—Judas of Kerioth. The name, however, may mean “The strangled one,” denoting his tragic end. In any case, Christ calls him the son of perdition—that is the only parentage the Son of Man will give him—and thus He mercifully passes over the human parentage.

From Joshua xxi. 11—13, we learn that the city of Hebron—as distinct from the surrounding fields and villages, which continued to be Caleb’s—was given to the Levites. Thus it has ever been. A brave man’s inheritance is not permanently confined to himself. He fights and wins for others as well as for himself, and others share in the liberty and possessions which he has won.

Brethren, what an example in all that is heroic and self-denying is the Lord Jesus! And what a scope for the exercise of the truest heroism do we find in the service of Him who “set His face to go to Jerusalem,” and to bear His cross to the summit of the hill of sacrifice! The Christianity of to-day sadly lacks robustness and decision. God grant that we may rise to the level of our privileges and of our high calling, become good soldiers of Jesus Christ, stand in the evil day, and, having done all things, stand!

XXXII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE CLOSED DOOR.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—REV. iii. 20.

You all know who uttered these words and utters them still. We have met together in a joyful spirit to-day because it is the day upon which Our Lord rose from the dead. It is the risen and ascended Christ who knocks at many a heart here this morning. Each of us has a door admitting to his heart's affections. Jesus wants to be our guest, and asks us to open the door so that He may enter. Some of you have seen the painting by Holman Hunt called “The Light of the World,” in which Our Saviour is represented as knocking from without at the closed door, and waiting patiently for some one to open it. There is no handle outside that door ; it can only be opened from within. Jesus will not force His way in, as they do in Ireland when they evict tenants, but will have us open the door for Him. He will not take possession of your heart unless you give Him welcome. But He is not soon discouraged. He calls from without, and is very anxious that you should know that He is still waiting, and constantly repeats the tender, loving words—“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.”

He uttered those words to most of you a year or two ago, and He has been repeating them ever since. Indeed, there are some here far older than yourselves to whom He has been calling for the last fifty years, and I fear they have not all opened the door yet ! He does not want to wait at your door as long as that. How greatly would He rejoice if every little boy and girl were to open their heart wide and give Him the best place there this very morning !

He is most anxious that you should open the door now, for it is very much easier for you to do this early in life than it will be later on. I remember hearing a friend say once, that the longer Jesus was kept outside the heart, the more carefully,

as a rule, it was bolted. At first it is only a little latch that can easily be lifted; but by-and-by some fresh sinful thought or habit makes the presence of Jesus less welcome, and the chain is put up. Sin grows in that boy's or girl's heart, and makes him or her still more anxious that Jesus should be kept out of sight; so the key is turned. As years pass by, evil friendships are formed, and thoughts more wicked than ever lurk within that heart, and the young man or young woman now decides that at every cost Jesus must not enter, and bolts first the lower bolt and then the higher one, and hides away in the innermost recess of all. But still at times he or she hears that gentle voice, and makes another desperate effort to barricade the door with the miserable old furniture that sadly needs turning out. Ah! I have often seen this done step by step. People have begun to do it when they have been little children, and they have continued to hinder the Saviour's entrance in some instances till the close of life, and the patient loving Visitor has at last given up knocking. God forbid that this should be the case with any little boy or girl to whom I am now speaking!

But just a word in passing to those who are older. There may be some one—aye, more than one—here this morning who has done all this; and yet to *him* the Saviour is now saying, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear My voice——" "What, *any* man! Good Lord, he has kept Thee waiting all through the weary years!" Our Saviour replies, "If *he* hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in." "But, Good Master," exclaims the tenant from within, "the lock and bolts are rusty and the ivy has grown apace, and entwined around the hinges; the door itself is warped by sin, and is hard to open." The Saviour replies, "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thine help." Ah, believe me, I have known no door so fast that, when the one from within has prayed that it may be opened, it has not opened wide.

But the Saviour wants to save you little children all the misery and danger which those who have kept the Saviour outside for a long season have known by bitter experience. It is the risen Lord whose hands bear the print of the nails that knocks now at your little hearts. O give Him a joyous welcome! Let Him take complete possession of your thoughts and desires. His presence will make the feast. You will be perfectly happy in His love, and ever safe in His keeping. God grant it!

XXXIII.

SERMON—"WHAT AND IF!"

"What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?"—JOHN vi. 62.

JESUS on this occasion, as at other times, was misunderstood, and His sublimest utterances were misinterpreted, not only by the Jews but also by His own disciples. He paid but little attention to the wrangling of the multitude, but "when Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured" at His words, "He said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?"

In the light of these grandly suggestive words we consider—

I. *The ascension of Christ as the culminating wonder of a wonderful life.* Are men startled by enigmas, are they shocked by the mysterious, or do they murmur at the inexplicable? "What and if they shall see the Son of Man ascend?" Already Jesus had said to the unbelieving Nathanael (ch. i. 50), "Thou shalt see greater things than these"; and to the unbelieving Jews He had exclaimed (ch. v. 20), "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will shew Him greater things than these, that ye may marvel." Now He challenged the doubts of the disciples with the intimation of a greater wonder than that which had already surprised them—a wonder that they should yet *see*. They would not be permitted to see Him rise from the dead, although they would have abundant proofs of His resurrection, but they would *see* Him ascend from earth to heaven.

This is one of the few instances in which our Lord, abandoning the direct dogmatism of His authoritative teaching, uses the word "if"—not the "if" of doubt, misgiving or fear, but the "if" of infinite suggestiveness. This "if" is the narrow chink through which a light streams which reveals boundless possibilities. To such great uses did the Lord Jesus turn small words!

There are some surprisals that must be hinted at beforehand.

Such was the intimation concerning Christ's cross (Matt. xvi. 21-26):—"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Those words which He then uttered were the shadow which the Cross cast before itself. There is a gain often in reflecting upon the possibility or the probability before the startling reality breaks upon our vision. Thus there is an educational value in the comparative reserve of intimations. The suggestion, rather than the emphatic announcement, of wonders or mysteries which are in store for us is calculated to prepare us gradually for the reception of them. It was to this high use that Our Lord turned the subtle intimation of our text. The disciples were not allowed to lose sight of the one event for which every other in Our Lord's life prepared the way. Hence expectation was aroused and hope quickened. Meanwhile every wonder or mystery which otherwise would have surprised the disciples was to become an inspiration and a prophecy in view of the crowning wonder in which that great life would find its consummation—"what and if!"

II. The ascension of Christ was not only the crowning wonder, but also *the final vindication and exposition of the life which preceded.*

1. It was an exposition of *the Incarnation*. The birth—so exceptional and mysterious, which is announced by a multitude of the angelic host from the open sky, while all heaven is aglow with joy and astir with rapture—must find an adequate counterpart in the close of the life thus ushered in. Only a glorious close can harmonise with so illustrious an origin. The song of the angels must not close in the hush of death and be silenced in the tomb. So celestial a song must have a celestial

ending. The last note must attain to the height and dignity of the first.

2. It was a vindication and an exposition of *His teaching that He came from the Father and would return to the Father*. All that was exceptional in His claims demanded exceptional credentials. His predictions concerning His subsequent ascension, and especially that given in our text, would stand or fall by the manner of His exit from the scene of His brief but unique ministry.

3. It presented *the crowning phenomenon of His life, and thus evidenced its sequence and law*. The ascension gave a glimpse into the secret of His power, and revealed, partly at least, the motive force of His great life, “Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame.” He, by such intimations of His ascension as my text contains, gradually revealed His great aims and expectations, and opened up new depths of motive and design. With such an expectation, what wonder that He “endured the Cross, despising the shame”! How majestic was the prospect before Him! This compensated for all the humiliation and pain. “He was despised of men”—but, “What and if!” He was “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”—but, “What and if!” He was to be nailed to the cross and to die the death of shame—but, “What and if!” He was to be buried in a borrowed grave—but, “What and if!” This was the glorious set-off to all the humiliation, poverty, and grief—the compensation balance of that wondrous life of suffering.

These words of our Lord are a protest against hasty conclusions and impatient criticisms. Christ bade men not pronounce their judgment too readily. He warned them against judging the tendency of His life, or rejecting the high claims of His teaching, till the final exposition was given. The hasty explanations of even disciples marred the original text. Let the Great Master finish His work, and add His own *Finis!* This was the emphatic demand of Jesus Christ. In our text Christ bids His disciples pause—talk less and think more. “What and if?” In other words, “Do not rush at conclusions without sufficient data. You have not exhausted the possibilities of my life. Let the future disclose some of its secrets to you before you close your enquiry in hopeless astonishment.” This is ever the demand of Christ, and one which is more and more justified as the ages move. The stars in their courses

fight for the Christ, and the slow, solemn advance of millenniums vindicates Him. Among His most earnest protests have been those against premature estimates of Him and of His work. "My time is not yet, but your time is always ready," were His words to His followers when they on one occasion sought to hasten His steps and hurry on His purposes. Christ then taught His disciples that the life of that man was poor indeed whose time was always ready, who had no plan undeveloped and no aim unreached. Our Lord's life on earth was one mighty protest against such miserable counterfeits. In His life the greatest wonder was only predictive of a still greater which men should yet witness. There was no finality about anything He did on earth, but a continuous progressiveness about all until He ascended on high.

III. The ascension of Christ was not only explanatory of the past *but also predictive of the future*. It gave an upward direction to the Church's gaze.

Observe the peculiarity of the expression concerning heaven—"Where He was before." John at the outset of his Gospel exclaims—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the light of these words we would read those which our text contains—"Where He was before."

Again, *the epithet "Son of Man," which He applies here to Himself, is significant*. It is one of very frequent occurrence in the Old Testament, and is often used by Our Lord concerning Himself, but it is also one which He could only apply to Himself by virtue of His incarnation. Thus Christ taught His disciples by this intimation that He would ascend richer for having descended. The central idea is that the ascending Saviour has taken our humanity with Him. "What and if ye shall see *the Son of Man* ascend up?" What wonder that when the apostles *did* see *the Son of Man* ascend as He had predicted in these striking and suggestive words, they *looked steadfastly* toward and gazed into heaven. There never had hitherto been a sight so attractive to the *eyes of men* as this was. It might well have absorbed their attention without an approach to sin—yes, though angels rebuked them, for how could angels understand the thrilling interest, amounting to rapture, with which *sons of men* witnessed the ascension of *the Son of Man* into the heavens!

There was, however, another and yet deeper reason why the

angels rebuked them. Their sense of loss was relieved by that of glad surprise, but it was not lost in joyous expectation. The two in white apparel said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up 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.” The fulfilment of one of His predictions by His ascension to heaven was the best evidence of the fulfilment of the supplementary prediction that He would come again. Had Christ *ascended!* Then He would *return*, as He had said.

Observe that the intimation of our text was *only given to His chosen few, and was fulfilled to them only*. These were among the realizations peculiar to the inner circle of discipleship. Luke writes, “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” (Luke xxiv. 50). It is strange that this record should have been given by Luke rather than by John. Jesus no sooner sent them forth than the “What and if?” of earlier days became a glorious reality to them.

Luke adds, “And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” In the ascended Christ they recognised their *Lord* as they had never hitherto done. He had left them, but no longer did they view His departure as a desertion. The ascension was not the final act. He had told them that He would “come again.” We all like to say that when we part from our dearest ones for a season. An absolute parting is unbearable. The prospect of meeting again is the only thing that can blunt the sting of separation. How gloriously true was this on this occasion!

It was well that the disciples were permitted to see Christ between the resurrection and ascension—see what feelings He still cherished toward the race that crucified Him. When they had doubts concerning Him He showed them His hands and His feet. These symbolized the sympathy of the risen Christ.

Among His last words were, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations,” etc. What a tender, gracious “therefore”! so different from what the world who had crucified Him might have expected. It was the startling *non sequitur* of Infinite Love.

“While He blessed them, He was parted from them.” In the light of this record what a significance do we find in the

words, "This same Jesus . . . shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen Him go into heaven"!

"It was not possible that He should be holden," exclaimed Peter on the Day of Pentecost. *Sin* could not hold Him—"He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." *Death* could not hold Him—"Fear not, I am He that liveth and was dead, and have the keys of hell and of death." This world could not hold Him—"He ascended up on high," leading "captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." A message comes to us to-day along the path of the ascended Christ, "Because I live, ye shall live also." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." In the hour of sorrow and of bereavement, to whom shall we go but unto the living, risen, and victorious Christ? In Him only do we find the mercy and grace we need. We find, too, our best and dearest ones who have vanished from our homes and our life in Him alone. We lose them everywhere else. In Him is all fulness. We preach Him to you who are needy and dead in your sins, and beseech you to come unto Him that you might have life. And of His fulness have we who trusted in Him received, and grace for grace. We need, and we desire, no other Saviour. Having Him, we have *all*. Without Him, we have nothing. Christ the risen and ascended Lord is our all and in all. May He be yours!

XXXIV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE MISUSED PENKNIFE.

“He cut it with the penknife.”—JER. xxxvi. 23.

THIS is the only instance in which we find any reference to a penknife in the Scriptures; and one is sorry for it, because this barely does the penknife justice. It was made to do very miserable work on this occasion. It had been intended for a higher and nobler service. One of the saddest things in life is *the misuse of what is placed in our hands* for noble purposes. There is a danger of this in the life of every child. There are few things that a little boy would like to have more than a knife, and yet I suppose that there are few things that he knows less how to use. I once knew a little fellow who was given a penknife, and he cut all the buttons off his coat in order to see whether the penknife was sharp or not; and, as if that were not enough, he tried to write his name upon the sideboard. Now, it is wisdom on the part of the parent not to give such a boy a knife until he knows how to turn it to better use.

In olden days the scribe, or writer, used to carry in his girdle a few reeds, a pot of ink, and a penknife. The scribes in the time of Jeremiah generally wrote on parchment with pens made of reeds. In order that the scribe might write properly it was needful that he should have a penknife with which he could sharpen his reed pen. Now, King Jehoiakim had one of these useful little knives. One of the great disadvantages of any one being a king, or a public favourite, is that he has many things given him for which he has no special use. Among the many things which were given Jehoiakim was this scribe's penknife. I do not suppose Jehoiakim ever wrote anything worth reading, or that he had in his life properly sharpened a pen.

But on this occasion very important words had been read to the king. Jeremiah had been twenty-three years waiting upon God, and had as the result repeated a most solemn message to Baruch the scribe. Baruch at first read the words to the people. The rulers of the king's palace heard of it, and desired to have the roll read to them. Having heard it they advised Baruch and Jeremiah to hide themselves, while they would tell the king of what they had heard. The king commanded Jehudi to fetch the roll and read it to him. We read that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves—or more correctly,

three or four columns—of the roll, Jehoiakim became impatient at hearing a message which so severely rebuked him, and took the roll, and cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, where it was consumed.

This is what I mean by a sad misuse of what may be placed in our hands. The apostle Paul tells us that "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now." Among the many meanings which these words have, there is one which we ought now to remember: that is, the way in which many things—different metals, for instance—seem to groan when they are misused by man. When the sword is used to slay men in cruel war, I seem to hear that steel blade groan at the terrible use to which it is turned. Steel was intended for higher purposes than to take away the precious lives of men. I can also imagine this little penknife groan at the use to which the wicked king put it. It is a terrible thing to misuse any good gift, especially if it be to destroy still greater blessings. This little knife was made for a good use. All its existence was to be devoted to sharpen pens, so that the scribe might write important words, which men could read for generations to come. A beautiful use! We cannot wish to be turned to higher use in this life than to be made helpful to others to do their duty well. But on this occasion, instead of allowing the penknife to do its proper work, the king used it to cut up the roll which contained such important messages from God. We shall see what terrible responsibility this one act brought home to the king.

Now, Jehoiakim, who did this wicked deed, was *the son of good king Josiah*. It is a fearful thing to break upon the good history of a family, and be the unworthy children of good parents. I received this morning a sermon preached after the death of a noble man. It was sent me by one of his children. I thought it scarcely possible for that child to live a life that would be unworthy of the memory of that father. Yet sometimes we see sad cases of that kind. We have a striking instance here. Josiah was the man who, next to Jeremiah, did most to restore true religion in his day. But Jehoiakim, his son, is the one who, on this occasion, cut to pieces the roll which contained the Word of God to him. Now, I want you children who have parents who love and serve God, to remember that you, above all, should earnestly seek to be worthy followers of them.

Again, notice that the message for which Jeremiah waited twenty-three years *was destroyed by Jehoiakim in as many seconds*. How easily and how soon we can do mischief! But Jehoiakim made *a great mistake* when he thought that by casting this roll into the fire he was *getting rid of the message* which it contained. God, who had given that message to Jeremiah, also gave him a good memory and great determination. We read—“Then took Jeremiah another roll and gave it to Baruch the scribe . . . who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had burned in the fire.” This is the old story. Men have in all ages been trying to destroy the Word of God, but all in vain; for just as they thought they had succeeded it has appeared again. What else do we read?—“And there were added besides unto them many words.” As the penalty of trying to burn the roll, not only was all the first message given again, but also “many words” of terrible meaning were now added. The king, who thought he had destroyed the Word of God with his penknife, and in the blazing fire on the hearth, was, as a penalty, denied decent burial when he died, his body being cast outside the walls of the city.

How many there are who, like Jehoiakim, take away from the Word of God verses and chapters they do not like! This is but another way of taking a penknife and cutting up this sacred volume. Children, I trust that you will ever treasure this sacred Book. In it are the words of everlasting life. Blessed is he who, like Timothy, from a child has known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus, and who throughout life continues in the things which he has learnt, knowing of whom he has learnt them.

XXXV.

SERMON—“*A BODY PREPARED.*”

“Wherefore, when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, *but a body hast Thou prepared Me.*”—HEB. X. 5.

THESE words, or, at least, similar words, were uttered by David more than a thousand years before (Ps. xl. 6-8). Notwithstanding the imposing character of the Jewish ceremonial, those who lived nearest God in ancient times and realised most the full

import of true consecration to the service of God, also realized that in sacrifices and offerings there was no intrinsic value; that by the blood of bulls and of goats sin could not be taken away; and that the offering of these sacrifices was but an acknowledgment of the *need* of sacrifice and the acceptance on the part of man of the Divine protest against sin. Thus sacrifices were repeatedly offered in order to keep the remembrance of sin fresh in the minds of men. "In those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sin every year," says the writer of this Epistle in the preceding verses.

So far back as the Book of Samuel we find the great truth uttered—"To obey is better than sacrifice." The same truth was repeated in different forms throughout the ages, most explicitly of all, perhaps, by Micah (vi. 6-8)—"Wherewith shall I come before God and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?"

"Sacrifice and offering 'Thou wouldest not," says the Psalmist, "*Mine ears hast Thou opened,*" or *pierced*—words expressive of willingness to listen and to obey, and containing an allusion to the ancient custom among the Jews of boring through the ear of that slave who, when he could claim his liberty, did not do so from love to his master, but freely submitted to the ordeal of having his ears pierced, so that he might become his master's irrevocably.

There is a difficulty with regard to the rendering given of this phrase in my text. It conforms with the translation of the Psalm in the Septuagint, but not with the Hebrew original as we now have it. There are many theories: the two most important, perhaps, being—first, that the most ancient MSS. which the translators of the Septuagint consulted contained the passage as given in this Epistle; second, that the translators of the Septuagint gave the general meaning rather than the particular custom, the significance of which the outside world would not at once understand; thus, that instead of translating, "Mine ears hast Thou pierced," they rendered it, "A body hast thou prepared (or *fitted*) for me"—

words similar in meaning to those of Paul—“I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” “Stigmata” is the original word for “marks,” representing the brand or the mark of the owner. This may be burnt in the flesh, or it may be bored through the ear; in each case it is the “stigma” of the Master, and by this the body is fitted for the Master.

I will not go further into the matter, save to say that even if the Septuagint, or, indeed, any Hebrew copy, had not the rendering of our text, this variation would be perfectly consistent with the way in which inspired men in New Testament Scriptures deal with the utterances of the inspired men of earlier days. We speak of poetic licence. There is a licence of inspiration which the Apostles claim. We accept these words, not merely because we think the oldest Hebrew Scriptures *might* have had them, and that the translators of the Septuagint translated them literally from the older manuscripts, or for any kindred reason, but because an Apostle, whose inspiration we accept, places this construction upon the words, and gives a fuller and higher significance to them than they ever had on the lips of David. David had been delivered by God from great perils. How could he express his gratitude unto God? “Sacrifices and offering Thou wouldest not”—these were cheap enough for a king; any amount of bulls and of goats would be no sacrifice to him—“Mine ears hast Thou pierced.” In other words, “Thou hast at my urgent desire accepted me as thy willing slave for ever, Thou hast put Thy mark upon me, I am irrevocably Thine. This is the highest offering I can give. My body bears Thy ‘stigma’; it is ‘fitted’ for Thy service, and Thine only.”

These words on the lips of David became prophetic. They contained more than their preliminary significance, like all the inspired prophecies of the Old Testament. David, in the very utterance, probably realized that there was Another who would render fuller and more complete service than himself. Thus, those words, which had at best but an imperfect significance upon the lips of David, would find their consummation of meaning upon the lips of David’s Son. “Wherefore when He cometh into the world,” He takes up the old utterance of the inspired Psalmist, because that utterance could be fulfilled only in Himself:—“Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but *a body hast Thou prepared me.*”

Now, as a general fact, it is one of the most striking things

connected with our earthly existence that *God sends no life into the world unclothed, bodiless*. Every life has its body, and a body specially adapted for the service which that life has to render. Illustrations abound on every side. The higher the life the more complex the organism, but in each case there is a wondrous harmony between every life and its embodiment, and every body and its surroundings.

If it be so, if God sends no life into the world without preparing a body fit for it, and if the higher the life the greater the preparation, or provision, for the adequate scope of its operation, how much more when He will send His Son into the world will He prepare a body for Him—a body that shall be specially adapted for His great mission, and for the accomplishment of His great design! In the Incarnation we have the Christ receiving a body by which He is the better "fitted" for the service of obedience and self-sacrifice which He came to render. "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham."

The Incarnation is confessedly among the greatest of all mysteries. It is the Infinite One accepting a body. What does this mean? We cannot tell; we can only touch the fringe of the great subject. But, whatever beyond our comprehension it means, it at least signifies this:—That, for a time, the Infinite One—

(1) *Accepts the limitations of a finite existence*.—As an Incarnate Son He speaks of "that day and that hour" which "no man knoweth, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son, but the Father*." He has accepted certain restrictions. Is not that a fitness for the service He has to render? To the very little extent that we can see, let us try to understand what is gained by the Christ accepting the finite conditions of our existence. We know that as man He hungered; was tempted; wept human tears; healed men by *touching them*; felt intense sympathy for all who suffered *physical* pain, and spent no small portion of His life in alleviating their anguish. It was *His Incarnation that made all these things possible*. He took little children "*into His arms and placed His hands upon them and blessed them*." It was the very limitation of which we speak that gave a meaning to that incident. This is the record of a Saviour whose "*arms*" and "*hands*" were engaged in a gracious ministry. Would you have a Gospel without such records? We know that He thirsted and sat by the

well, and spoke the words of eternal life to the woman of Samaria, that His feet were washed with the tears of a penitent Magdalene, and that His cross was made all the more glorious by His filial affection. Would you have a Gospel without such narratives as these? We know that He prayed to His Father, and that His was the joy of receiving the Father's approval. His acceptance of a finite existence made these things possible in His experience, and thus made Him an example to us. We are very, very far from seeing the full significance of the Incarnation.—eternity alone will reveal that,—but we see enough to rejoice in it and glorify God for that Incarnation which, by virtue of the *limitations* it involved, made a Gospel like ours possible.

Again, by the Incarnation Christ accepts—

(2) *The conditions of service, the submission of a servant:* “Lo, I come to do Thy will.” How does the Apostle Paul put it? “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (a prize) to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation (emptied Himself), and *took upon Him the form of a servant*, and was made in the likeness of man, and being found in fashion as a man, *He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil. ii. 6-8). The Incarnation was the form in which the Lord Jesus could render the lowliest service. What a step in the path of obedience was that! Once we accept the story of the birth, and believe that the Christ has accepted a human body, Gethsemane and Calvary are perfectly intelligible and easily accepted. The story of the manger leads us to expect everything in the path of humiliation and obedience, and to esteem no depth of condescension too great. From the days in which we are told Jesus went down to Nazareth and was subject unto His parents, to that bitter hour in which He said, “Father, not my will, but Thy will, be done,” we have but the career of humiliation and obedience, which was predicted by the birth. It is as man that Godward He has rendered the most perfect service, and that manward He has left a perfect example that we should follow His footsteps.

Again, by the Incarnation He accepts—

(3) *The highest possibility of self-sacrifice.* Read the words which follow:— . . . “By the which will we are sanctified through *the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* . . .

This man, after that he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” The Incarnation finds its full significance in that sacrifice which was made possible by it. Without the Incarnation there could be no Cross. It is the manger that predicts Calvary. We are told to-day that it was the high moral character of Jesus Christ that gave the full, complete satisfaction for sin. Such a dogma can only be accepted by setting aside the New Testament. While we accept this book as the rule of our faith, while we acknowledge it as the fullest revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of His work, and of the satisfaction which He gave, so long are we bound to cling to the Cross as the expression of the highest sacrifice for sin—the vicarious offering in which all that was vicarious in the Incarnation and the Life culminates, and without which the Incarnation and the perfect Life which followed would have been inadequate. “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.” “The blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin.” We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish.” The words of the Saviour to His Church, as she commemorates in graphic symbolism the great love wherewith He loved us, are, “This is *my body which is broken* for you, this do in remembrance of Me ;” and the New Song of the Redeemed will be, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof : for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation ” (Rev. v. 9).

“Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh.” “Shall we in the presence of that mystery only wonder, or shall we not also adore? Shall not the love be the mightier in proportion as it is past finding out? The love that can be measured is always feeble. Not so is the love of God in Jesus Christ. Shall it not constrain us from this time forth? Let our exclamation be—

“ O Love of God ! how strong and true,
Eternal and yet ever new ;
Uncomprehended and unbought,
Beyond all knowledge and all thought.

“ We read Thee best in Him who came
To bear for us the cross of shame ;
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live, our death to die.”

XXXVI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE WELL BY THE GATE.

“ And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate ! ”—2 SAM. xxiii. 15.

THESE words, although they were uttered by David when he was a man, yet show to us that on this occasion he had not forgotten the days of his boyhood and youth. He was at this time hiding in the cave of Adullam, which, according to some travellers, can be approached only by a narrow and somewhat dangerous path. David had known this cave for many years,—indeed, since he was a boy, if David was anything like other lads, for boys are great discoverers. They, as a rule, know every steep path and hiding-place within a few miles of their home. David had doubtless frequently played hide-and-seek with his companions inside that cave, little knowing that in later life he would have to play hide-and-seek there in right earnest. This is an illustration of *how our experiences as boys and girls prepare us for future difficulties*. It is well that a boy should try his ingenuity at early games, because all prepare him for sterner games in which he will have to take part later in life.

David's knowledge of the district as the result of his boyish curiosity was soon found useful, when sheep wandered from his flock as a shepherd lad. They often played hide-and-seek with him, as his companions had previously done, and he found out the sheep all the easier for having found his hiding playmates in former days. David had later on to flee from Saul. Then, when he had failed to find shelter elsewhere, he thought of the old cave which had proved such a capital hiding-place for him in bygone days, and once more he hid himself there.

Now again David was in the cave of Adullam, while the Philistines were in the plain which separated him from Bethlehem. It was the time of early harvest, in the month of April, and the Philistines had overrun the corn-fields and occupied the plain between David and his native town. He remembered the time when he was a boy, and used to run along the fields where the Philistines now were, and when he drank freely of the well, fearing no foe. There it was still by the gate. The weary traveller had a thousand times been refreshed by it. But he, although king, was now separated from it by his country's powerful and bitter foes.

People often *prize very highly the spring from which they first drank*. There is a spring near a little obscure hamlet in Wales of which I have a very high opinion. I

well remember how, when I was a little boy, I used to play with my companions until I got very thirsty and tired, and then used to run to that little spring for a refreshing draught of water. I have never since those days quenched my thirst as I did then, and I verily believe, to-day, that there is scarcely a well or spring anywhere which can compare with that. I think David had a similar tender, loving regard for the well of Bethlehem. There can be no doubt that water could have been found much nearer to David; but no water compared with the water of the well by the gate. Oh how he longed to be a boy once more, and enjoy the liberty of those early days which he so tenderly remembered! He was at this time a king, but he could not drink from that well now as he could when he was a shepherd lad. You children know nothing yet of the feeling which came back at this time to David. You are all anxious to become men and women. But there are some of us who would gladly exchange with you, and become children once more. We have missed many innocent joys which we had when we were children like you, and wish we might have them once again.

The very fact that this pleasure was denied David made him long for it all the more. If the Philistines had not been in that plain between him and the well, David would probably have not felt such a longing thirst. There is a saying that "stolen waters are sweet." I know that this refers to things which are wrongfully taken. But I now apply it to instances like this, when that which is longed for has to be taken as if by stealth. The very fact that what we once had can be no longer obtained, or only with great difficulty, makes us, in some instances, long all the more for it. This is human nature.

Now notice *that David's wish was gratified.* Three brave men broke through the ranks of the Philistines, at the risk of their lives, to gratify David's wish, and brought back the water for their favourite and heroic leader. A brave leader makes his followers brave. What a noble deed this was! How faithful those heroic men were to their king! David, you might think, was satisfied now. No. The brave king knew well how to value bravery in others, and said, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. What a noble example to us! David felt that only God could be worthy of such a service.

Further, he felt that he *dare not quench his thirst at so high a cost as the risk of men's lives.* Therefore "he poured it out unto the Lord." Now, we all can follow David's example. There are certain pleasures we may long for which we ought not to accept at the risk of other lives. Thomas Hood once pleaded for the poor seamstresses, who night and day were sewing shirts for the wealthy in order to earn just enough bread to eke out their frail lives a little longer. He exclaimed to those who displayed their linen, little counting the cost at which they did so:—

"It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives."

How true this was! Ah, and there are many other ways in which people indulge themselves at the cost of precious lives. You have read about the poor toilers in our cities. But that is not all. The one who takes his glass of wine merely because he likes it, and thus risks making a drunkard of his child, is gratifying his taste at a fearful cost. God forbid that you should ever do that! On the contrary, may you follow David's example on this occasion—yea, and have the spirit which was in Jesus, "who, though rich, yet for our sakes became poor."

XXXVII.

SERMON—ABRAHAM OFFERING ISAAC.

HEB. xi. 17—19.

"ABRAHAM when he was tried."—Some lives abound in tests, others are marvellously free from trial. God does not give the same amount of education in the school of affliction to all His children. Some are let off with few lessons, others who are destined for exalted service have hard tasks to master and difficult problems to solve.

Among the latter was Abraham. We read (Gen. xxii. 2) that "God did tempt Abraham." The word there translated "tempt" is elsewhere variously rendered in the Authorised Version—"prove," "assay," and "try," much oftener than "tempt." The same word is used in Psalm xxvi. 2—"Examine me, O Lord, and *prove* me." This trial was not only a test, but also a discipline, strengthening and fitting Abraham for future service.

There were two supreme tests in Abraham's life. Both were of a domestic character. The first was a command to "get out of his country, and from his kindred" (Acts vii. 3),

afterwards expanded, in the request at Haran, to "get out of his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house, unto a land that God would show him" (Gen. xii. 1); the other was to "take his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which God would tell him" (Gen. xxii. 2). In each case the explicitness of the command strikingly contrasted with the indefiniteness of the result. Yet, from the moment that the first request was made to Abram, there came, with the conviction of a great call, an increasing consciousness of a great destiny. When Abram at the first Divine call left his country (Acts vii. 3), he did not apparently receive any explicit promise, and even when the call was repeated at Haran he was encouraged, not by a promise which should find its exclusive fulfilment in himself, but with the grander assurance that he would be so blessed that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. The call on that occasion was emphatic in its demands, but general and indefinite in its promise. As yet Abram received no direct promise of the land of Canaan. It was at the other end of the journey (Gen. xii. 7) that he received that assurance.

Even when Abraham had received certain emphatic assurances from God which should sustain him, his life largely consisted of events which seemed to contradict the promises given him. This was the peculiar form which Abraham's trials assumed. He no sooner pitched his tent in the land of promise than he was driven out of it by famine. Later on the greed of Lot secured for the younger man the fairest portion of the land that had been promised to Abraham for his inheritance. In time Abraham became old, but notwithstanding the promise of an heir he remained childless. Isaac was at length born. At length Divine promises seemed to converge and focus in that birth. The son of promise was the brightness of that patriarchal home and the vindication of the patriarch's faith. Now we reach the great anti-climax in the narrative,—“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

This was the crowning test of Abraham's life, in which all the preceding trials culminated. We are told by some teachers that Abraham made a mistake when he undertook this journey

to offer his son in supposed obedience to the command of God. One thing is evident: that Abraham was not likely from *preference* to give this construction to the Divine command. The wish at least in this case would not be "father to the thought." Again, there is no suggestion in the narrative that Abraham had any misgiving as to the possible meaning of the request. Further, there is no intimation on the part of the inspired men who have recorded, or referred to, this incident, that Abraham mistook the meaning of God's command. Whoever may be responsible for the theory that Abraham made a mistake with regard to the meaning of the Hebrew command translated "to offer for a burnt offering," Moses is not. His narrative proceeds on the assumption that Abraham understood Hebrew, and that the construction which he put on the command was the right one. Nor does the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who may be supposed, without any undue stretch of the imagination, to be at least as conversant with the true meaning of the Divine command as modern critics are, suggest that Abraham was mistaken in construing the meaning of God's request. All other references to the faith of Abraham are at least silent as to the mistaken sacrifice he is supposed to have been led to offer in the most crucial moment of his life. Again, there was no hint given by God, when He stayed Abraham's hand, that he had mistaken His command. It is true that He prevented Abraham from completing the sacrifice which was in his heart to offer, but the reason is given,—“Lay not thy hand upon the lad . . . for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me” (Gen. xxii. 12). Further, James (ii. 21) confidently asks, “Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”

So in our text we read, “By faith Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac.” If some of our modern critics had written this Epistle they would have said, “By *mistake* Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac.”

Observe how Abraham had been tried all along. When at the outset he left his country, and during his subsequent journeyings, the Divine command became more and more explicit. Meanwhile, as a providential antithesis, Abraham was gradually stripped of his earlier associates. His father died at Haran. Then came to him the repetition of the old command, with the significant addition to leave his “father's house.”

This involved his leaving his brother Nahor and family. Later on even Lot separated from him under conditions which must have made the separation doubly painful.

When, therefore, the command came to offer up Isaac the trial reached its greatest depth and intensity. There are crucial tests in every true life, for which every preceding trial has prepared the way. Such was this supreme test in Abraham's life. The greatness of the test appears in *the exceptional character of the demand*. It appeared as a direct contradiction of God's promise. The detail was painful in the extreme. The command appeared like a kind of spiritual vivisection of the patriarch's faith, by which every quivering nerve seemed to be exposed by the cruel knife. That it was a command to offer a human sacrifice could not have greatly shocked Abraham's faith, as God had not yet revealed His will in that direction, and Abraham's earlier training would not have led him to look with great abhorrence upon that custom. The peculiar form of the trial now to Abraham was its apparent contradiction of the great promise which God had given him, and at a time when the suspense of former days seemed to have been brought to a happy close.

The obedience of Abraham was—

1. *Prompt*. The command came in the night. Early in the morning Abraham "rose up . . . and took . . . Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering . . . and went unto the place of which God had told him." Nothing was said to Sarah, to Isaac, or to the young men, that would have made Abraham's obedience to that command more difficult. The obedience was as spontaneous as the command startling.

2. *Persistent*. Abraham had the sustaining force which enabled him to maintain his purpose unwaveringly during the trying period of suspense between the command and the full obedience to it. During the three days' tedious journey he kept the perplexing secret and strong resolve. When Moriah was at length reached he, in the strength of a mighty purpose that would not brook interference, left the young men at the foot while he and Isaac ascended the hill. The question which Isaac asked during the ascent was sharper than any dagger to Abraham's heart. The father's assurance to the young men, and his answer to Isaac's question, were prophetic, and grandly heroic. The conversation between father and son, resulting in the acquiescence of two hearts, is hidden from us. This is

among the secrets of the higher communions which consecrated spirits hold in their choicest moments. The faith of Abraham found its counterpart in the noble submission of Isaac. He who had carried the burden up the hill of sacrifice was old enough to entertain the view of modern critics as to his father's mistaken zeal, and was strong enough to resist what he might thus have considered to be a sad misconception. But what do we find? The son of promise by filial acquiescence accepts the command as final, and honours the promptness and persistency of his father's faith.

3. *Perfect.* The question would naturally present itself, "How can God give a commandment that contradicts His Word and exposes Him to inconsistency?" Then would come the further question, "How could Abraham obey the command without helping to frustrate the fulfilment of the promise?" Abraham looked upon those difficulties as problems which God, and not he, would solve—"accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." The faith which had enabled him to leave country, house, and kindred, to endure mysterious delays which appeared like Divine inconsistencies, now triumphed over the greatest trial, and apparently the most startling inconsistency. "Wherefore God counted it unto him for righteousness." The human "accounting" found its counterpart in the Divine "counting." Abraham's faith was perfected by the approving touch of God. Abraham accepted the command as meaning the unreserved and unconditional offering up of Isaac, with the faith that God would say "Enough" when the obedience came up to the measure of the demand. *When* that would be it was for God, and not Abraham, to decide. It was for Abraham to obey; and he *did* obey. "Abraham *offered* up Isaac." When Abraham lifted up the knife the sacrifice was complete. Isaac had already been sacrificed upon the altar of a father's heart. All the agony of giving up had been endured. Only the *tragedy*, and not the real sacrifice, was prevented.

Further, God supplemented Abraham's obedience, and completed the provision for the satisfaction of His own commandment, by pointing to the ram in the thicket. The great principle had already been enunciated by Abraham, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The question of Isaac which called forth this answer—"Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"—is the representative question of the world. Man

in all ages has been seeking a lamb for a burnt offering. Abraham's answer is the reply of God in Jesus Christ. The history of sacrifices outside the Christian religion is the history of man offering sacrifices to God; the story of the Christian religion is that of God offering a perfect Sacrifice for man. All the sacrifices under the Old Dispensation merely proclaimed the necessity which the offering of Christ met.

Abraham exclaimed, "*Jehovah-Jireh!*" a phrase capable of two translations, the very ambiguity being grandly suggestive. The two translations are: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," and "In the mount the Lord will provide." Thus the *Mount of Sacrifice* becomes the *Mount of Vision*, and the *Mount of Divine Provision*. By the greatest sacrifice of a father's heart Abraham can the better understand the love of God, who should give up His only-begotten Son. The truth, which the late Frederick W. Robinson of this town once expressed, finds a striking illustration here: "Obedience was the organ of spiritual vision." Jesus exclaimed, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56). Abraham saw that day from the summit of the Mount of Sacrifice, which he had reached in his readiness to offer his own only-begotten son. Abraham's fatherly heart on this occasion beat in unison with the great Father's heart, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son.

But this mount also became the *Mount of Divine Provision*. Abraham learnt that it cannot avail for man "to give his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul." Henceforth he looked to Him who had provided the offering for him in the hour of his greatest need to "provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering" in the world's direst necessity.

This Sacrifice offered is our only hope. The proclamation of the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" is the task to which thousands have consecrated their lives. The only sacrifice now required is that we should consecrate ourselves as living sacrifices to Him who has loved us with an everlasting love, and who has redeemed us "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." Oh that we each and all may trust in that Sacrifice and be redeemed with that blood!

XXXVIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—A GOOD NAME BETTER THAN PRECIOUS OINTMENT.

“A good name is better than precious ointment.”—ECCLES. vii. 1.
“Thy name is as ointment poured forth.”—SONG OF SOL. i. 3.

THIS vessel, which has been lent me by a friend, is an alabaster jar purchased in the East. It contains very valuable scent, which cost the owner £5. It has gradually oozed out through the alabaster, as well as saturated the alabaster itself, so that there is now but little left.

If I held this jar for a long time in my hand, I suppose every one in this congregation would notice the fragrance: it is so very powerful. Now, my text tells us that “a good name is better than precious ointment.” You have already heard how much the “ointment” which this vessel contained cost at first. A good name is far *more precious*. All the ointments in the world would not purchase back again a lost name, or sweeten a character which had been once tainted. You can buy precious ointment if you have the means, but you cannot purchase a good name even with money. It is too precious to be bought with silver and gold. It is never sold in shops. You can by the aid of God keep the good character with which you have begun life, but once you have lost it, all the treasures of the earth, or the perfumes of the world, cannot restore the fragrance of a good name.

“Precious ointment” is also *very agreeable and pleasant*. I think that among the greatest proofs of God’s love toward us in everyday life is the fact that He has sent us so many flowers, and aromatic plants, with such sweet fragrance to gratify our smell. He has thought of our pleasures as well as our necessities, hence He has sent so many things pleasant to the eye, to the ear, and to the nostrils. A good name is better than precious ointment in the sweetness which it breathes everywhere. We all know what genuine pleasure the presence of a holy man gives us. We say, “What a sweet man he is!” We find that the very air which our spirits seem to breathe is filled with a sweetness which his good example and gentle loving presence

154 *A Good Name better than Precious Ointment.*

impart. We learn from his genial, happy face how pleasant it must be to be good.

Now, the perfume that comes from this jar is the fragrance of the ointment or scent that is within; so a man's good name is the aroma of goodness within him. It is very marvellous how searching this perfume is. I have told you that even the scent itself gradually but surely oozes through the very alabaster; this jar cannot keep it in,—it will force its way out. If I put this jar somewhere out of sight in the pew where you sit, although you could not see it, you would smell the perfume, and know it must be near. So it is with a good man whose heart is given to Jesus, and his life to the Master's service. He may be the most retiring and modest, and probably be never prominent, but always in the background, almost out of sight; yet the fragrance of his holy life gradually draws the attention of others, and all will learn what a good man he is.

Again, there are *slight flaws* in this alabaster jar. I believe that at some time or other it has had some rough treatment. There appears to be a very slight crack in the alabaster, *through which more of the scent forces its way than elsewhere.* I have known some good men who have been battered a little by Providence, and the more they have been beaten about, the sweeter the perfume which their holy life has sent forth.

I noticed, too, on the way to the service this morning, that *the more I shook the jar the stronger was the odour;* and I thought of the good man tossed about by changes, and shaken violently by persecution, who, the more he was tossed, sent forth a sweeter fragrance in a loving and patient example.

I further observe, that if put I my hands around the jar, *their warmth draws forth the sweet aroma:* so does a kind word, a genial smile, a warm grip of the hand, or a loving sympathetic deed, bring out a great deal of the sweetness of a gentle and noble character, of which we knew but little before.

Now I want to call your attention to the last portion of my text—the words of the Church to Christ—“Thy name is as ointment poured forth.” A godly man's name is like “precious ointment,” but the name of Jesus is like “*ointment poured forth.*” If I could afford to pour this ointment forth, in a few seconds

the whole building would be filled with the odour. Our Lord's name is as ointment poured forth in a sinful world, which shall yet be filled with the fragrance.

There are, indeed, some deeds of ours like ointment poured forth. In the account of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with that ointment which was very costly, you read: "And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment" (John xii. 3). I suppose that the most precious offering is generally the last which holy men and women present before they pass away. In the latter part of the first verse of our text we read, "The day of death" is better "than the day of one's birth." This is very true of the godly man. The alabaster box or jar is then opened by the touch of death, and the precious ointment of a holy life is poured forth as the last act of love, and is treasured in sacred memories. Never before did he appear so precious as then.

Now, there are some things that can spoil even good ointment. Read in Ecclesiastes x. 1—"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour." Is there a dead fly in your ointment? Can it be bad temper, selfishness, deceit, idleness, or one of the very many faults that can spoil a life? May the love of God be shed abroad in your hearts, and show itself in deeds of gentleness and love, "an odour of a sweet smell, a savour acceptable, well-pleasing to God"!

XXXIX.

SERMON—THE SEA AND THE NIGHT.

"The sea is His, and He made it."—PSALM xcv. 5.

"Thou makest darkness, and it is night."—PSALM civ. 20.

Few things impress us more than the rapidity with which sublime truths often degenerate into commonplaces by frequent repetition. These words, which we are too apt to regard as platitudes, meant a great deal to the man who first uttered them.

To him *it was a triumph of faith to say, "The sea is His, and He made it."* He, as a Jew, had never presumed to explore its vast expanse, nor fathom its hidden depths. He had looked with awe upon the Mediterranean or Great Sea, from Mount Carmel, or some other eminence. His eye had

followed its glassy surface, or its surging billows, until the mysterious sea and the mysterious heavens seemed to join each other—until the infinite depths below and those above seemed to touch. But, unlike the heavens, the sea was a terrible thing to him, alike in its calm glassiness hiding unknown deeps, and in its savage fury and thundering roar revealing a prodigality of power. He associated “the voice of the waves” with “the tumult of the people.” To him the sea was the symbol of rebellious might amounting well-nigh to omnipotence.

It was not difficult for the Jew, belonging as he did to an agricultural people, to believe that God’s “hands formed the dry land.” He obtained his living from the earth. Men can, with comparative ease, realise that God has made that which benefits them. Perhaps this, after all, is the chief reason why men have in later times become reconciled to the sea. Jean Ingelow’s “Old Fisherman,” in pathetically relating the storms he had encountered, and the losses he had sustained at sea, characteristically adds, “O Lord, I have drawn good food and made good money out of Thy great deep.” This at least was one reconciling thought in the poor old man’s breast.

But how could a Jewish psalmist exult in the fact that the sea was God’s? He had, no doubt, read in the account of the creation that God had made the sea. But a man must get at the heart of a record, and the soul of a creed, before it can impart to him genuine assurance. There is but little comfort in the mere fact that God has made that which is terrible. That must, somehow or other, be associated with a beneficent purpose before we can have any pleasure in referring to it. Was there ever in the history of God’s people some Divine blessing of which the sea was made a bearer? We pause for the reply.

Again, *it was a triumph of faith for the psalmist to say, “Thou makest darkness, and it is night.”* What! can it be true that God made *night*? Here, again, we remember that the psalmist had learnt from his earliest days that God at first said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” But was it so evident that God “had made darkness”? Men have in all ages attributed light to a deity, and without exception, I think, to a beneficent deity; but the night has with equal unanimity

been attributed to evil spirits. Indeed, when our Lord appeared to His disciples *on the sea, and by night*, the old human instinct, which attributes the mystery of the deep and of the darkness to demons, took possession of them. They thought that the very Christ was a demon. The child, to-day, thinks that there is something evil in darkness. God has graciously ordained that the full consciousness of the setting sun, and the gathering darkness, should not rush upon us at once. I cannot imagine with what feelings a man in full possession of his faculties would witness a sunset for the first time.* There is something thrillingly tragic about the darkening day. I am inclined to think that, first of all, it must have been made known gradually to Adam by the dispensation of sleep. I fear that if, after a day of brightness, I *for the first time* saw the sun set, and darkness rush upon me, I should lose my mental balance, and become mad. Apart from what I have learnt, by a growing consciousness extending at first over years of infancy, I should conclude that some evil power had triumphed, and that I was its victim. Ptolemy felt, when the sudden and mysterious darkness descended during the crucifixion of Christ, that *God must be dying!* It is a fearful thing to man when light mysteriously and unexpectedly dies out. It appears to be synonymous with all that is divine vanishing. When therefore the psalmist said, "Thou makest darkness, and it is night," and spoke of that act as one of the merciful deeds of a loving God, it was a triumph of faith which would have been impossible apart from a Divine Revelation which connected infinite goodness with the darkness of night.

We now come to the general question—What had reconciled the psalmist, as a Jew, to the thought of "*the sea*," and of "*the night*," as being the works of God? I have already intimated that the mere fact that God had made the terrible sea would not be enough to make it a pleasant theme of

* Since the delivery of the sermon my attention has been called to the following, which I think sufficiently interesting to insert here: "An old negro woman in Pennsylvania, who was born blind, has recently received her sight by the removal of the cataract. When the bandage was first removed the patient started violently, and cried as if with fear, and for a moment was quite nervous from the effects of the shock. When night approached upon the day when she first used her eyes she was in a fright, fearing that she was losing the sight which she had so wonderfully found after sixty years of darkness."

meditation to the psalmist. In addition to that he had already traced some of its beneficent uses. He had learnt that the sea was God's reservoir, to which He sent His cloudy chariots to be replenished, so that they might water the earth, and thus save it from becoming a barren cinder, clothed with no verdure, and producing no food for man nor beast (Psalm civ. 3, 13). That was a valuable assurance. But beyond all this the psalmist remembered that one of the most gracious of all God's purposes was fulfilled in the depths of the sea, and one of the most wonderful of deliverances was wrought in the dead of night; for it was by night, as well as amid storm and tempest, that the Lord saved His people. It was in the night He made them walk through the depths as on dry land. With what reconciled feelings the ransomed people must have looked at the sea the following morning, as they remembered the events of the terrible night which had culminated in so bright a dawn! "The sea is His," and "Thou makest darkness," must have escaped from their hearts as the inspired utterances of a new and mighty conviction. It was this event that taught them that God's way was in the sea, and His paths in the great waters, and that His footsteps are not known.

As ages have passed by, men have realised more and more the truth of this assertion—"The sea is His." Man claims the land, and divides it into acres. There is only one exception—the place where we bury our dead, and which we call "God's acre." Lords go as far as possible, and, with a boast and fuss which weary us out of all patience, lay claim to right of foreshore. Let them have their boast: they can go no further. Even countries can only lay claim to channels and bays. The high seas, the open oceans, whose are they? God's, and God's only! "The sea is His." "The deep places of the earth" are "in His hands." What a comfort to those who have lost their dearest and best ones at sea that they have only fallen into His hands!

"*Thou makest darkness, and it is night,*" is another assurance which is obtained from the story of the marvellous deliverance at the Red Sea. Now the psalmist could read the opening chapter of the Book of Genesis, and understand it as he never did before. "God made light" and "saw that it was good." Men had read these words, but had concluded that while light was good, darkness was evil. Now the psalmist learned that it

was the alternating of light with darkness that was "good"; hence "the evening and the morning were the first day." It took some time to realise that there was "evening" as well as "morning" in God's day.

If we apply all this to our spiritual experience, we learn to see God's goodness in the greatest mysteries of our life and in the most perplexing enigmas of Divine dealings. We realise that the unfathomable sea and the inscrutable darkness are always parts of His ways; that there is Divine love in that which withholds as well as that which gives. The day reveals one sun, the night a million suns which shine in space. It is the darkness that most of all brings the universe to light. The revelation of the night is on a grander scale than the revelation of the day. Very little of the universe would be known apart from the night. It is then, when the stars appear to come out of their hiding places, and shine, that we can look into the infinite, mysterious, abysmal, and ever receding heights, and realise most on what a grand scale the great Creator has done His work. So, in a higher sense still, it is through the darkness that we see many a star of hope, and catch a glimpse of the wide sweep of Divine operations, which the sunshine of joy or prosperity would have concealed from us. In the Old Testament we read of "visions of the night," as if they were the exclusive possessions of the darkness; and so in one sense they were. The night has in all ages had its peculiar ministry to perform and its special revelation to give. But never before was this realised as it was by the deliverance at the Red Sea. The moment the Israelites could associate Divine deliverance with the sea, and with the night, that moment those objects ceased to be objects of dread. God had touched them, and transfigured them with His touch. Thus did He reconcile His people to what they had hitherto dreaded. Brethren, in all history God has made of the most terrible things the channels of His redemptive love, and has converted the night and the raging sea into chariots of salvation. It is by the still greater deliverance—the spiritual redemption—that He makes us fall in love with what we have been accustomed to fear: trial, mystery, tribulation. We learn to see God's love in all, since He has ever associated His deliverances with terrible things. The salvation of men through Jesus Christ is inseparably connected alike with the world's greatest tragedy and with Heaven's

tenderest pity. The cross where human hatred reached its highest pitch in a deed of blood, was that in which Divine love culminated in an infinite sacrifice. The worst in man and the best in God met there. You cannot separate the Cross of Christ from the terrible; and, thank God, you never can separate it from the gracious: "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea."

Still, as of old, does God transform the most terrible things into instruments of deliverance for His people. Even the wrath of man praises Him, and all things work together for good to those who love Him. May we learn to trust God more, and to look in the deepest waters for the way of His deliverance, and in the darkest night for the shinings of His face!

XL.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—SHIMEI, THE STONE-THROWER.

“Shimei went along on the hill’s side over against him . . . and threw stones at him.”—2 SAM. xvi. 13.

SHIMEI the stone-thrower! That is our subject this morning. This is nearly all we know about him. I am quite sure that no boy here this morning—to say nothing of the girls, who, I suppose, have never thrown a stone in their lives at any one,—would like to be known only as stone-throwers. Yet Shimei is only known as the man who threw stones at a man far better than himself. Stone-throwers generally do that. Let us for a few moments consider this habit of stone-throwing.

1. It is a *very cowardly* habit. Notice where Shimei was when he threw the stones at David. He was on the hillside, on the opposite side of the valley. Had he wanted to settle his dispute with David, it would have been far more manly for him to have gone over and had a hand-to-hand combat with him in the valley, and on an equal footing. But Shimei knew better than that. He thought discretion was the better part of valour, so he ran along the hillside over against David and pelted him. Any coward can pelt stones from a hill down upon his enemy in the valley, but *only a coward will do it*. As a further proof of Shimei’s cowardice, read a little further on (2 Sam. xix. 16-23) how he hastened to meet David when he was returning victoriously, and cringed before him and begged pardon. It is always so. When you come into close quarters with a stone-thrower he proves a coward, and wants you to forget that he ever pelted stones in his life.

2. It is a *cruel* habit. This act on the part of Shimei was specially cruel. David was now fleeing before his son Absalom, whom he loved so much. It is a fearful thing when a boy turns his hand against his father, and returns only evil for all the good his father has shown him. This was a terrible trial in David’s life, to have to run away from his favourite son, who had listened to wicked men instead of his father, and was now plotting against his father’s life. At this time David’s heart was pierced through and through. “Sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.” It was now, just at the

time when even an enemy should have had some sympathy with David, that Shimei, the coward, ran along the hillside opposite, and cruelly pelted him with stones. Stone-pelting is generally a cruel act, and he who indulges in it becomes gradually hard-hearted and selfish.

3. It is a *reckless* habit. Shimei pelted at David, but we do not read that he hit him, even once. If Shimei was like most stone-throwers, he was more likely to hit David's companions than David himself. I would always rather be one at whom an angry boy aimed than be a yard or two away from that one. Shimei, however, did not seem to mind whom he hit, so long as he could hit somebody, or indeed so long as he could pelt. This leads us to our last remark.

4. It is a habit which shows *bad temper and contemptible irritability*. Whenever you see a stone-thrower, you may conclude that the only thing that is strong about him is his bad temper. Shimei, because he was not David's equal, and could not meet him in a hand-to-hand encounter, was furious, and could only vent his anger in cursing David, and pelting stones at him. Notice that he threw dust as well. Now, the dust could not hurt any one, but it gave a vent to Shimei's bad temper. But I hope on a future occasion to call your attention to the habit of throwing dust.

Now notice that, though one of David's men was very angry, and wanted to go over and behead Shimei, David would not give him permission. He knew that he had done wrong in the past. Perhaps Shimei was allowed by God to do this as a punishment. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" So David let Shimei pelt. David could have thrown stones as well as Shimei. He had done that with great effect on one memorable occasion. But that was in the open plain, and he met the enemy—a giant—on equal ground. Goliath had a sword, and David only a sling and a stone; yet David aimed well and hit hard, and the stone sank into the giant's forehead. But Shimei was not a giant, and his forehead was not worth aiming at. Such men as Shimei are not deserving of notice. The best thing is to do as David did—let them pelt, while we go on our way.

Now, there are many little Shimeis still in the world—those who are always calling others by bad names and saying all manner of unkind and untrue things about them. The spirit

with which we should go through the world is not that of Shimei, but of David on this occasion,—a generous and forgiving spirit, not ready to cast stones, or unkind names at others; but as Jesus Himself, when reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judgeth righteously, so ought we to return good for evil, and thus overcome evil with good.

XLI.

SERMON—“NO, NEVER!”

“For Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee” (R. V.)—HEB. xiii. 5.

No passage exactly parallel to my text can be found within the covers of this Book; the nearest approach being the words which were uttered by the Lord to Joshua, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Josh. i. 5), and repeated by David to Solomon, “He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (1 Chron. xxviii. 20). There is an apparent superfluity of negatives in our text which we do not find in either of the parallel passages to which I have referred. They occur in Greek five times in this brief sentence. I suppose the literal translation would be, as nearly as we can give it in English—“No, I will never fail thee, no, I will never, never forsake thee.” This repetition is exceedingly significant, since these words are given as the promise of God, with whom there is no idle word which does not carry its peculiar burden of sacred significance.

We cannot read the references in the New Testament to the more ancient Scriptures without being impressed with the fact that, while the writers do not always reproduce the exact words of the older inspired writings, yet with the licence, as well as the accuracy, of inspiration they grandly reproduce their deep and, frequently, their hitherto hidden meaning. This fact casts a side-light upon the relative morality of quotations. We have seen literal quotations which have been so taken away from their context and placed in another setting, that they have been practically false representations of what they professed to reproduce. On the other hand, we have read paraphrases which had scarcely a word in common with the

original passage, but which have conveyed the meaning with strictest accuracy and fidelity.

In our text, however, we have no mere paraphrase. This is a literal reproduction of an ancient promise, but with such additional emphasis as God's repetition of that promise, and His frequent pledge of faithfulness in its ever-recurring fulfilment, would necessarily impart. The assurance is an ancient one which has gathered around itself as the ages have moved, and God's fidelity has found new exemplifications, an accumulation of asseverations, in the “noes” and the “nevers” which have rushed into every pause of the original utterance.

This is a promise which bears no special address. We cannot fix a name to it, and for this we are grateful. There are some promises, which, like letters, have been addressed to certain persons, and which to the end of time will bear upon their envelope those particular names. There are other promises, and, thank God, they are by far the most numerous, which either were never exclusively addressed to an individual or community, or were far too great for such to monopolise, or for any age to exhaust; and which have been redirected and repeated in varying phrase, but with identity of meaning and additional emphasis, as generations have passed by. Thus some Divine promises, like Divine prophecies, are not of “private interpretation.” They cannot be expended on one life or generation. They have a marvellous reserve of resources. Age after age brings its empty pitchers, and they are all alike filled. There is enough for each, and enough for all. Or, to change the figure, they are like the sun which for millenniums has peeped in through numberless windows, and greeted untold households, in all lands and in all ages, and yet its fires are not quenched nor the brightness of its countenance bedimmed. Ah! these old promises, like Him who uttered them, are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. They partake of His own infinitude.

Indeed, some of the greatest assurances are given, not in word, but in silence. I shall never forget when, as a boy, I left home for school for the first time. My mother uttered to me many a kind word of counsel, and of warning—many an assurance that strengthened and sustained me in after days. But the best of all that she said was spoken in silence. She told me that she had *never* loved me as she then did: that during my absence I should be ever present to her thoughts

and very near to her heart: that she would bear me in her affections, and carry me in her prayers to the shelter of God's own mercy-seat; but in all this she *said* nothing. The assurance flashed from that brilliant eye, kindled in that glowing countenance, throbbed in that tender embrace, quivered in that trembling kiss, and glistened in those falling tears. Unuttered, but grandly expressed, that promise was shot from the depths of a mother's heart to the very centre of her boy's—"No, I will never fail thee, no, I will never, *never* forsake thee." It is thus that God often deals with us. There are times when He joys over us "with singing"; there are other seasons when He is silent in His love, when He plants a Father's kiss upon our brow, and says nothing, but means more than words can utter. Our text is an attempt to express in prose the rich wealth of Divine love in its eloquent silences when God "rests" in His love. The uttered promises of God throughout the ages are at best but faint expressions of a love that cannot be fully expressed, and is past finding out.

This assurance of our text *meets the highest needs of our nature*. Loneliness is one of the most trying experiences possible to man. It never has been from man's creation, and never will be to all eternity, "good for man to be alone." Our Lord Himself, in the midst of His terrible conflict, felt keenly the burden of loneliness: "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" (John xvi. 32). The only qualifying assurance which made that loneliness bearable to Him was—"Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." This feeling of isolation deepening into desolation reached an intensity of agony, fit to break His heart, in the moment when God and man seemed to stand aloof, and when from the depths of His anguish there went up the piercing cry that rent the heavens—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This was pre-eminently *a human* cry. Man yearns for fellowship—fellowship with man, and, above all, fellowship with God. To be without God, is to be without hope. To be isolated from the great Father of spirits, is to be orphaned indeed! The promise of our text—like that given by the Christ on the eve of His own desolation, "I will not leave you orphans"—is a gospel to the orphaned heart of man when it seeks God, if haply it might find Him.

Is it not a mysterious law, that the higher the type of creature the more dependent he is, and the greater his needs? The

higher the type, the more complex is the organism, and the greater and more varied the necessities, until we reach man, the greatest creature whom God has made on earth ; then we touch the most needy. Thus, as you rise in the scale of being, you rise into need. Brethren, it is only an Almighty, self-existent God that can be the complement of such a creation. What think you of a creation whose lowest and meanest creatures are the most *independent*, and whose highest and noblest are the most dependent. Here is a mystery—a startling enigma! Greatness involves need ; dignity involves dependence ; nobility of nature involves the necessity of commensurate satisfaction from another and higher source! Therefore does God speak to man as He does not to any other creature on earth, as if to say, “I have made thee only a little lower than the angels ; hence thou hast immeasurable ambitions, yearnings, and needs. Thy nobility consists in the greatness of thy dependence. The highest necessity of thy nature is that thou shouldest have great need. I, Myself, am thy supreme need. Thou art too great to be satisfied with less than thy God and thy Saviour. I will satisfy thee ; I will not leave thee Godless : better that thou shouldest miss all than thy God. ‘I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee.’” Now, this assurance comes to us with additional emphasis from the lips of Christ, in a promise where the negative form is changed into the direct and emphatic positive—“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

The promise of our text is twofold. The first part consists of a protest against the suggestion of God’s *insufficiency* ; the second, of a protest against the suspicion of Divine *unfaithfulness*.

I. *The Promise of Divine Sufficiency*.—“I will in no wise fail thee.” The emphasis which is placed upon the word “Himself” must not be overlooked—“For *Himself* hath said.” I have pointed out that in proportion to the greatness of our nature is the measure of our need. I would now remind you that in proportion to the measure of our fall is our need multiplied. No creature in heaven will have made so great a demand upon God as redeemed man. It is to this creature, with needs intensified by his own sin, but who now realizes his entire dependence upon God, that God *Himself* speaks—“I will in no wise fail thee.”

God's promise *projects itself into the unknown future*.—"I will *never* leave thee." Man cannot live in the present. He ever looks forward. His hopes and fears come from life's morrows. This accounts for the interest which promises and predictions ever awaken in the heart of man. The gospel for man must have something to say about the time to come. Our Lord struck the keynote in the Sermon on the Mount by announcing the great "Hereafter," and therefrom drawing the most powerful considerations for present duty and privilege. Man repudiates being shut up to the present. He protests against mortality, and in his inmost heart will not admit of the possibility of dying quite out. From his earliest days he yearns for what he can keep. His grip of even temporal things is that of an immortal being. One of the most pathetic phases of human life is that he who wants things which he can keep is always snatching at things which he cannot keep. He has aspirations which earthly possessions, attainments and friendships cannot satisfy. Is that yearning to die out? I cannot believe it. It is that which when satisfied will make our heaven, or which if unsatisfied will, with the memory of neglected opportunities, make our hell. God meets that yearning in all who trust Him with the assurance, "I will never leave thee." In other words—"Through all time, and for all eternity, thou shalt draw from My resources, thou shalt satisfy thy life in the light, and beneath the smile, of thy God."

Again, the promise *includes every change of circumstance and variety of experience*. The words of God by the mouth of Isaiah grandly emphasize this: "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xlii. 2). In the face of the infinite variety of disappointment and trouble is the permanence of this Divine promise that God will be *with us*. The "I AM" is the name in which God speaks to man amid the whirling changes and startling transitions of our mortal life. None but the eternal and unchanging God, as revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, can satisfy our yearnings and meet our needs. It is, however, enough if He be with us. The consciousness of His presence and blessing has been that which in all ages has sustained God's saints, and imparted to them the truest heroism. They undertook no task without Him, but having once accepted

the most difficult work for Him, they "endured as seeing the Invisible."

II. The promise of *Divine faithfulness*. There is nothing more beautiful and touching in life than fidelity, nothing so abhorrent and cruel as infidelity. Life is trying enough when those who were once associated with us in closest relationship are, through no fault of their own, or of ours, associated with us no longer. This experience we all know more or less. At such times the assurance of Divine sufficiency and permanence comes to us as an Evangel, since man has no firm foothold anywhere else. But there are experiences far more trying than those which come from change of circumstance arising out of the conditions of our brief life here. They come to us when men forsake, and friends prove untrue. It would seem as if the consummation of the world's guilt will be its unfaithfulness (Luke xviii. 8)—unfaithfulness to man as well as to God. Sin began to show its fruits in the infidelity of Cain toward his brother and his God. Sin will culminate in the prevalence of Cain-like infidelity brother-ward and God-ward. Now, over against that, the acme of God's excellence is His faithfulness. It is this which alone can triumph over human infidelity. It is this, too, which bears with us in our doubts and fears, and bids us trust—"If we are faithless, He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. ii. 13, R.V.). Thus the Divine constancy contrasts with our inconstancy. It is this fact that has sustained the saints in all ages when persecuted, and even when "in perils among false brethren." It is this that has braced them for conflict, given them joy in sorrow, hope amid disappointments, and the certainty of triumph amid the reverses of life. This assurance may be ours. If we did but appropriate this twofold promise, what heroisms would be ours, and what noble lives we should live! Remember that this promise, which in varying form is as old as revelation, is also as fresh and bright as the glad new morning. May we enter into its spirit, become partakers of its inspiration and joy, and thus ever "Trust in God and do the right."

XLII.

SERMON TO YOUNG MEN—JOSIAH, THE OLD-FASHIONED YOUNG MAN.

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father,” etc.—2 CHRON. xxxiv. 2, 3.

IT is a serious thing to occupy a position of prominence in a nation's life, or in the world's history. It is the lot of most of us to live in obscure spheres amid the shades of life, so that our inconsistencies are not seen beneath the burning light of publicity. They are only known by a few, and they are passed over charitably even by such. There are some men, however, who have to live in the full blaze of public observation. Even their private life is largely exposed to the eager gaze of men, and the least inconsistency or aberration on their part is readily registered. Thus, as the sensitive plate in the photographer's camera, when the person who sits for a likeness is placed in a powerful light, takes an impression of him in which every line upon the countenance and every furrow upon the brow are exaggerated, so that the artist has to touch the negative in order to do him simple justice,—so, when a man sits in the fierce glare of public light, his failings are so prominently recorded, and his defects so clearly brought out, that it is necessary for us in fairness to touch the negative with the pencil of charity, and thus soften down the defects. One feels in that mood when reading the books of Kings and Chronicles: not that the kings, whose portraits are given, were as a rule a very noble race of men—far from it,—but because they appear all the more ignoble on account of the prominent position which they occupied, and the searching light which rested upon them and still rests upon their memory.

Remembering all this, when we read such words as those of our text concerning Josiah we are filled with wonder. *Josiah's extreme youth was against him.* He was only eight years old when he began to reign. Poor lad! had he made serious blunders or wandered far, I trust we should have been charitable enough to have dealt tenderly with him. He began to reign at a time in life when discretion, as a rule, has not ascended the throne, and when impulse reigns supreme. It was the inexperienced child who, judging from his age, had never learned to rule *his own* spirit, that was now called upon to sway the sceptre over a powerful and restless people.

Again, *the times in which Josiah began his reign were hostile to*

noble rule. He ascended the throne in a dark age. Idolatry of the most licentious kind had been introduced into the national life, and had at length become the national religion. The personal influence of Manasseh—notwithstanding his subsequent repentance—and of Amon had been degrading to the lowest possible degree. Prophets at length were silent, or rather had died out of the nation, and priests were partakers of the vices of their kings.

In the face of these two facts—*the extreme youth of the king* and the *fearful degeneracy of the times* in which he ascended the throne—what is the record of this reign? We read: “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and *declined neither to the right nor to the left.*” This is the only instance in which the emphasized words are recorded concerning any king of Judah. “What?” says some one: “Josiah must have had an excellent father, who gave him a good example with which he was permitted to begin life.” Nay; Amon, the father of Josiah, was one of the worst men who ever sat on the throne of Judah. Josiah broke grandly upon the current and order of succession, and went back to the original excellence of kingship, as represented in the person of David. The sudden turns in the history of peoples, and in the records of kings, surprise us at times. Manasseh was the son of good King Hezekiah. He was a young man who had everything in his early training, by way of precept and example, to help him; but look at the record. Here, on the contrary, is Josiah, the son of the miserable Amon; and read the miracle that is recorded—“*He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.*” What can account for this? There is one little hint in the narrative as given in the Second Book of Kings (xxii. 1, 2), which we are not justified in overlooking or ignoring—“And Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty years in Jerusalem, *and his mother’s name was Jedidah*, daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.” Those of us who owe, next to God, almost everything to the example and gracious influence of a mother, an influence that was well-nigh omnipotent because so infinitely tender, are always on the look-out for a clue of this kind. The words which immediately follow are—“And—*and*—he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of *David his father.*” This mention of Josiah’s mother gains additional significance from the reference to another mother,

Josiah, the Old-fashioned Young Man. 171

the mother of Ahaziah (2 Chron. xxii. 2, 3). We read, "Forty-and-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign." What an advantage he had over Josiah in point of age! He was at an age when he might have learnt the lessons of kingship, developed his resources, formed his character, and determined upon the course and policy which he would pursue. Josiah was only *eight*, Ahaziah *forty-two*! Yet there was a blight in Ahaziah's life. "He reigned one year in Jerusalem,"—and that was one year too much! What was the secret? He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: *for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.*" The secret of Josiah's consistent walk, on the contrary, may have been largely due to the quiet but all-powerful influence of a good mother. But even the example of a noble mother would not by itself account for this sudden turn in the history of the kings of Judah. There are wonders of grace often wrought in the lives of the children of wicked men which you cannot explain. Four hundred years separated Josiah from David—a period blessed occasionally by the life of a good man like Asa or Hezekiah, but in the main a barren and ignoble period. Thus, Josiah's young heart responded across the centuries to David, the founder of the throne upon which he sat. Here, at length, after long waiting, was a nature akin to that of the great ancestral king, and claiming relationship with him,—a heart throbbing in unison with his, while it ignored the time that intervened. Thank God, there are seasons, even in degenerate times, when the old purity of things is restored, when the grand old faith is received and lived over again, and when the heroism of those who are gone comes back like a new inspiration to young lives. There is a strange significance in the periods of four hundred years, referred to in the Scriptures, representing great pauses in the history of Divine revelation. That theme may be the subject of a future discourse. Now, I only emphasize the fact that, during the four hundred years between David and Josiah, God had only sent an occasional man who rose above the dead level of those degenerate centuries, enough to serve for a Divine protest, and for a reminder that all the heroes of faith had not died out, and that David's throne had not utterly been deserted by God and goodness. At length Josiah was born; and in the eighth year of his reign, or at the age of sixteen, began to seek the God of David his father, and four years later began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and groves. Picture

172 *Josiah, the Old-fashioned Young Man.*

for yourselves a youth of twenty years facing the resistance of a degenerate people, purging idolatry at its very source, challenging the opposition of the priests—the bitterest and deadliest in all ages—and doing all this single-handed, for even Jeremiah had not yet appeared on the scene!

Josiah began at Bethel with Jeroboam's ancient abominations. Three hundred years before this a voice had predicted the daring onslaught of this young reformer: "Behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord: Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings xiii. 1, 2). This burning of exhumed human bones, as the extremest measure when every other was inadequate, so that the place should be desecrated for ever, was carried out to the letter by young Josiah. That was a grand picture when, in later days, Josiah and Jeremiah, two youths, stood shoulder to shoulder daringly protesting against the iniquity of their age, while the whole destiny of the nation, humanly speaking, was dependent upon the fidelity of those two young men. There is no picture in the history of the Jewish people nobler than that, save this one of Josiah, without a companion—without even Jeremiah, of whom as yet nothing had been heard—standing up alone, and in the might of faith in God and unreserved consecration to His service, purging Jerusalem and Bethel of the idolatries that Solomon and Ahaziah had introduced, which had not been thoroughly purged even by good Hezekiah, and which had been greatly increased by Josiah's own grandfather Manasseh, and his father Amon. Young men, do you ask what *you* can do after this? *This is what the son of a godless father could do.* I am inclined to believe, as I have already intimated, that Josiah's mother was a good woman; but even that is not an essential in the providence of God. When even the mother misses her sacred opportunity, and misuses her high function, when she does not exert the noble influence which only a mother can exert, God can make up even for that. I have seen miracles of young men before now who have come out of homes where there have been profligate and drunken fathers and mothers. There has been everything by way of example to degrade and

damn them, yet they have come forth with the purity and heroism of a Josiah, and the consecration and persistency of a Jeremiah, and have done noble work for God and for their age.

See how it is expressed here : "walked in the ways of David his father." "Ah ! he is an old-fashioned young man : he lives behind the age ; he ought to have been living in the time of David, for he has quite adopted his ancient ways," exclaimed some young man of the period. All the conceited striplings of the day would join in the chorus—"Poor Josiah ! he does not move with the age, does not look like the son of Amon and the grandson of Manasseh, men of spirit who knew how to make the best of life. He is an eccentric young fellow, very puritanic in his notions, and sings psalms as if he lived in the days of old King David." Be it so. Josiah did not care to connect himself with any of his predecessors as much as he did with David. The intervening period he treated largely as a parenthesis. He desired to go back to the days of simple faith, and be in touch with the greatest psalmist of the ages, whom God had honoured as a friend, and raised to be the father of kings and the founder of a kingdom and of a throne to which in relation to David's greater Son there would be no end. My young friends, a true man likes to be old-fashioned sometimes. It is noble to move with the age, when the age is going forward ; but it is grand to remain with the past when the age in which we live retrogrades from ancient purity and ancient faith. When there is no spiritual vigour or moral fibre in our day, it is well to stick to the old days when *there were* such things as strength and fibre in religion and morals. If at any time a Church becomes feeble in its grasp of truth, or lax in its views of purity, and loses hold of the first principles of true godliness, then it is time that the noblest souls should cling to the old-fashioned creed and devotion, and live in that sense a millennium in advance of their age. Do not be afraid of the charge of being old-fashioned. It is cheaply made, and is often meaningless, save as it is the highest possible compliment. Be in the company of the world's best and noblest men : never mind whether they live to-day, or whether they lived eighteen hundred years ago, or even more.

"He began to seek after the God of David his father."
Began—this is a suggestive word. There is a time in life which is a season of beginnings : that is the period of youth. It is a wonderful experience to watch the history of beginnings

in a life. We never grow weary of it. The child begins to observe, to walk, to talk, to hold fellowship with those around. To watch a child is like watching a mighty river in its origin as it springs up in one single transparent jet of water. Josiah, when a youth of fifteen, made a new *beginning*. "He began to *seek*." This was the beginning of a *new enquiry*. Again, there is a period in life which is pre-eminently one of *enquiry*, of *search*. That, too, is the season of youth. The child and youth are ever asking questions. Blessed is that youth whose enquiries take a noble direction. What of Josiah? "He began to seek after *the God* of David." He not only desired to keep in touch with David, but also to keep near David's *God*. This is the Divine side of human quest. This was the earnest search of a young man who recoiled from the idolatries of his age, and sought after the purity of the old devotion, and after the God of that king who could sing such psalms as David did. It is a grand thing—I say it with reverence—when a man becomes a recommendation to his God, so that the world beholding his good works shall glorify his Father which is in heaven. Thank God that the Saviour condescends to be glorified in His saints! Josiah thought more of God because He was the God whom such a man as David worshipped, and of whom he had spoken so much and so well.

What do we read next? "And in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem." He was not in too great a hurry to purge. This he did four years later than he began to seek after God. Careful and prolonged seeking after the true God preceded the cleansing of Judah and Jerusalem. When once God was found, however, there followed thorough cleansing from impurities and idolatries. There is no use in our knowing anything about God, unless we carry our knowledge into a complete reformation of existing evils. Josiah began in his own capital, and in his own home—began, too, at the very centres of idolatry, where it required the greatest heroism to reform. Josiah had the full consciousness that the God of David, who had inspired that psalmist to sing His praise as he did, would also enable him to accomplish all the difficult task of a national reformation to which he had committed himself. It was this assurance that made a hero of him. It is a noble thing to have some one saint whose example shall inspire our trust. We in these days have a far greater One than the greatest saints to follow—the Saviour, who, though rich, yet for our sakes became poor, and who has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

Recent events rush upon the thoughts of some of us. We have read of the death of Father Damien, one of God's heroes, who went forth alone to minister to a colony of outcast lepers. I care not, in the face of a service like his, to what Church he belonged, since I know he belonged to Jesus Christ, and had partaken largely of His spirit. He went forth to a settlement of lepers, of whom the world had no hope—went so that they might not feel themselves totally deserted, and that they might still remember that the world in which they lived was God's and the world to which Jesus Christ came—yea, one in which there are men to-day imbued with the Spirit of Christ who will go even to lepers and claim brotherhood with them, although the touch of brotherhood mean contamination, disease, and death. My dear friends, I want the God of Father Damien. I believe he seriously erred in his belief; yet who shall say that the love of Christ was not very largely shed abroad in his heart, and grandly revealed in his life?

Another noble man, whom many of you knew, has recently passed to his reward: a man of a very different type, and with clearer views of truth, but yet at one with the other just at that point where the saints touch Jesus Christ,—I refer to the Rev. J. Vaughan, formerly of this town. I often wonder that the people of Brighton are not far better than they are. Think of the men who have been ministering here in the past. I will not refer to living men who have for many years in this town borne the weight of great responsibilities and labours, and who still occupy the high places of the field. But what of those who have passed away?

There was Joseph Sortain, that eloquent preacher, whose powerful utterances seldom, if ever, failed to thrill the congregations which thronged to hear him—a man who, in the exercise of his high gifts and his sacred calling, moved such men as Thackeray. Then, again, there was Frederick William Robertson, a man to whose theology one has often to take emphatic and serious exception, but one who was a great teacher of men and servant of God, one richly endowed with rare gifts—a powerful intellect, keen intuitive insight, and a delicate sympathetic touch—which under God's blessing made of him one of the ablest expounders of Scripture and one of the most suggestive teachers in holy things which this century has known. He was a man who, notwithstanding what we deem erroneous in some of his utterances, kept very near his Master, and caught to an excep-

tional degree the light that streams from the face of Jesus Christ. Would that those who, in later days, have repeated his thoughts had caught more of his reverence! Again, there was Wade Robinson, the Christian poet to whom the Gospel came as a sublime harmony from the skies, and from whom it came to men like a celestial chant. Both he and Robertson died young. Heaven claimed them soon. Ah me! how many more?—Paxton Hood, Clay, Wilkins, Balfern, Frazer, and others.

I return, however, to him who has so recently passed away, and who ministered so faithfully and so long in your very midst. He does not seem to have been endowed with the rhetoric and eloquence of Sortain, or with the mental grasp and keen perception of Robertson, or with the poetic charm of Robinson, or the versatility of Paxton Hood; but he was a man who never failed to deliver his message faithfully. He presented the truth with marvellous simplicity, and with a touch of infinite tenderness. He was a man who so loved his Saviour, and so sympathised with those for whom Christ died, that his words never failed to enter the hearts of men, and, under the Master's blessing, to find a lodgment there. I was never permitted to hear him preach, but I have often read his sermons, and have always been struck by the fresh, living way in which the whole truth—old and yet ever new—has been given. He came and spoke of Jesus Christ in such a way as to convince you that he knew Jesus, that he had seen Him face to face, and had held much converse with Him. It was not necessary for him to work up a peroration, or to elaborate a fine sentence: all that was needful for him to do was to tell you, with his exquisite simplicity and tenderness, what he had seen of Jesus Christ, and what Jesus had told him to repeat to you.

Many of you have listened to him, and to some of the others whom I have mentioned, and yet you are no nearer their God to-day than you were when you first heard them. This is a fearful fact. It had been better for Capernaum that it had never been lifted up to heaven, since according to the greatness of its uplifting by reason of privilege was the greatness of its downfall in subsequent condemnation. God forbid that you should ever know the bitterness of such a condemnation! In your early days seek after the God of bygone saints, who is so gloriously revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord; and may He who so richly blessed young Josiah abundantly bless you all!

XLIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—SHIMEI THE DUST-THROWER.

“Shimei . . . cast dust.”—2 SAM. xvi. 13.

My subject last Sunday morning was “Shimei the stone-thrower.” I want to remind you this morning that Shimei was not satisfied with *throwing stones*: he also “cast dust.” We read in the sixth verse of this chapter of Shimei throwing stones and curses only, but now we read that when David and his men “went by the way” and paid heed to neither Shimei’s stone-throwing nor his cursing, he grew evidently desperate, “*and cast dust.*”

It is just possible that *he had thrown all the stones within his reach*, and that having no more stones to throw he took to dust. It generally comes to that. When a man gets into a vile temper the materials at his command are exhausted long before his temper is. But I am not quite sure that this was the only reason why Shimei took to throwing dust on this occasion. It may be that Shimei’s temper so far overpowered him, that he was not satisfied with throwing stones to hurt David, but that he also threw dust in order *to insult and annoy him*. There is a special meaning connected with dust-throwing in the Old Testament. Men used to throw dust *upon themselves* when they confessed their sins and humbled themselves before God. I think that Shimei on this occasion threw dust as a *sign of humiliation and shame*; but, like some other people, instead of throwing it upon himself he threw it on a far better man, exclaiming, “Come out, come out . . . thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul . . . and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and behold, thou are taken in thy mischief,” etc. Ah! I have known some who, like Shimei, instead of humbling *themselves*, have confessed *other people’s sins* very flippantly, and have tried to make others feel what loathsome sinners *they* were. But they have not been the best people who have generally done that.

I think, too, that Shimei threw dust in order *to make it easier for him to run away*. He was probably rather afraid that David would at last follow him up. He had seen Abishai look up very angrily when he said to the king about Shimei, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." Shimei thought it was time for him to go, and to throw dust down into the valley to cover his retreat. There is an interesting fish, called the cuttle-fish, which adopts Shimei's plan of backing out of a difficulty. Perhaps you have seen the cuttle-fish. It is an ugly creature, and very cruel when it gets hold of its prey. Sometimes the cuttle-fish, however, is frightened. Then it has the wonderful power of changing its colour, like the chameleon. But it is, too, very fond of another trick—that of throwing out a fluid very much like ink, which stains the water. It has also the extraordinary habit of swimming *backwards*. All cowards have that habit. Shimei, I think, had, and so he cast dust just as he probably beat a hasty retreat.

I am inclined to think that it is from the example of Shimei, or of men of kindred type, that we have that saying, "Casting dust into people's eyes." That one tries to cast dust into people's eyes who seeks *to deceive men* as to his motives and movements—any one who tries to live and succeed under false pretences. Now, the serpent in Eden, when it said to Eve "Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," was only casting dust in Eve's eyes; and sadly did it succeed. I am not surprised that God said to that serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle . . . upon thy belly shalt thou go, and *dust shalt thou eat* all the days of thy life." There was an outward symbol of the kind of thing he had been doing. The deceiver is doomed to live on *dust*. Herod, too, when he said to the wise men, "Go, and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I may go and worship Him also," was only trying to throw dust into their eyes. Some of you have occasionally tried to do that, to your teachers and parents, by making false excuses and pretences. Now, there are many who would not throw stones at, or what is the same, say an unkind word about, any one, but who will cast any amount of dust into people's eyes, or pretend to do things which they are not really doing

half their time. Now, one may be less cruel, but scarcely less wicked, than the other.

It is *a dirty habit* to be casting dust. When a man is trying to deceive you, or to throw dust into your eyes, try to be on the windward side. Throwing dust is very much like throwing mud—the difference being that one is dry and the other wet. Show to me any one who can deceive or throw dust, and I will show to you one who will not stop with that, but who will throw mud, in slandering others; and of all things this is one of the most despicable. Whatever you do, see to it that you do not stain the characters of others by mud throwing. A word of slander may stain for a long while a good name. May we all go through the world as Jesus did, “who when reviled reviled not again, when He suffered threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. Let us deal gently with all, patiently with the erring ones, and throw dust or mud at no one, by a deceptive word or an unkind accusation!

XLIV.

SERMON—THE MAGNITUDE AND TENDERNESS OF DIVINE DEALINGS.

“Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him,” etc.—ISA. xl. 10—12.

WE find frequent reference in Scripture to the Divine hand, arm, and bosom, by which God is brought the nearer to the level of our comprehension, and within touch of our love and confidence. In the verses which I have read for my text there is a striking combination in the use made of these figures. We find expressed here,—

- I. The magnitude of God’s power and rule.
- II. The tenderness of His shepherdly care.

I. *The magnitude of God’s power and rule.* “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span?” etc. The reference to the Divine hand, as I have had occasion to notice before to-day, is essentially human, man being the only creature on God’s earth who has a hand. How wonderful is its construction! It is marvellously

adapted for skill, power, and authority. It is that which in happy combination with other endowments gives man dominion over creation. It is *his hand* which, in more senses than one, sways the sceptre. It is his hand that asserts his royal nature, his power and authority to rule. Again, *the arm* is that which gives leverage to the hand, and without which the hand would be useless. The hand and arm of God are spoken of here. We read elsewhere that the heavens are the work of His fingers, that in His hands are the deep places of the earth, and that His hands formed the dry land. Here we read—"Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span?" The great Architect and Framers of the universe is represented as forming and adjusting earth, sea, and sky with His hand. This is the graphic representation of the Divine Worker at work. The one implement used is the Hand of the Great Worker—its hollow for the seas, its span for the heavens! What sublime poetry descriptive of creative skill! The illustrations are taken from primitive life. The truest poetry comes from primitive simplicity. It dies out in centres of commerce; it cannot breathe the oily, smoky atmosphere of factories and blast furnaces. We must go, not to the town which man makes, but to the country which God has made, to the simplicities of nature and of life, and breathe the pure air of God, uncontaminated by the sulphurous exhalations of human manufactures, before we can breathe true poetry. We may know a good deal about equations and conic sections, but very little about the beauty of imagery and the thrill of inspiration. The stern prose of ledgers and cash-books has taken possession of us like a dumb devil. In our text, on the contrary, we find expressed in simple and charming imagery the simplicity and might of faith. We who believe in nothing but the stern prose of the mart are apt to say "Yes, but all that is poetic," and then dismiss it as if there were no truth, but only fancy, in figurative speech. We think too readily that all that is true is prosaic, in other words finite, and as such confined within the limits of our conceptions, and within the limitations of the language of weights and measures. We forget that there is a point where even our mathematics die in poetry, that is, where they border upon the infinite, and when the mathematician has to become a poet, and adds to all his most abstruse calculations the recurring decimal, or the mysterious words that laugh to scorn his reckoning—

ad infinitum, to infinity! One of the grandest curves even in mathematics, for instance, is the parabola, which ridicules our paltry efforts to follow it as it stretches forth its arms into the infinite in a curve that never returns to itself, but goes on for ever in its ever-widening sweep. The moment you touch God you touch a point at which prose and mathematics struggle in vain to express the truth; and poetry, the language of the child, and the language of God Himself in speaking to man, has to come to the rescue. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?"—What is the sublime truth which this richly figurative speech conveys? One truth at least is *the self-sufficiency of God* in His creative work. He needed not to go beyond Himself. All creation is the outcome of His own power and skill, independent of the shifts of machinery and tools. When this has been stated, the prophet proceeds to draw other figures from primitive life in the simplicity of its operations to describe God's creative work. "Comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure"—that is, a *tierce*, or the third of an ephah. It is the same word as that used in Psa. lxxx. 5,—"Thou givest them tears to drink in great measure." As Delitzsch beautifully expresses it, it is a small measure for the dust of the earth, but a "great measure" for tears. "Weighed the mountains in scales,"—that is, a steel-yard, that by which the greater loads are weighed; "and the hills in a balance"—the tradesman's balances which weigh smaller things, but with greater accuracy than the "steel-yard." Nothing has been done by haphazard. Every world has been balanced, and the equilibrium of the universe adjusted with infinite wisdom and skill. Astronomical observation leads to this conclusion; Isaiah asserted it with regard to this earth before astronomy was born.

So far we have dwelt upon Isaiah's statement of what God *had* done. Now we notice briefly the prophetic announcement of what God *would do*. The former refers to *His creative power*, the latter to *His providential rule*. "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him." There is here a prediction of a special Divine advent in power, but, this morning, I take this as typical of all Divine advents and interventions throughout the ages. We have read of the Divine *hand* in the record of God forming and adjusting the earth, but now we read of the Divine *arm* in His personal advent and providential rule. There is a Providence as well as a

Creation. God has not completed His work by His creative skill and power. "He worketh hitherto." The hand that formed and adjusted is moved by the arm that rules and governs. It is the arm that wields the hand. The hand that measured the heavens and the arm that sways the sceptre are, according to Isaiah's theology, inseparable. There are many who would separate these if they could. They believe that God made the worlds, and that He sent them whirling along their orbits, but they will not acknowledge that His arm still rules them and their inhabitants. They would take away the Divine arm; they only see the hand. The Scriptures, on the contrary, abound with emphatic references to the Divine arm. "Hast thou an arm like God?" (Job xl. 9), asked God out of the whirlwind to Job. "Thou hast a mighty arm" (Psa. lxxxix. 13), exclaimed the Psalmist; and again, "His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory" (Psa. xcvi. 1). Isaiah wrote, "The Lord hath sworn by the arm of His strength" (Isa. lxii. 8), and again, "Therefore His arm brought salvation" (Isa. lix. 16). In these and similar passages the *arm* of God is the symbol of His power in providential and redemptive works.

"His arm shall rule for Him,"—that is, shall bring all foes submissive, and make all subjects obedient to His sovereignty and command. "Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work (or *retribution*) before Him,"—the reward of His own obedient subjects, and the retribution of His resisting foes. It is instructive to notice the different names applied to God in the Scriptures to show various aspects of His character and work. Observe the names by which God is called here. "The Lord God" (*Adonai-Jehovah*)—a combination of the two greatest names by which God was known under the Old Dispensation. The consequent announcement is that of the advent of the "Mighty One" (R.V.). Yet these words expressive of power and dominion are followed by others which have all the tenderness and grace of a pastoral symphony. We notice—

II. *The tenderness of His shepherdly care.* "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," etc. The hand that meted out the heavens and measured the waters of the deep is that which feeds the flock, and the arm that rules for Him is the arm that gathers the lambs. In those words "His arm shall rule for Him," we have the *grandeur of theology*; but in these words,

“He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd,” we have the *pathos of theology*. The arm that is resistless in its sway, is also unspeakably gentle in its movements, and tender in its embrace. Was there ever such blending of might and tenderness?

It is this twofold truth that men need to learn. They see God’s arm amid the stars, but not among the scattered flock, gathering—caressing—leading. In ancient days, when David was a shepherd, the arm that slew the lion and the bear, and laid Goliath low, might have been seen often caressing the feeblest lamb of the flock. I have seen a man of powerful build—with a rugged countenance that had bravely looked the world in the face, and with strong, horny hands that told the story of hard and continuous toil—take his little infant in his powerful arms, and embrace him as tenderly as if he had been the mother. I have then forgotten all about the man’s strength, his powerful countenance and horny hands, in the vision of his charming tenderness. So have I seen God with the hand that made the heavens, and meted them with the span, and with the arm that has crushed despotism and cast down tyrants, gather the lambs of the flock, and carry them along life’s rough path, where they will never feel the might of the storm and the ruggedness of the way, right up against that bosom wherein throbs the heart of infinite tenderness.

“And carry them in His bosom,” adds the prophet. Ah! I have not read of “*His bosom*” in this context before now. I heard no mention of His bosom when He was spoken of as measuring the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meting out heaven with the span, nor yet when He was spoken of as coming with strong hand, and His arm should rule for Him: it is only when the prophet speaks of *the lambs* that He mentions not only *God’s arm*, but also *His bosom*. The hollow of His hand is good enough for the waters, His span for the heavens, His arm for His subjects, but only *His bosom for the lambs*. This is a tenderness specially adapted to the peculiar need. The Good Shepherd Himself speaks of the *sheep* which has wandered as being carried on the shepherd’s shoulders (Luke xv. 5); here the prophet speaks of *the lambs* as being carried—not on the shoulders, like wandering sheep, but in the Shepherd’s *bosom*, the nearest spot to the Shepherd’s heart.

“And shall gently lead those that are with young,” or, “*those*

184 *The Tenderness of Divine Dealings.*

that give suck" (R.V.). You remember the words of Jacob to Esau, "My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds with me give suck : and if they over-drive them one day, all the flock will die" (Gen. xxxiii. 13, R.V.). The Great Shepherd will not forget motherhood with its cares and burdens. He who will carry the lamb will gently lead the suckling ewe. Thus the arm that is irresistible in its sway is infinitely tender in its embrace, and the hand that is all-powerful in its working is unspeakably gentle in its leading. God's omnipotence can only be equalled by His compassion. He is not only Almighty, but also "almighty to save." Our God who created the heavens has also lifted up the Cross. He who made the world, so loved that world, though fallen far from Him, as to give "His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Shall all the manifestations which God has given of Himself be lost upon us? Shall all that Nature has to tell us of His wisdom and power, all that Providence has to teach us of His goodness and resource, and all that the Gospel has to reveal to us of His grace and love, make no impression upon our hearts and minds, and produce no adequate result in our lives? God forbid! May He grant that the little children who are here this morning, and who have from their earliest days heard of the Saviour's love, may realise how tender that arm is which is ready to embrace them, and how loving that bosom upon which they in their feebleness may lean. And may you who are growing weary of life's journey, and know not how to walk much farther, experience how gentle is the leading, how encouraging the look, and gladdening the smile of "the Great Shepherd of the sheep" who loved us and gave Himself for us!

XLV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—SWEET LIGHT.

“Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.”—ECCLES. xi. 7.

I AM sure that we all very heartily endorse these words. Light is sweet to *the sight*, to *the taste*, to *the smell*, to *the touch*, and to *the hearing*. Now, I suppose that some children present wonder how that can be true. If they will follow me in what I have to say, I think I shall be able to show them that it is so.

We all know that light is sweet to *the sight*, and that it is “a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun”—to *behold*, not to *stare* the sun in the face. The sun will not allow you to gaze rudely at him, but likes you to look at him with due respect. I always feel as if I could take off my hat to the sun every morning when he peeps over the eastern hills, and his bright cheery face comes to sight, and sheds a flood of light all over the land, and fills my home with gladness and my heart with joy. The light is one of the first things that the child greets, and one of the last things to which the aged and dying turn. It is *so* sweet! It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun, because *they were made for the light*. You have all heard of fishes whose ancestors have so long lived in dark caverns of the sea where there was no need of eyes, and where therefore they gradually disappeared in the younger fishes, that now they have no eyes at all. Eyes do not like the darkness except when they are tired, and want to put the shutters up, or rather draw the blinds down. The moment you children are in a dark room you like to close your eyes, as there is no further use for them just then; but when you wake in the morning, and the sun peeps in through the blinds, your eyes once more sparkle with light and joy.

Light is sweet, too, and pleasant to the eyes, because *it makes so many other things appear beautiful*. What is it that has given the charming colour to the flowers, and the rich foliage, which are so pleasant to the eye? It is the sun. When you next see a rose, think of the sun that has been

smiling day by day on the little bud, until at last that beautiful rose appeared in all its charm, so that now it is so pleasant for the eye to look at it, as it reflects some of the subtle beauty it has caught from the light of heaven. Oh how pleasing it is to the sight to look at the woods, the fields, and every blade of grass that points upward, and says, "There, up yonder, is where I get all my beauty from, in the sweet light that comes down all the way to me." It is pleasant to behold the light dance upon the rippling waters of the sea on a summer day, or bleaching the crest of the mighty waves when the wintry storm rages, or when it shines upon the calm waters which reflect the depths and serenity of the blue sky above.

Again, Light is sweet to *the smell*. To return to the rose: it is not only beautiful to the sight, but also very charming in its fragrance. The little child not only looks at it, but also soon learns to smell it. How very sweet is the fragrance of the rose or of the lily! Now, what has given that sweetness to the flower? It is the light that comes all the way from the sun. Without sunlight there would be none of that sweetness.

Again, Light is sweet to *the taste*. I am afraid to ask how many of you like fruit—apples, pears, cherries, strawberries, etc. There is not a child here who does not, I expect. But if you go with the gardener round the garden, and pick some strawberries, he sometimes will tell you—"The strawberries are not *sweet* this year." You ask, "Why? The soil and the plants are precisely the same as they were last year." "Yes," replies the gardener, "but they have not had much sun this year." It is the light that chiefly gives *sweetness* to the fruit.

Again, Light is sweet to *the touch*. Now, without the light there would be none of the beautiful bloom on the fruit, and the most delicate leaves would not have their exquisite smoothness. It is the sunlight that chiefly gives them such a charming polish, which is so cool and pleasant even to the touch.

One word more. Light is sweet to *the ear*. Not that light itself makes the sounds; but it is indirectly the means of producing some of the sweetest music. The bright days are those in which the birds sing sweetest. I know there are exceptions. The nightingale sings in the night, and makes even the darkness musical, but as a rule little birds want light before they can sing. It may be that you have a little canary at home which sings

too much. What do you do to silence the little songster? I am afraid that some of you throw a covering over the cage, and so darken the little fellow's home, and thus make him feel sad, and silence his sweet song. Again, you take the covering off, and as soon as the sweet light reaches him he pours forth his carol which is so exquisitely sweet.

Ah! we owe to the light far more than we can tell! How much happier we are this bright morning than if we were in the thick of a London fog, seeing no one except the one at our elbow, and mistaking him for a murderer, since he looks so black!

Now, the good God who has given us the sun, has given us a greater Sun. This charming light reminds us of Him who is the *Light of the World*—our Lord Jesus Christ. His light enters the hearts of all who love Him, and fills their lives with brightness. We never need be in the dark if Jesus be with us. His love is far more gladdening than the morning light. It is He who teaches us how dearly God must love us, in that He gave Himself for us. From Him comes all that is beautiful in the lives of the holiest men and women. Oh, how we ought to thank God for Jesus, and how ready we ought to be to walk in His light, and to shun all dark and unholy deeds!

XLVI.

SERMON—THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day,” etc.—2 TIM. iv. 8.

THIS is the speech of a robust man—a man with a clear memory and a well-defined hope, who knows how in a few graphic words to epitomise the past and to estimate the future. I have already, in my sermon on the painting “*Mors Janua Vitæ*,”* called attention to Paul's summary of his past life as given in the preceding verse. I will now only note the sudden transition of tense in these verses. In the seventh verse his retrospect of life is emphatic and complete. The consciousness of “something attempted, something done,” breathes in every word. Life to him has *not* been a failure. It has been a victorious conflict, a finished race, and a sustained faith.

* See “Sacred Themes and Famous Paintings.”

But Paul does not linger with the past. With keen vision he views the present, and with the rapidity of lightning he glances into the future. Henceforth there *is* laid up for me *shall* give me *at that day*. Hence, within this small compass are condensed the past, present, and future of a great life—all that it has been, is, or can be. The retrospect heaves with the passionate memory of victorious conflict and successful effort, while the prospect glows with the sublime vision of the final vindication and reward of the righteous Judge. Between these is the present, full of calm confidence and patient expectation.

My subject is *Paul's confidence and expectation*. It is not enough that a man speaks to me in the past tense,—I want to know what he has to tell me about the present and the future. There must be an outlook for a noble life : what is Paul's outlook? Here the object of his confidence and expectation is—“A crown of righteousness.”

1. It is *a crown*. This is no new word. We are familiar with the story of the Olympic games—yes, and familiar with the more absorbing and tragic struggles of all ages in the race for crowns. How many ambitions have been fired, and how many battles have been fought and passions have raged in wild tumult, at the sight of crowns! The names of those who have madly staked their all for the bare possibility of snatching them is legion. Down deep in human nature there is the ambition to be king.

Ah! few things will bear as little scrutiny as the crowns which have rested upon human brows. But there is something peculiar about this crown.

2. This is a crown *of righteousness*. It is the crown of goodness—of regenerated and perfected manhood,—a crown which shall symbolise character and be the highest expression of the man who wears it. It is not something exterior and unrelated to the wearer. Paul believed in that salvation which had not only clothed him with the righteousness of Another—*that he did believe in*: it was the basal truth upon which his hope was founded—but also in a salvation which, by so doing, had, in its marvellous processes, *made a righteous man of him*. This was the greatest miracle of all. His belief in God's grace was none the less because he believed that God's grace could do so much for him. It was he who exclaimed, “Having obtained help of God, I continue unto

this day" (Acts xxvi. 22). It was he who also exclaimed—"By the grace of God I am what I am," and added, "and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. xv. 10). Brethren, the *crown of righteousness* had a great charm for Paul. It was in perfect harmony with his new nature. He did not want a crown if it could not be a crown of *righteousness*.

But what attraction can this crown of righteousness have for those who all their lives have been in eager pursuit of the mammon of unrighteousness! How can it fire their ambition and brighten their expectation? Yet this is one of the distinguishing features of the Gospel, that its rewards are the rewards of *righteousness*, having a charm only for those whose natures have been renewed, and thus brought into sympathy with all that God loves, and who find their highest reward in the righteousness which He bestows—in other words, in finding the consummation of their being, in that they are made partakers of the divine nature. Man's crown at the outset was that he was made in God's image and after His likeness. His crown as a redeemed and restored man will consist in his being *like his Lord*. "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."

3. It is a crown *that is peculiarly Paul's*—"For me" . . . "give me." It would fit no one else. Every man in his own order. This follows from the fact that the crown which God bestows is His highest approval of a perfected life, and partakes of the essential character of that life in that while it is the highest approval of it, it is also the expression of it. This is true of the flower that blooms, it is true of the man who is redeemed and perfected. Paul's crown could not be the crown of any other. It is that which expresses in its rich symbolism the consummation of his salvation, the perfecting of his regenerated nature in all the distinctiveness of his own individuality.

4. It is a crown *that is reserved*—"Laid up." There is nothing of the impatience of the child about this expectation. "He that believeth shall not make haste." As yet Paul is the *undeclared* victor. For the time being it is enough for him that he *is* victor. The grandest portion of David's life was that which intervened between his being anointed as king

and crowned as king—that period when, conscious of a royal calling, he was still satisfied with being a shepherd. He knew that a crown was “laid up” for him, and he could wait for it. The God whose servant had anointed him would crown him when the right moment came. This was Paul’s confidence. How much reserve there is in every great life! Nothing strikes us more than the incompleteness of lives here. There is always something to come—some hope unfulfilled. No attainment is final. Life does not find its full meaning here. Without the assurance of a progressive life yonder, the death of the great man of accumulated resources and mature experience seems an intolerable mystery. He has died without his crown. All along, “man never is but always *to be blest*.” Some find something to sneer at in this: I find something to rejoice in. The coronation is to come. How true is this of the Christian! “If in this life only we have hope in Christ,” exclaims Paul, “we are of all men most miserable.” The hope which Christians cherish is too great for this sphere. This life as a final response to it is a cruel mockery. It is only so far as we realise that there is a grand reserve, that we get reconciled to the sudden and tragic close of so honourable and arduous a pursuit as that of Paul’s. His life did not find its full significance here. There was something *kept*. The crown was kept until he should become kingly enough to wear it, and his brow should bear the stamp of truest royalty. “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” Meanwhile He who has prepared the crown for Paul is preparing Paul for the crown, and meanwhile Paul is a king *incognito*.

5. It is a crown that shall be *righteously bestowed*. The righteousness of the giver is emphasized as well as the righteousness of the crown. There are some hands from which we dare not accept any reward. Paul on this occasion had everything to hope from the righteousness of the Judge. How gloriously would *He* contrast with the unrighteous judge who had condemned Paul to the death! There is righteousness as well as grace about God’s rewards. “If we confess our sins,” exclaims John, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Remember, only a *righteous*—“faithful and just”—Saviour *can* “cleanse us from *all unrighteousness*.” The hope of the sinner who grieves over his own “unrighteousness” must be

as much in the *righteousness* as in the *love* of God. I fear that modern theology—unlike the old—overlooks this. Where would our hope be if we had a doubt about God's righteousness! We would as soon doubt His love—in one sense sooner! If the Cross of Jesus Christ has not revealed God's righteousness, I cannot rest in any love that it reveals. Where *can* we rest until we are assured that as the fruits of His great sacrifice we shall yet become partakers of His *righteousness*, and until the Lord the righteous Judge shall give us a crown that shall symbolise the high distinction of oneness h
Himself?

Here we find the final issue of Paul's life and labours. As he draws near to the close he feels the majesty of being as he never did before. Just when other honours fade do the honours which Christ confers upon His own bloom. When other reputations are bedimmed by the touch of death, then Paul and all the righteous "shine forth as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." At some distance from "St. Peter's throne," in Rome, that symbol of the apostle's spiritual supremacy appears like a cross. It is only when you draw nearer to it, that it gradually discloses itself as a throne. Even so, Paul at this time was so near to the end of his high calling as to lose sight of the cross (which he had hitherto seen so often, and of which he had spoken so much) in the growing splendour of the crown which his Lord had in keeping for him. So too *in our experience* every cross shall turn into a crown, as it has in our Lord's. It is His will that in that respect the Redeemer and the redeemed shall be alike.

6. It will be given at *the right time*. Paul's hour had not yet come. The triumphal procession, or the hour for conferring the honour, was not yet. It would be at the close of the race—or, to use the figure of battle, on the return from the campaign, when the standards carried through many a battle would still be lifted high, and when the triumphal march into the city would take place—that the honour would be conferred.

(a) This expectation sustains trust. Meanwhile, the crown is in *His* custody who will keep it safely and worthily bestow it (2 Tim. i. 12). It is this expectation that supplies the

perspective of vision, and brings the future into significant relationship with the present.

(*b*) It encourages *watchfulness*. "Behold, I come quickly." "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Here again, Paul's personality asserts itself. In this assurance he emphasizes the distinctness of his own individuality. He will maintain to all eternity a separate personal relationship with God. In that day *he* will receive *his own* crown. At the same time there is nothing exclusive about this hope.

7. It is a crown *similar to others that shall be conferred*. Although Paul's relationship to God is distinct from that of every other, yet it runs parallel with that of many others. In one sense, God and his soul stand related to each other as if only they existed in the vast universe; in another, the relationship is only typical of numberless relationships.

Hence the hope of Paul, while intensely personal, is also comprehensive. How many people there are who think that Divine resources will be well-nigh exhausted when they are crowned with a crown befitting them! Paul's hope embraces a large company. The emphasis of the "me" is joined to the comprehensiveness of the "all."

Brethren, Paul's faith may be ours. There is no one here who has learnt to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who may not exult in the apostolic expectation. O thou weary one, who hast longed to be like thy Lord—sinless—loving—gracious—what a prospect is before thee! Thou *shalt* be like Him, and receive His "Well done!" The fight will soon be over, and the race finished, and thine shall be the crown. Thou shalt enter into the joy of thy Lord, a joy for which all that thou hast passed through has but graciously prepared the way. "And he that hath this hope in *Him*, purifieth himself even as *He* is pure."

XLVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—LITTLE, BUT EXCEEDING WISE.

“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.”
—PROV. xxx. 24-28.

LITTLE people generally like to hear of the excellences of little things. On that principle, our subject this morning ought to be very welcome to a large number of us. Big people are apt to forget, but little ones never, that it is possible to be little and wise.

Our text is the words of Agur. You see that he speaks of little things which are not to be overlooked, before he speaks of the nobler-looking creatures which are “comely in going,” and which no one would be likely to ignore. Agur does not seem to have gone to extremes in anything. It was he who uttered the prayer—“Give me neither poverty nor riches.” A minister in Wales once read this for his text. There was a large number of farmers present, devout men who generally responded to the minister’s utterances. He read the words, “Give me neither poverty——” “Amen, *Amen*,” vigorously exclaimed every farmer present. The minister continued, “nor riches.” “Eh, eh,” was the subdued response, in a deep undertone. The last words did not quite express their wishes. Agur, on the contrary, offered both petitions with all his heart. He was a man of a well-balanced mind. Hence in our text he does full justice to *four little things* which most men would be inclined to despise.

He speaks of *four* things. These are quite as many as we can consider this morning.

These four little creatures have certain disadvantages with which they have to contend. There is one disadvantage common to all—namely, *their littleness*. Now, there can be no doubt that there is a drawback connected with being little. The world is so apt to judge excellence by bulk, like the slave-

dealer who expressed great disappointment when he saw the poet Pope, as he himself owned a slave who had a muscle twice as big as the poet's. Now, in the animal world, where might is right, there is doubtless often a great disadvantage felt in being small. Yet there is a great law which compensates for these disadvantages. In our text it is *wisdom* that makes up for littleness—a wisdom which fits each little creature for its particular sphere. Thus it is that a man of six feet in height is elsewhere, in this sacred Book, sent to the ant to consider her ways, and, like her, to be wise. So here Agur speaks of—

I. *The ants*—"a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." Notice that their special disadvantage is that they are *not strong*. They are strong, no doubt, in proportion to their size—for often have we seen them carry heavy burdens—but then they are so very small that their strength is only weakness. Now, to make up for their feebleness, they are very industrious and thrifty. It appears that, in warmer climates than ours, where they are not in a state of torpor or sleep in the winter, as they are here, the ants prepare their food in summer for colder weather. God has given to them the blessings of thrift and unwearied industry, which so grandly make up for their feebleness. Many are the instances given of wisdom and kind consideration in the lives of ants: such as in the construction of their dwellings, the way in which they share in bearing each others' burdens and the unburdened ants make way for the burdened ones. Thus it is not surprising that the Arab parent places an ant in the hand of the new-born child, and offers the prayer that the infant may turn out as wise as that little insect. The ants answer the purpose of their existence. What more can they do? Would that we all did as much!

II. *The conies*—"a feeble folk." They are weak, not like the ants, merely because they are small, but, although much larger, they are weak, and also timid. The creature referred to here is smaller and less pretty than the rabbit, but equally inoffensive, exceedingly timid, and still less able to protect itself. Owing to the structure of its foot it cannot burrow. Hence "the conies" accept the hospitality which the chinks of rocks afford—"yet make they their

houses in the rocks." They are very common along the ridges of Lebanon. They show great sagacity. An old "cony" or "*shaphan*," more experienced than others, acts as sentry, and announces the presence of danger by a shrill whistle, thus warning the others to run speedily into shelter. Thus the younger ones look to the more experienced for the warning voice which tells of peril. So that, although they cannot burrow, or build, they have the wisdom to take refuge in the everlasting rocks which God has provided for their safety. What a beautiful blending of wisdom with helplessness! Would that we, like the "conies," in the hour of danger and helplessness sought shelter in the Rock of Ages, cleft for us, where there is perfect safety!

III. *The locusts*—"have no king." Their disadvantage is that they have no ruler—no one whose experience and knowledge gives him the position of leader. They are wise, however, in making up for this disadvantage—"yet go they forth all of them by bands." They unite together in *large* companies, although they have no recognised king. They go in great numbers, so that they darken the heavens as they fly. One, or a few locusts, are easily destroyed; it is their number that makes them resistless. When they descend upon the fertile plain, they cover everything, and rush on like an overpowering flood, devastating a whole tract of country in a few hours. They go through fire, and through water: thousands of them perish; but in so doing, make it easier for thousands more to proceed on their way. Nothing strikes one more than the persistency with which, notwithstanding every difficulty, they follow one line of march. Now, this disciplined army is led wondrously. For a time, a line of locusts takes the lead, then it turns aside and goes to the rear, allowing the next line then to take its place, and so on until every line at some time or other leads the host. Their wisdom is in their union and co-operation. Thus united in large numbers, and utterly free from all envies and jealousies, these feeble creatures, although without a king, become the terror of nations. How much can be done by united and harmonious effort, let the children learn from the locusts, as "they go forth all of them by bands."

IV. *The spider*. Notice that this little creature is spoken of in the *singular* number, while all the others have been

spoken of in the plural. This one gains nothing from numbers. The drawback in its case is that it is alone. But there is a compensation even here—"taketh hold with her hands." "Spider" is scarcely the right translation. A kind of *lizard* is referred to here. This little creature has its feet so formed that it can run over smooth ceilings like the house-fly. It catches flies ingeniously, and thus, on account of the service it renders, it is welcome in "kings' palaces." It is adapted for its special sphere, and very clever in doing its own work; hence, although small, is wise. How many a child could learn this lesson of quiet, patient, and efficient service from the little lizard which may be found in the chinks of walls in Eastern palaces!

What a blessing it would be if every little child here to-day were but to learn that the gracious God who has fitted the ant, the "cony," the locust, and the lizard for their work, although so little and insignificant in themselves, can also prepare little children for noble service and useful and honourable lives! May we all learn that lesson, and try to live to high purpose, and so glorify our Lord in the lives which He has given us!

XLVIII.

THE JAVELIN AND THE LYRE.

"And David played with his hand as at other times, and there was a javelin in Saul's hand."—I SAM. xviii. 10.

THIS was an interesting period—the period of transition from the Judges to the Kings. Saul was the first King of Israel. He was of imposing appearance, towering head and shoulders above his fellows, but he was not exceptionally brilliant or devout; hence, when at the outset of his public life he met the prophets, and hearing their wild strains as they chanted with voice and accompaniment, he caught their inspiration and prophesied, the people were filled with surprise, and uttered words which in later days became a proverb expressive of wonder—"Is Saul also among the prophets?" He was, too, of a fickle, changeable nature;

hence he did not preserve the high level which he on that occasion reached : he gradually degenerated, and became the prey of jealousy, remorse, melancholy, and suspicion of those who loved him best.

Here, then, we have the fickle, jealous, vehement Saul, with javelin in hand, ready to hurl it at the young man to whom already he owed much, and whose character strikingly contrasted with his own.

David had while yet a youth been anointed king, in preference to all his brethren, by Samuel the prophet. Yet there was no trace of impatience on his part to ascend the throne for which he had been anointed. Many young men would in the circumstances have lost their heads. I have known some lose their heads over far less than this. How far David was conscious of the grand meaning of the anointing, it is difficult to determine ; but it must at least have surprised him, and filled him with strange surmisings. It gave him an outlook into life for his great soul, the grand meaning of which he himself would but gradually realise. Thus he, without any sense of incongruity, went back to the sheep as before. After a while he was sent for to appease Saul in one of his evil moments, and thus to prolong the life that stood between him and the throne. Again he returned to the sheep. Further on, coming as it would seem by accident to the battlefield, when Israel were in conflict with the Philistines, this shepherd youth was sneered at by Eliab, his own brother ; yet he became the champion and the deliverer of his people. Even after that, when appearing before Saul as the deliverer of Israel, with the trophy of victory in his hand, and being questioned, "Whose son art thou, young man?" he answered, with the modesty and reserve of one who was anointed and qualified for a kingly position, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." There is no mention made of the anointing, and nothing approaching self-assertion here. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Now, all this did not come to David as the inspiration of a moment, but as the consummation of his past training. Character is not built up in an hour. As an illustration of this, compare 1 Sam. xvi. 12 with the eighteenth verse of the same chapter. What an opening up of character, and how progressive ! In the field, in the camp, and in the court, David accumulated

experiences and resources for the days when he should become king of Israel.

“David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely.” These words must be read in the light of the other words, “And Saul eyed David” (ver. 9). David’s conduct is the conduct of one conscious of keen and jealous scrutiny. Moreover, he who is to govern the nation must learn first to “behave himself” (1 Sam. xviii. 5, 14, 30). David saw the weak side of the king’s character, and yet was great enough to serve him as the Lord’s anointed one. Only a royal nature could have done that. The lesson of self-government was mastered thus early. David was soon advanced to a high position. One day, when returning from a battle in which he had proved victorious, the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing to meet King Saul . . . and answered one to another as they played and said, “Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.” Saul was angry, and “on the morrow the evil spirit from God came upon him.” Some find a great difficulty in these words; but it behoves us to remember that God does not only send consolation and joy, the blessings of the Comforter, but also sends to men like Saul the spirit of remorse, restlessness, and agony—an evil spirit. “And Saul prophesied in the midst of the house.” The word “prophesy” is an unhappy translation of a term used to denote words spoken under the influence of a good or bad spirit, and in this case to express a “towering frenzy,” or violent raving.

Observe here, as a study of character, that *Saul takes up a javelin*; *David takes up the lyre*, and plays as at other times. The contrast is striking and complete. What a theme for a painter to embody on canvas! The javelin and the harp are symbolic of the two characters, and are predictive of the two lives. The one represents the jealous and pampered hypochondriac, the other the disciplined but buoyant youth—the one man being mad in the grip of an evil spirit, the other calm and fearless in the consciousness of a divine calling. Saul fell at length on his spear; David rose to eminence for all time on his lyre. David *did* take up the sword at other times during life, but in the face of that fact it was

the lyre, the instrument of harmony and peace, that immortalised him. We know him best, not as David the man of war, but as the Psalmist of Israel—yea, of all lands and all ages.

What a reply to Saul's javelin was David's harp! The ancients attributed supernatural power to music. Apollo is represented as subduing everything with his lyre. There was a germ of truth in all these wild imaginings. That harmony to which the lyre should give the true expression is a *divine* power. That music which was in David, which he sang out in his Psalms, and of which he made his harp expressive, was all-powerful. We wish sometimes we had heard David sing one of his own Psalms to the accompaniment of his own harp, and witnessed the inspiration flashing in that eye and the fervour glowing in that countenance, as his fingers made the strings thrill with divinest music. Especially do we wish we had heard him on this occasion, when the very danger of the hour added to the sweetness of the strains and the fulness of the harmony. Do I say danger?—nay, it was only apparent danger. Saul's javelin could not hurt David while he had that harp in his hand, and attuned to such a Psalm. He was immortal at least till he would lay aside that lyre. Saul's javelin probably reached the wall, but not David's heart. You cannot hurt the man who is where God has placed him, and who, the moment you take up your dart of jealousy, takes up his lyre, and gives you music for discord and blessing for cursing.

Brethren, we find here the Gospel *in song*. Minstrelsy becomes here a proof of godliness and a channel of grace. This was playing the harp under unfavourable circumstances. It requires a great deal of godliness sometimes to enable us to proceed on the even and harmonious tenor of our way as if nothing had happened,—as if nothing discordant had ruffled our composure. This was David's way, inspired as he was by the Spirit of all grace, of expressing the truth which in later days became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and was embodied in glorious fulness in all His utterances, His life and His death—"Resist not evil." "The meek shall inherit the earth." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." It is at the feet of Jesus that we can best of all learn the lesson which is taught in this incident—namely, to take up the lyre whenever men take up the javelin against us.

When we hear Him exclaim in His first sermon, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust;" it is then that we realise that "man is likest God when mercy seasons justice"; and when further on we see Christ embody His own teaching in His own life; and, above all, in His death! as He exclaimed in prayer to God on behalf of those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; it is then that we realise that we are "likest" Christ, when even the torturing nails and the piercing spear only draw from our hearts a prayer which shall rise to the height of a benediction. Alas, how few of us know anything about this, and those who do, how little! Ah me! we profess Christ, we talk about Him, and do anything and everything for Him, sooner than follow His example and obey His commandments. Yet these are precisely the things that He requests of us. When shall we learn His law aright, and like David answer the whiz of the javelin with the music of the lyre, and thus overcome evil with good? God grant it may be soon! Then shall the world take knowledge of us that we have been at the feet of Christ and learnt of Him.

XLIX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—MOUNTAIN CLIMBING.

EXOD. xxxiv. 2.

MOSES on this occasion was bidden to climb Mount Sinai, and reach the summit to receive the Law from God, so that he might give it to the people at the foot. He could not become a lawgiver except on two conditions: first, that he should get up early and be ready in the morning; and second, that he should climb the mountain until he reached the very summit. Now, there is very little done in life except on these conditions. A man must begin early and climb patiently, if he would do anything noble here.

We will therefore talk a little about mountain climbing, and apply it to our every-day life.

1. The best time to climb is *early in the morning*, before the heat of the sun is powerful. How true this is of life! The best time to do difficult tasks, and thus climb patiently toward some position of usefulness and honour which we long to occupy, is very early in life. Those who have lived noble lives have as a rule striven when very young.

2. Climbers as a rule *start in high spirits*. They run on, and jump over every brook and boulder, and it would appear from their rapid progress that they would soon reach the summit; but as they proceed they learn to reserve their strength, and thus use it more wisely, as it will be all required before they have finished their task. How often have we seen this in life! Little boys and girls begin life with great enthusiasm. They rush at everything, and spend a great deal of energy unnecessarily, but by-and-by they learn to make the best use of the strength they have, as they will have none to spare after they have done all their duty.

3. Climbers are also apt at first *to take short cuts*. They do not see why they should take the winding or the zigzag path. But they have only to do this a few times to learn that those who made the path knew the way far better than they do, for by taking a short cut they have only got into difficulties and dangers, such as bogs and precipices. So in life, at first we are inclined to make a way for ourselves, and not to follow in the old paths which others have trodden before us, but sooner or later we learn that our own conceit and waywardness have only resulted in trouble, and we look with greater deference to the example of others, who have walked the path of life before us. We get less impatient and more teachable as we go on.

4. Even when climbers follow the right way, they have, at times, *to pass dangerous spots*, where the path narrows near a steep precipice over which some one, perhaps, has at some time or other fallen. On such spots there is often a board fixed bearing words like these:—"Dangerous! a man has fallen over this precipice." Then we have to take warning, and keep as far away as possible from the danger. How often this is the case in life! There are so many dangers—sins and habits—against which we are warned. God has in His Word graciously given us many such warnings. Blessed are those who take warning, and keep as far as possible from the sin which has made others so grievously to fall!

5. Some climbers have *to carry heavy burdens*, while others have not only their burdens carried for them, but *are carried themselves*. So in life. Some are born in such circumstances of poverty and trial that their path is a very steep one, and they have many burdens to carry. Others are born in circumstances of wealth and ease, that they and their burdens are carried most of the way. But how much more noble it is to climb and do our duty well than to be only a burden to others! How much sweeter will be the joy on the summit for all the difficulties which we have patiently overcome on the way.

6. The climbers have occasionally *to pass through cloud and mist* on the way upward, but if they persevere they pass through the cloud *into the clear sunshine above*, and then how beautiful the very clouds will be when beneath our feet! Yea, sometimes we see the lightning flash and hear the thunder roar, but we are above all, and can smile at the storm and the darkness. So if you live long enough you will find that you have to pass through storm and darkness, but if you have the grace to persevere, and trust in your God, you will at last be led through the darkness into light, through trouble into joy.

7. Climbers, too, have *many disappointments* on the way. They ask others how far it is before they reach the summit, and they get many conflicting answers, so that they scarcely know what to expect. Then again they see a lofty crag with a pole stuck on the top of it, and they say, "There, if we can reach that we shall have gained the summit." They reach it, and then find that there are other heights towering far above them which have yet to be climbed. How often this is the case in life! Frequently we think that we have only to go so much further, or to reach such and such a height, and then all

will be done, but we find that we were greatly misled by many to whom we listened, and that the height which we thought was the highest only enabled us to see better how far we had yet to go. Yet we are not sorry, for even our mistaken hopes for a time have helped us to go on. It is well that God has not shown us all the future at the start of life.

8. Many difficulties and dangers will be avoided, and success will be assured, if we have *a safe and experienced guide*. There are some mountains which cannot be ascended safely except with a guide. Our life is a mountain of that kind. We cannot reach the goal unless we have Jesus for a guide. He has given us an example that we should follow His steps. May we all follow Him very closely, and we shall pass safely through every danger and every cloud, and at last stand upon the summit where the light of God for ever rests, and from which we shall review with gratitude all the winding paths of life, and all the difficulties and dangers through which we have passed.

L.

SERMON—CHRIST'S WORDS AND DEEDS.

JOHN x. 21. (R.V.)

“THERE arose a division again among the Jews” because of the words which Jesus had uttered. It is the old story. Jesus Christ has always divided human communities. He brought with Him not peace, but a sword, cleaving in two every multitude that gathered to hear Him. He cannot be ignored. How can He be accounted for? He is the great enigma which calls forth many answers. As the ages pass the conflict rages more and more around the person of Christ. There are many personages in history, as in life, concerning whom we are not obliged to arrive at an opinion. But all hinges upon what we think of Christ. “Who do men say that I the Son of man am?” was the question in which He Himself expressed the importance of a due estimate of His character and life.

In the preceding verses we have one of those hurried estimates of Christ given in the white heat of anger—“He hath a devil, and is mad.” There are a class of men who never fail to come to very speedy and decided conclusions. They arrive at them by a short cut, and very often by astounding leaps. In their creed the Pope or the devil accounts for every enigma. Everything at variance with their preconceived notions is attributed with alacrity to the one or the other

of those august personages. They have a keen sensitiveness to the presence of a devil a long time before he appears, and as a rule point in the direction from which he is least likely to come. The great enemy of man has in all ages had numberless devotees who have professed to conceive a profound dislike towards him, and who shout, "Devil, devil," as loudly as their wide mouths will permit, but in so doing always look the wrong way. How often did men more than eighteen centuries ago with the devil in their heart point to the spotless Son of God and exclaim, "He hath a devil"?

It was so on this occasion. But this method of ignobly shelving high claims which could not be disproved, or adequately repudiated, could not satisfy the multitude. The explanation that Jesus had a devil had become a commonplace, but had carried with it no conviction in being frequently repeated. There were keen-sighted men in the crowd who saw through it all—"Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" There is true philosophy in these words uttered hurriedly by unknown speakers in that surging throng. Some of the world's best utterances are anonymously recorded. How often have the wisest things been uttered by men and women hidden and lost in a crowd? We have heard the voices, but have not known the speakers. In such instances the remark has often been brief, and the question curt, but they have stuck to our memories, and have lived in our lives. They had a wider application than the speakers ever imagined. A well has been opened—a spring tapped as if with the divining rod of a peasant. The words recorded in our text were at first uttered by some one who thought he was speaking only for the moment, and not for the ages. It was not one of the elaborated sentences of the Rabbis which was reserved for a great occasion, and which the author sat down to write deliberately as a specimen of thought and style. It was struck off at white heat—a spark only, but yet a spark which burnt the tongue of the blasphemer and slanderer, and sent them sneaking dumbly out of sight. This utterance was intended to repel a calumny and disprove a lie, rather than to express the whole truth in positive form; and right nobly did it accomplish its allotted task.

The truth suggested by our text is—*That words and deeds are tests of character which men should not ignore.* These

tests are applied here to Jesus Christ. The demand made in our text is that the estimate we form of Him should be in harmony with, and adequately account for, His words and deeds. We consider:—

I. Our Lord's *speech* as a test of His character—"These are not the sayings of one possessed with a devil." Some one possibly smiles incredulously and asks—"Who can judge a man by his speech?" Napoleon the Great held that speech was made to conceal thoughts and purposes. But did he succeed in confining speech within these ignoble limits? For a time and in certain cases he doubtless did. But what of those peevish and angry utterances of his at St. Helena? As we read the story we are forced to exclaim, "Oh, man, thy speech bewrayeth thee!" That great actor was no longer able to conceal himself, when he fretted and fumed and swore in helpless peevishness. Watch a man's utterances through and through, and he cannot hide himself from you. He may at times flatter himself that he has succeeded in the attempt, but his speech so wronged and misused at length plays traitor with him in return, and reveals what manner of man he is. Speech, graciously given by God to man alone on earth, as a means by which he shall be able to express truth, will not suffer itself evermore to be made the degraded instrument of diplomacy and deceit. It will at times involuntarily start and assert itself. Sooner or later the diabolic will be sure to express itself in the speech of the man possessed with an unclean spirit. There is also a subtle expressiveness and beauty in the native speech of goodness, which evil can never adequately imitate. Well might the people have said on this occasion, "These are not the words of a man that hath a devil." Listen to the words which Jesus had just uttered. "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring," etc. These words even to us throb with true shepherdly tenderness, though we miss the melting pathos of that voice which uttered them, but which those who made their protest on this occasion had heard for themselves.

But let us give this test a wider application. In the records of the best lives we find words uttered in haste, unpremeditated, or under great provocation, which needed an apology, since they revealed the weaker and less noble side of character. When did Christ utter such words? In speech He was never "overtaken in a fault." His disciples often were, but He

never. Surely, in this respect as in many others, "Never man spake like this man"!

Again, see if there were immature words uttered at the outset of His ministry, which revealed the crudities of youth, or an imperfect estimate of that ministry to which He had committed His life. Was there ever anything said by Him which betrayed a wrong motive, or defective moral teaching? Have succeeding ages been able to find a flaw in His doctrine, or have they been able to add a single virtue to those which He taught men? Is there any high hope or noble purpose excluded from, or false expectations or ignoble motives included in, His teaching? Have there ever been higher demands for purity, and yet a more tender sympathy toward those who have lost it, than in the teaching and example of Jesus Christ? Did His utterances ever fail either in the tenderness of charity or the incisiveness of truth? Have any words lived like His, or living, exerted such a sanctifying, healing and ennobling influence over human lives? Let us refer to one or two features of His incomparable utterances.

What does he say about *God*? No teacher of men can be silent on this great theme. Necessity is laid upon all to acknowledge or deny God. One of the first questions asked every teacher is—"What have you to tell us about God?" A man may smile, and say, "I do not believe that there is a God," but in any case he must *say* it. The world demands one answer or another to the all-important question. What has this Great Teacher to say about God? Has any other teacher brought Him so near to man? He teaches men that God is tender and patient toward us, solicitous concerning our highest interests. He teaches that He is our Father, and bids us trust in Him and seek to be like Him, and thus glorify Him. He tells men many tender, loving things concerning God,—that He clothes the lily, feeds the sparrow, numbers the hairs of our head, and, finally, "that He so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Has any teaching concerning God given such light and joy to the human heart as this? Verily, "These are not the sayings of one possessed with a devil!"

Again, what has He to say about *man*? Pope says that "the proper study of mankind is man." We do not adopt that sweeping statement, but we believe that, next to God,

the most important theme for human teaching is man, in his relationship Godward and manward. Has any one ever revealed to man the possibilities of our being like Jesus Christ? Has any one ever been so faithful in denouncing sin, or so uncompromising in His claims for purity, as He? Again, has any one breathed such a spirit of hopefulness in the heart that is troubled? has any one given such an estimate of God's pity and love, as Jesus Christ? Has any one so blended the revelation of human sin with that of Divine love as our Lord? What aims, what inspirations, what hopes are begotten in men by His teaching? By the graveside of our dearest and best ones can any assurance compare with His—"I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in Me shall never die"? In the hour of death, will any words come to us with such soothing sweetness—like the chime of evening bells as they shall make the darkness harmonious, and death only a sleep—as His—"Because I live ye shall live also"? "Whence hath this man these things?" Does the sweetest message the world has ever heard, and the only Gospel that has brought life and immortality to light, come from heaven, earth, or hell? "Verily this is the Son of God." "These are not the words of one possessed with a devil." We consider:—

II. Our Lord's *deeds* as tests of His character. "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" It is the prerogative of the devil to close men's eyes, not to open them. It is not so much the miracle of giving sight as the beneficent nature of it that stamps it as *undiabolic*. Every beneficent purpose, as well as every good and perfect gift, comes from above, from the Father of lights, and by no chance from beneath, from the prince of darkness. What was the tendency of Our Lord's deeds? Precisely the same as His teaching. Did He not always go about doing good? There is a harmony of goodness and of benevolence in His works from the beginning to the close. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" was His own challenge. The world still loves to look at that life. Even sceptics vie with each other to-day in their admiration of it. They often pause in profound admiration of Christ's goodness. What can account for this great Personality who so speaks, and so acts, except it be that He came from heaven? Was there ever such pity toward the fallen, such patience toward the erring, such persistent hopefulness concerning the lost, as in Jesus Christ? Above all, is there anything for power and

tenderness to compare with His cross? What can take its place? Can anything in human language be so pathetic, so inspiring, as the assurance that breathes in the words which have been repeated ten thousand times at the sight of that cross—"Who loved me and gave Himself for me"?

And here we come to the root of the whole matter. Theology, history, and moral philosophy can all apply their tests; but no test can compare with that of our own experience. Our experience may fail to appeal powerfully to others, but nothing is so convincing to ourselves.

Among Our Lord's disciples are the noblest men and women whom the world has ever known, and they attribute all their blessings to Him. Eighteen hundred years ago He said, "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." He stands or falls by such promises as these. But there are tens of thousands to-day, to say nothing of those who have left their testimony behind them, who say that He has fulfilled these promises in their experiences even in the most crucial moments. This conviction enables them to bear all their burdens, and to do manfully all their duties, however arduous. Moreover, their last song in death is about His love, and the last name they whisper with their fleeting breath is His. Why should Jesus of Nazareth occupy this unique place? If He be not God, then this fact is nothing less than the crowning miracle and wonder of all ages. How grandly significant that, just when every one else fails, Jesus is nearest and most precious! "Truly this is the Son of God!" In Him alone I find the sanctifying, cheering, and sustaining power that can regenerate me, and redeem the world; and in His presence my whole soul goes forth in the twofold confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and "My Lord and my God!" My friends, the question which comes to each of you to-night is—"What think ye of Christ?" Each has to answer it for himself. Oh, what eternal issues depend upon the estimate we form of Him! Life and death hinge upon your relationship with Him. There are some of you who hitherto have not come unto Him that ye might have life. There are others of you who have already trusted in Him as your Saviour, and who have learnt the blessed reality of those words—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."

LI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—DORCAS AND HER WORK-BASKET.

“And all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewed the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.”—ACTS ix. 39.

DORCAS was dead, and poor women wept after her. A great deal of light had just vanished out of their life, and they felt keenly what a friend they had just lost. Each of the widows knew how much Dorcas had done for her, but not till all of them had met did they realise *how many* Dorcas had similarly blessed. They little imagined how busy she had been at work, until they began to count the number of garments she had made. Each widow related how many things Dorcas had made for her, and so on, until at last everybody wondered how one pair of hands could have done so much. When Peter came they showed him the coats she had made. They did not think it beneath the dignity of an apostle to look at the neat tucks, and the small even stitches in those garments—not that Peter was much of a judge, but they felt that he would be sure to appreciate such beautiful work as hers, or he was not worthy of being an apostle. The garments, too, were not very stylish, but the widows knew how useful they had been and how well they wore.

What a thrilling story each of those widows could tell!—but the garments were still more eloquent. The hands which had been so busy were now still, but every stitch in the garb of the poorest woman present had much to say, and wanted to speak so that Peter might hear—yea, and so that we might hear nearly two thousand years later—what a good woman she was, whose life was too precious just then to be lost!

But I have sometimes imagined that not only the women and the garments which they wore had much to say on this occasion, but that there was a very earnest conversation carried on elsewhere. There was just the *unfinished* garment which Dorcas had laid down—for it is seldom that such workers are allowed to do all they want to do before they die—there is generally something left requiring finishing by other hands. I have no doubt there was on this occasion some garment that had not been quite completed when death arrested those busy fingers. The needle had been thrust into the material somewhere near the last stitch, ready to continue its task, and

there was a little thread in it still unused. There was a tone of regret on the part of the thread that it had not been all used up by Dorcas, and yet it had the satisfaction of knowing that it had led the way for the thread which had been used, and was itself ready to be taken up into the work at any moment, and that though, perhaps, other hands would now use it, yet it would go to complete the work which Dorcas had so nobly begun. Besides, there was an apostle present; perhaps some miracle might yet be wrought by which Dorcas would be permitted to complete her unfinished tasks. How great then would its joy be in being used little by little until all was gone!

Then, again, I can imagine quite a busy conversation going on in *the work-basket*. The thimble had much to say about the number of needles it had known during the time it had been in Dorcas's service, many of which had been broken or blunted in the work, but all of which had been glad that they were permitted in any way to help her in her labours. Then a pair of scissors would tell its experience of all the different materials it had cut, and what a kind loving owner it had lost in Dorcas. Never again could it hope to be engaged in so glorious a task, but it was thankful that it was ever permitted to be of use in such an exalted service. How many others would have been glad of the opportunity, but had never had it!

There were keen regrets expressed by some needles that they had not done more, especially by those that had grown rusty in the basket, and by others which, although they had been a long time in Dorcas's possession, had not as much as once done good service in sewing poor widows' garments. How much they would have given now if it had been otherwise!—but the opportunity was now lost. There were some skeins of thread, too, which had been left unopened. Theirs was not the joy of that other skein which had been almost entirely used. They could, however, rejoice in the fact that it was owing to lack of opportunity, and not unwillingness on their part, that they had not been more helpful to Dorcas in her noble work.

* * * * *

But what joy must have been visible everywhere when Dorcas was restored to life! How every widow wiped away her tears! The half-finished garment rejoiced to know that Dorcas would soon again take it up, for she never could be

idle! The dwellers in the work-basket became joyous with the prospect of renewed service. Even the rusty needles grew brighter with the hope of yet becoming useful. The unused skeins quivered with emotion at the prospect of possible service; the old thimble felt quite young again for work, while the old pair of scissors, which had done so much, was all on edge with keen excitement. All learnt the lesson that the only life worth restoring is the charitable and sympathetic; that the only life worth living is the useful, and that he who would be greatest must be servant of all.

What a welcome Dorcas received from them when she next opened her basket! They all glistened with delight, and resolved to do all they could in the future to make work a pleasure to Dorcas. No rusty or brittle-tempered needle, no thread ready to snap or get into a tangle through perversity, nor anything idle or useless, was to be found in her basket after this; but they all vied with each other in doing good, for they had learnt the lesson that nothing was so noble as a useful life spent in the service of Jesus Christ, and for the good of the poor and the afflicted. May every child learn that lesson to-day, and resolve by God's grace to accept as the motto of life these noble lines—

“ Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, and to wait.”

LII.

SERMON—PAUL IN ARABIA.

“ But I went into Arabia.”—GAL. i. 17.

OUR text supplies us with the only clue we have concerning an important period in Paul's life—namely, the years immediately following his conversion. These words were uttered by Paul in self-defence. Necessity had been laid upon him to defend himself and his apostleship—the greatest possible trial to a man of his exquisite delicacy of feeling. It had been affirmed by certain Judaising teachers in the Galatian Church that Paul had not been called by Christ to the apostleship, and further, that he had not been taught by Christ. Moreover, false and unworthy motives were attributed to him.

In this Epistle the Apostle replies to these charges. The

first verse supplies the keynote to the whole Epistle—"Paul an apostle *not of men*." Paul affirms that he had not only *been called* by Christ, but that he had also *been taught* by Him. He had, it was true, missed the three years' training which the other apostles had received from Christ while He was yet with them in the flesh, yet He had passed through another training none the less Divine. "I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: *but I went into Arabia.*"

Now, this visit of Paul's to Arabia has been called his "first essay of foreign labour," and many accept these words as referring to a missionary visit of Paul to Petra, the metropolis of Aretas in Petræan Arabia. Against this supposition is to be placed the fact that no reference to such a mission is made by Luke the historian, or by Paul elsewhere. But accepting these words as referring to Paul's withdrawal from public gaze for secret communion with God, it is quite consistent with the usual reserve of Scripture concerning all the great secrets of the inner life that no details should be given of what was so sacred in the apostle's life and experience.

It is also highly probable, to say the least, that Paul in using the word Arabia would attach to it the *Hebrew* meaning of the word, and would not use it in the vague and inaccurate sense in which some of the ancients used it. If so, the word could not have referred to Petra, or to any district in the neighbourhood of Damascus, but to that which was strictly Arabia—the Peninsula of Sinai.

It is important also to remember that Paul made this reference to himself in reply to the Jews, who accused him of having received his message second-hand. Apart from this, probably, he never would have uttered these words, and the world would have been without this valuable hint concerning a very important period of his life. Some of his most striking and valuable utterances were wrested from him in this way. Next to the life of our Lord, the life of Paul presents us with the most striking instances of this.

Elsewhere, when men professed to trace back the apostle's inspiration to a mere human source, his whole nature was aroused into a supreme effort of self-vindication, as he exclaimed (Revised Version), "I must needs glory, though it is not expedient." He did not choose, from preference, to do it, but he could not help it. Paul was not a spiritual

parasite, getting all his life from other natures. He had a life of his own. Of all second-hand things nothing is so ignominious as a second-hand gospel. His reply on this occasion to the paltry men who accused him of this was, "Nay, I conferred not with flesh and blood . . . I went into Arabia"; in other words, "I did not learn my theology at the feet of Peter or John or James, but I went to Arabia, and there, where Moses received his training and his commission for his great work, and where, in later days, the whole people of Israel gathered at the foot of the terrible mount to hear God thunder forth His Law,—where, when the Divine voice was too terrible to be heard again, God wrote His Law on two granite slabs, and sent them to the people by the hands of Moses,—there, too, where Elijah, in the hour of helplessness, received new strength and a new message,—there, where God's greatest lawgiver and His greatest prophet were trained,—there, in the most ancient and most sacred spot in the world's history, I was trained for my apostleship." What an answer was this to the Jews, who accused him of having his gospel from man!

These, so far as I can see, were the circumstances which occasioned the utterance of these words in the first place. But what meaning have they for us? This at least:—

1. That when the great crisis called conversion came in Paul's life, *he did not rush upon the great duties of apostleship*, and repeat flippantly at second-hand what others said. He withdrew into the august solitudes where God had spoken to His people in ancient days, and there paused to listen to the same inspiring voice. There is a danger to which men are apt to fall in great centres of activity—that is, to conclude that the pausing moments of life are the least valuable. This chapter in the life of Paul is a rebuke upon such a conclusion. How often are the pauses the most profitable moments,—those in which we lay broad and lasting foundations for years of toil! It is significant that none of the apostles were sent forth until they had passed through about three years of careful training. And what training that must have been, with such a Teacher—and during that period when, to use the words of one of their own number, they "saw" with their "eyes," they "beheld," and their "hands handled" of "the Word of life"! And most of what they "saw," "beheld," "handled," was not on those public occasions recorded in the Gospels but in the privacy of their communion with Jesus, the history

of which was only written in their memories and graven in their hearts. What He told them in *secret* they preached upon the housetops. How often, indeed, in all ages, has the training of the greatest men been in obscurity and in silence! Elijah, John the Baptist, Luther, Paul, and most of the world's noblest men, have been trained in solitude for life's work. "The streams that turn the clappers of the world arise in solitary places."

In solitariness all those passive energies are developed which are our sustaining power in exhausting toil. There we get the reserve from which we draw subsequently—the main-spring which gives motion to the whole machinery. Hours spent like Paul's in Arabia are those which above others supply a stability to character. The foundations of our being lie deep and hidden. The seed germinates and sends forth its first energies in the dark and out of sight. So amid those inspiring solitudes the apostle derived a power and an energy which in later years never left him.

Have we our Arabias? Have we had our enforced inactivity arising from different causes—sickness, bereavement, old age? Life is poor, indeed, without such pauses!

2. Here, too, *Paul could not separate himself from the great past.* He would not if he could, hence he went to Sinai. He knew God could not be inconsistent. That is the one limit to His omnipotence: "He *cannot* deny Himself." Hence Paul did *not flee from* Judaism. He *went back to its very source.* What thrilling interest those rugged crags, pointing with their rocky fingers to the heavens, must have had to the great apostle! Versed as he was in the history of his people, how everything in those ancient secluded wilds would become sacred to him! There God in olden times had touched the earth and made it smoke. The apostle, after fifteen hundred years, seemed to feel the throb of that touch. It came to him like an electric current along the chain of centuries, losing nothing by the distance. The granite rocks seemed to him still to reverberate the sound of God's voice. This was the focal point of God's revelations to man in ancient times. The place must have been as sacred to the great apostle as it was to the great law-giver,—indeed, more so! There was no need for a flaming bush and an audible voice to convince *him* that he was standing on holy ground. It was sacred to him in the highest and truest sense,—by virtue of great and hallowing associations. How he must have felt at this crisis in his history,—what he

needed most to feel, separated as he was from so much that he had always deemed sacred,—that he was united by sacred bonds to Moses, that beneath the surface (however varying in aspect that was) their convictions intertwined. He went back to the very spot where the Law was given in order to find the Gospel there.

How greatly Paul must have been enriched by this discipline! Dean Stanley, following Chrysostom, intimates that in the name "Hadjar," or rather "Chadjar," by which Paul must have heard the Arabs of the desert call Mount Sinai, he must have found the first suggestion of his striking allegory—the only one in the New Testament—in the Epistle to the Galatians (iv. 24—26). There is a difficulty, however, which we should not ignore: that is, the improbability of Paul, even in allegorical language, treating "Hagar"—"a wanderer"—as synonymous with "Chadjar"—"a stone." Be that as it may, who can tell what "visions and revelations" Paul received in that solitary and wild region! There is one suggestion which I would make with some caution—namely, that the greatest revelation of his life was granted him in this region and at this period. Supposing Paul's conversion to have been about A.D. 41 (as is highly probable), and that he wrote his second Epistle to the Corinthians about A.D. 57-8, the experience to which he refers in the twelfth chapter of that Epistle as having occurred "fourteen years ago" takes us back to his stay in Arabia. Is it not, indeed, in sublime harmony with God's past dealings that such a vision should have been granted Paul there? That was the place where visions had been given to Moses and Elijah, the greatest lawgiver and the greatest prophet. Is it strange that the greatest apostle should have received a similar vision at the same place? It was amid the rugged scenes of Patmos that John in later years received his apocalyptic visions. Is there not a strange significance in these apparent coincidences?

Now, these are striking and extraordinary experiences, but in another sense they are typical of other lives. They supply, in grand and rugged outline, principles which apply in a less degree to our miniature lives. It is in solitude that those passive energies are developed which are our sustaining power in our active hours. It is then that we gather the reserve force from which we subsequently draw in times of need. Hours spent like Paul's in Arabia are those which supply

stability to character. The foundations of our being lie deep and hidden, and it is in our deepest and most hidden experiences that they must be laid. Poor is that life which has in it no pauses, no hours of loneliness and of solitude! The hush of life is as needful as the rush of it for the development of character and the growth of Christian graces. This is an age in which men live at high pressure. The expenditure of force amid the dashing and whirling activities of commercial enterprise and professional competition is sometimes appalling in the extreme. The season of relaxation is the safety valve which saves our social life from bursting up. As it is, human character is abnormally developed. Human intellect is sharpened into so many points, but there is less volume of humanity in the individual character than in other days, when there was less hurry and impatience in life. To-day there are more *specialists*, but fewer *men* than formerly. Our *religious* life, too, often derives its tone from the secular. Everything must be done by steam, and at sixty miles an hour. Seldom has Christianity been more active, and never more fussy, than to-day; but amid all the whirl of organisations there is often but little space left for the growth of those passive virtues from which all active graces must draw their energy and life.

It is a part of the divine economy of things to compensate for the drawback thus associated with what is a glory of our religion if not carried to excess—its active and energetic phase. Thus He sometimes lays His hand upon us and bids us pause, think, and be quiet. He sends to us *enforced* seclusion, if we will not voluntarily accept it at times as a means of grace,—yea, He sends even sore trouble and bitter isolation, by which calmer thought, deeper knowledge of truth, wider views of duty, and the gentler graces of patience, meekness, and love become our possessions—possessions by which our experience is enriched and our life ennobled. Who, then, shall complain if in his life there have been seasons of even *enforced* withdrawal from much that is dear, if as the result he has been fitted for enlarged service and nobler consecration? Believe me, there are “Arabias” in every noble life, where men are brought into touch with lonely and rugged experiences, but by which God prepares them for new apostleships and high missions. God grant us such blessings, though they come to us often in disguise, and even in the unpromising aspect of solitude and mystery!

LIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ABOUT "RUBBISH."

"And there is much rubbish."—NEH. iv. 10.

"AND there is much rubbish." That was one reason which the people of Judah gave for not rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. It had been burnt to the ground: even the stones had been consumed. There was nothing but rubbish where the palaces had once stood. Yet Nehemiah was determined that Jerusalem should rise from its ashes. But he had a great deal with which to contend. There were, first of all, the sneers of Sanballat, Tobiah, and others. These were hard enough to bear, but still more trying was the lack of enthusiasm and of courage on the part of the men of Judah, who were to do the work. If *they* had no confidence, who could? Yet, they said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall."

There was much reason in this complaint. It was far more difficult to build the walls than if there had been no ruins. Any builder present would tell you that he would much prefer building in a field, where there was nothing but level ground with which to begin, than amid the ruins of former buildings, especially if every stone, as in this instance, had been burnt into powder. Often the builder, in sending in his tender, puts down a large sum for clearing rubbish, before he begins his estimate for the building itself.

I now want to apply that fact to your life. Character-building is very much like wall-building. *It is much easier to build up a good character if you have no rubbish with which to begin.* Now, in wall-building, even when the ground is clear, a little rubbish is sure to gather as the work goes on, although some builders calculate so closely what is required for the building, as to take nothing beyond that to the spot. But where there are ruins of other walls, the difficulties are greatly increased. So with reference to the building up of a noble life. What you build up in your earliest days is built on fresh ground. There is doubtless some digging of foundations necessary, but no pulling down of walls, or carting away useless materials, in having to unlearn a great deal of evil and folly which has been already learnt. We are, therefore, very anxious that, at this interesting period in your life, you should *not* be heaping rubbish together which you will have to take away later on,

before you can build up a character which God can accept, and of which you therefore need never to be ashamed.

Now, we often preach to those who have made a sad wreck of life. They have been all the while gathering together material of a kind, and building up after a fashion, but they have built upon shifting soil, and with poor material; and now, when trial has come upon them, the storm has beaten down their frail structure, so that there is nothing left but the ruin of their hopes and of their toil. We preach even to such, for there is hope that they may even yet build up something of which God can approve; but they will first of all have persistently to take away a good deal of rubbish—evil thoughts, evil habits, and a bad reputation. Thank God! I have seen men who have succeeded in doing this; but I want to tell you that there is a far more excellent way than that: it is to begin when you are young, by God's help, to build up a character which you will never need to undo. See to it how you begin. There are often a great many rubbishy things carried even into the child's life; but in that respect I think the times are far better now than they used to be. Almost all the silly stories about bogies and ghosts, which were invented by fools and repeated by still greater ones, have vanished out of our nurseries. You are all taught better things. It is wonderful how good men and women are able to produce so many interesting and instructive books for little folks as we have to-day. Use them well, and they will throw a great deal of light upon the stories and teachings of the Bible, and teach you much that will be helpful to you in building up a good and consistent life. If there are any of you who read other books which are not good in their influence, I hope you will remember that you are only collecting rubbish, which will have again to be taken away before you can do any good and lasting work. Begin well; lay the foundation deep; see that you make all to rest upon the one rock—Christ Jesus. Use the best material—whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. If your life be made up of these Christian graces, Jesus will accept it as a little sanctuary which shall bear His name, and which He can use for His service and for His praise. Such are the temples in which He delights to dwell; and, thank God! if we but seek for ourselves this high honour of being "built up a spiritual house," we shall, by His wisdom and love, be "builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

LIV.

SERMON—MARY AT THE SEPULCHRE.

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre, weeping,” etc.—JOHN XX. 11—18.

WE little realise how *much light goes out of the world with some lives*. “There was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,” write Matthew and Mark in their record of the Crucifixion. This symbolised a great fact. We know how the vanishing of one life may be to us like the setting of the sun : many of us have passed through such an experience. No star twinkled through the gloom, but a great darkness and the horror of it descended upon us. Every beautiful sight, every object that had charmed the eye, disappeared in the universal gloom. What darkness that was when the Christ died ! After the Evangelists have recorded the burial, they pause and halt in the narrative. The record only moves again when the light begins to return. “As it began to dawn toward the first day” are the words with which Mark starts anew ; so, too, in different phrase, the other Evangelists emphasize this new starting-point.

Again, observe *the revealing power of a great trial*. It takes great or trying events to reveal all the strength and beauty which otherwise lie dormant in some characters. The breeze of summer brings music out of the Eolian harp, but only the storms of winter can awake the mighty deep into harmonious symphony and make the trees of the wood clap their hands in grand accompaniment. So it required great tests to reveal the devotion of these grand heroic women toward their Lord.

This expression of devotion was *very human, and supremely womanly*. There are some here who know something of the feeling that prompts people to visit the sepulchres where lie their departed ones, with whom the brightness for a time at least vanished from their eye, the smile from their countenance, the ring from their voice and the elasticity from their tread. Especially is this the case if the grave has been lately dug, and the earth has scarcely claimed as its own even that which was mortal of those to whom the hearts of the living still tenaciously cling. There is nothing morbid about this, but something beautifully human. How significant—how full of strange emotion—the first visit to the grave where our dearest lie !

This was a *very beautiful and expressive protest against mortality*. The Oriental mind found relief in such an act as a protest against death, as well as a token of the loving homage of the living to the memory of the departed. The Oriental mind could little tolerate the thought of the body seeing corruption. This was one way in which what was immortal in them asserted itself. As the result of this persistent anointing, we can to-day look at the face of one of the Pharaohs before whom Moses stood. Beneath all this anointing was the conviction that man was *too noble to pass away into decay*. In the proposed anointing of the Christ by the women, we find the mightiest protest against the corruption of the grave; but God would yet accomplish the same end in His own way.

John, however, centres his narrative in one person: Mary's love was the most intense and the most persistent. From a comparison of the Gospels it would appear that this Mary of Magdala was the first to enter the Garden; that then she hurried back to meet the other women, and then hastened to the city. This was her second visit, having told the tale to Peter and John. Meanwhile the other women had tarried at the grave and seen the angel. The visit of Peter and John was apparently brief; that of the women long and patient. Peter and John had probably left before Mary had returned. The last to leave was Mary.

"But Mary stood" (or Revised Version, "was standing")—*stationed herself*—words expressive of resoluteness. Up to this point there was a measure of companionship in sorrowful watching among the mourners,—now we reach *the point of isolation*. Others had accepted the theory that Jesus had been taken away, and had left with sorrow, but Mary was more persistent, since to her more had been forgiven. Thus, in Mary we have one who carried a common sorrow far into the solitude of her own life. There is a sorrow of the community which is largely confined to the social circle, and which only in a secondary sense—and as a divided weight—becomes an individual burden. It was not so here. The sorrow of this little community now became Mary's, as if it were exclusively her own.

"Looked into the sepulchre"—next to *Him* she would see *the place* where He had lain: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," was an appeal to a similar feeling in the women.

“As she wept.” According to the three synoptic Gospels, the other women were afraid, or “affrighted.” Mary *wept*. There is nothing new in weeping at the grave. It is the old place of weeping. More tears have been shed there than anywhere else. The grave is one of the greatest enigmas of our earthly existence. It is the cold anticlimax of life, against which we protest with all the energies of our being. Even Jesus wept there.

But the circumstances are exceptional in this case. Others have wept because the grave is tenanted; Mary wept *because it was empty*, and because the ministry of love in anointing the dead body seemed no longer possible.

At length, by steady gazing, she found that the grave was *not so empty as it had appeared*. There was no dead body in it, but there were there two of God’s angels. This is in harmony with the whole recorded life of our Lord. We get a glimpse into the angelic world at every great turning-point. Angels merge out of the unseen at His birth, temptation, passion, resurrection, ascension. These were moments when the spiritual world crowded in upon the visible, and could not be entirely shut out.

Mary *saw them*. Peter and John did not. They were in too great a hurry. Men do not see angels in such a mood—they only see “linen clothes,” and the like.

“They say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?” I have had occasion previously to notice that tears upon a human countenance are a profound mystery to angels. But it was a *misuse* of the mysterious capacity to weep that perplexed them now. Weeping in this case *they knew* was out of place. “Why weepest thou?” are words of challenge. We should be able to give a reason for our tears. It is a step in the right direction sometimes when we are asked to define our sorrow, and to justify our grief.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” was Mary’s reply. These words reveal, among other things, the soul’s power of appropriation—“*My Lord*.” This is the greatest paradox of being, that finite man or woman can claim the Infinite God as his or her possession. “Thou art *my God*,” said the psalmist,—“*My Lord*,” said Mary.

But here, too, we have *weeping inadequately explained*. Mary’s data are wrong. “They have taken away my Lord.” How much more the angels knew about it than Mary! It

was one of their brotherhood that rolled the sealed stone away, and sat upon it in sublime irony!

"I know not where they have laid Him." She thought she knew all up to this point. How little she knew where her ignorance began! How inadequate our explanation of our grief when we are challenged!

There is *an impatience* in the answer. She has silenced the angels with a false theory, and hastily withdraws, or "turns round," and waits not for the reply. She would recoil into the solitude of her own grief. It is a terrible thing when sorrow becomes reflective, and turns in upon itself. But as Mary turns there is another Presence near. He repeats the question of the angels. How often does a question inadequately answered meet us over and over again!

Now it is asked by *One who has Himself wept* by the grave side. There is a tear in this tone of inquiry. The same question is asked, but, oh, how differently now! The "Why" on His lips is a sob with a note of interrogation after it. We know something of how much additional meaning some questions can press into old questions.

Remember in passing, as a significant fact, that these are the *first recorded words* of Christ after the resurrection—"Woman, why weepest thou?" etc. What a reflection for sorrowing ones!

There is here also the additional question which completes the first. "Why weepest thou? *Whom seekest thou?*" Sorrow is stupefying. There was a danger for Mary to forget her search in the steady gaze, becoming more vacant as it was continued. "Why stand ye gazing into heaven?" were the words addressed to the disciples at our Lord's ascension; and Mary, gazing into the grave, was in a similar danger. Thus our Lord supplements the original question with a second. There is a recognition here not only of grief, but also of *search*. The question of the angels threw her in upon her sorrow; the further question of Christ awakened within her the recollection of her quest. It aroused the spirit of search and of expectation anew in Mary. Perhaps there was danger of her giving up at length and turning in finally upon her sorrowful thoughts. It is a sad thing when, in our sorrow, we forget the aim of life, and lose the inspiration of hope. This takes all the buoyancy out of life. Our Lord would ever save us against this.

Observe Mary's answer as contrasted with her answer to the angels. To the angels she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." This is sorrow in *its reflective, despairing form*. On the contrary, her answer to Jesus is—"Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." This is sorrow in *its resolute and hopeful aspect*.

"I will take Him away." She could not have carried Him; yet she saw no difficulty. They say that when people are mad they can do well-nigh anything. There is a frenzy of love which is well-nigh omnipotent. There is yet hope of Mary. It is a grand thing when sorrow has not taken all the courage out of us, and when there is a voice that comes to us, awakening within us heroic resolves once more, and breathing a new hope into our soul.

Few sights are so pathetic as that of a brave heroic spirit bereft of its vision, yet speaking forth in its own native accent. Now Mary's former, active, daring spirit reasserts itself—but how changed now!

The Christ *can hide Himself no longer from her*. Hitherto there may have been a kind of withdrawal. There certainly was some change in His appearance. That face was possibly etherealised; or it was a change such as we trace after the long absence of a friend. He appeared "in another form," according to Mark (xvi. 12).

He reveals Himself now *through speech*. Of all things about us, the voice is that which, amid the processes of change, retains its identity most. "Mary." How much Jesus compresses of tenderness and revelation into that *one word*! He calls her by the old familiar name. How much crowds into her memory now! The voice that was unrecognised while it *questioned* is recognised when it *calls her by name*. This is the same unique voice as that which called her when He cast the devils out of her. That voice uttering that name reveals the Saviour's personality to Mary as nothing else could. Whatever change that mysterious passage through the grave has wrought in Him, His voice and His love are the same. Death and the grave have not made Him forget Mary's name or personality. "He calleth His own sheep by name . . . and they know His voice." Our Lord here supplies an illustration of His own parable.

- Her reply is *equally brief*—"Rabboni." Here we have a

dialogue in two words. When feeling is intense, utterance becomes laconic. "Rabboni" is the word in which Mary's soul expresses alike its love and its wonder. We find here a passionate concentration of feeling. The spirit of loving discipleship is crystallised and perpetuated in that one word. It is the first homage of discipleship offered to the risen Lord, and as such is carefully recorded. How many thousands since!

There are times when the whole soul flashes forth and reveals its personality in an exclamation. Only in supreme moments do men and women speak in that fashion. There is too much expenditure of nervous and spiritual force to continue that long. It is breathing in oxygen, and that cannot last.

The first impulse of the soul in the presence of the risen Christ is *to worship*. It is a moment of infinite surprise. It is the reaction from blank despair to boundless ecstasy. The sense of infinite privilege comes in the train of what appeared to be irreparable loss. In one brief moment are condensed the extremes of experience.

"Touch Me not." The first words *are prohibitive*. Here we have the spectacle of the Christ being unready for the devotion which a human heart is prepared to offer Him. So it was when the Greeks sought Him. His work was as yet incomplete and fragmentary. The ascension completed the resurrection. Jesus had previously said: "Tell no man . . . until the Son of Man be risen from the dead."

Here, however, at the empty grave *Mary receives her commission*. Mary becomes the first messenger of the resurrection. Angels comforted the others, but the Christ Himself gives a message to Mary.

The Gospel of the Open Grave is the story of the Resurrection and the prediction of the Ascension combined.

"I ascend!" She had stooped and looked into the grave for the Christ; henceforth she will look up and wait for her Lord from heaven. Thus is the story grandly progressive, and the past and present are made predictive of the yet more glorious future. Thank God for such a Gospel as this! May He forgive us that we have not received it more promptly and proclaimed it more joyfully!

LV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON EATING BOOKS.

“And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up.”—REV. x. 9.

Read also Ezek. iii. 1.

You will see that my subject to-day is *eating books*. I have no doubt it sounds a little peculiar, and yet this is what almost every boy and girl present has been trying to do. A great deal of your time, I trust, is spent in eating up books. By that I do not, of course, mean that you eat the paper and the covers ; but rather that you consume and take in all that the books teach, and thus make it your own.

Now, there are many different kinds of books in the world.

1. There are some which *have nothing in them*. They are not directly harmful, but neither are they of much good. When you have read them you can scarcely remember anything that they contained. They are very much like a kind of pastry which we call “trifle.” You all know that. The moment you put it into your mouth, it vanishes into thin air, and you scarcely know that you have had anything, except for the memory of what appeared to be something, but turned out to be nothing save a kind of passing sensation. There are books of that kind which only please for the moment, and which produce no lasting good. They are mere “trifles,” which trifle with you, and bring with them no real satisfaction. Life is far too short and too precious to waste upon them. Beware of books which only please you for the moment, and do nothing to make you better or wiser.

2. There are other books which are *stupefying*. They dull the senses. They are like what we call “opiates,” which make men feel heavy and stupid. These books are largely read, alas ! by lackadaisical young women who spend most of their time on the couch or lounge, consuming volume after volume, which makes them utterly forgetful of their every-day duty, and unconscious of the grand opportunities which open up before them in life. The result is that all their wits are

blunted, and their truest pleasures are dulled, so that their lives become dreamy and useless. Be careful never to read books which merely please by soothing and dulling the senses.

3. There are other books which are unduly *exciting*. I do not object to a reasonable amount of *interest*. Every book worth the reading must in one sense excite us; but I am not now speaking of books which excite you by the amount of true knowledge which they give, or noble enthusiasm which they impart, but those which excite you by the feverish curiosity with which they fire you. How often the story is broken off just at the point where you are most anxious to know the result, and for a whole month you are excited to such an extent as to be unfitted for your lessons or your daily duties! Meanwhile every other book, such as your history, arithmetic, or English grammar, appear dull and hard to learn; you have lost patience with all noble and true work in the passionate curiosity which that exciting story has awakened within you. I earnestly warn you against every book which makes it *more difficult for you to do your every-day duty*.

4. There are other books which are very *hard to digest*. I have no doubt some of you think, for instance, that books on arithmetic or English grammar are very indigestible; but if you take a little at a time, and masticate that well before you take more, you will find that even hard books will agree with you wonderfully, and that you will be stronger and better for having taken them. Children suffer from indigestion, in learning difficult tasks, by taking *too much at a time*. The great secret of success is to take a little often, and to see that you learn well every little lesson, and thus make it your own, before you take more. I have no doubt, too, that, if the truth were known, we should find that you consider sermons preached to the older folks often very hard to digest. That is one reason why we try to give you little tit-bits in the form of *Children's addresses*. I am afraid that now and then you find a hard lump even in them, which you can hardly master. But this is *often* the case in the sermon to the bigger folks. That perhaps accounts for the fact that your parents are sometimes fonder of your little sermons than they are of their own. They can take the food we give you so easily: there is less need of biting and masticating. Now, in return, I think

you should join the older folks in taking what you can of their sermons. I have no doubt there is a great deal you cannot understand; but do not give up listening on that account: take the little bits you can, and leave the bigger and harder bits to the big people; by-and-by I trust you will be able to take them.

5. There are other books which are decidedly *poisonous*. Take care that you do not eat them. These books speak well of sin, and kindly of evil. They encourage boys and girls to do what is wrong. My prayer to God is that you may be saved from such books as will take from your life every true joy and every possibility of good which may be in it. Beware of any book that does not agree with the Bible in its estimate of good and of evil.

And now, I want to tell you of this *One Book*—THE BIBLE—of which you need never grow weary. There are parts of it, I know, which none of us can yet understand, although we hope to do so by-and-by, in the land of light; but there are other parts so simple that every child can take them in. All other books require a great deal of judgment to choose what is good in them. You have been in the Zoological Gardens, and have seen what you have thought to be stupid little creatures—monkeys—eating nuts. Give a hollow nut to one of them: he will shake it and throw it away; he will not take the trouble to crack a nut that has nothing in it. You should do that with books which have nothing good in them. Then, again, there is the squirrel. I have recently seen some of these very pretty but rather mischievous little creatures. How often that charming little thing takes up a nut, bores a hole in it, takes out the kernel, and then throws the empty shell away! You have, perhaps, taken that up, and thought that you have found a nut; but no,—the squirrel has been there before you, taken away all that is good, and left only the shell behind. I would that you children did so with books,—that you only took the good out of them and left the husks behind; but *this* is a Book in which there is nothing to harm you. God grant that you may often read it and find it very sweet, and that, unlike John when he ate that little book, it may *never* prove bitter to you, but continue to be very sweet to your taste for time and for eternity!

LVI.

SERMON—THE RESERVE OF DIVINE ROYALTY.

“He holdeth back the face of His throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it.”—JOB xxvi. 9.

THIS chapter begins with words of irony. Job reminds Bildad that his utterances were neither applicable nor original; and then proceeds to dwell upon the twofold aspect of Divine operations—the revealing and hiding, the spreading and closing. The throne of God was no exception; He who bound up the waters in His thick clouds, closed in the face of His throne.

It is neither my business nor the right occasion this morning to dwell upon the striking words which lead up to our text, and which were uttered at a time when they must have sounded as a strange fancy, at utter variance with the then accepted theory of the universe, but which to us sound like a charming anticipation of scientific discovery—“He stretcheth out the north on the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.”

It is my purpose now to call your attention to that phase of God’s character brought so beautifully to light in the words of my text, and which I shall call—*the Reserve of Divine Royalty*. This is spoken of in a twofold figure.

1. He *holds back the face of His throne*. In other words, there is a Divine reserve of display. How dependent earthly royalties have been upon the prominence of the throne, and upon imposing insignia of royalty, such as the crown and the sceptre! How often in history has royalty collapsed with the disappearance of these symbols! In the ruder ages the throne occupied a most prominent position. The monarch, too, sat in state on his throne to administer justice. All this was deemed necessary to impress people sufficiently with the majesty of kingship. It was in such days as those that Job exclaimed—“*He* holdeth back the face of *His* throne.”

There is here primarily the admission which forms the central truth of the ancient Scriptures, that God is King; that things do not come by chance, but in accordance with a supreme Will. The centre of the Jewish cosmogony, as I have had occasion previously to notice, was a *throne*, and as the result the centre of the Jewish faith was the One who sat

upon that throne. In this Job, although himself outside the Jewish pale, was at one with Hebrew psalmists and prophets.

Having accepted this as the central article of his creed, Job affirms that there is great reserve about God's *manifestation* of His sovereignty. He does not constantly assert it by every startling symbol of power within His reach. He permits events to occur which seem to cast into the background the seat of authority and power—so much so, at times, that our faith is severely tried. This had tried Job's own faith. But he saw the meaning of it now. God did not thrust His authority into such prominence as that every irreverent observer could see it. How many providences there were in which the throne of God barely appeared, and men, as the result, blasphemously asserted that there was no God and no throne! Yet, amid all, God was only giving proof of His unique kingship, since it was His glory to conceal a thing: in other words, to be great enough, amid all His revelations, still to have a reserve of manifestation,

Now, it is this reserve that to-day, as in the days of Job, offends men. They would have Him bring His throne forward so as to flame in the heavens, and strike the nations with terror. They exclaim to God, as our Lord's brethren said to Him when on earth, "Show Thyself unto the world." This demand, strange as it may seem to the cultured, who too often indulge in it, is but another form of the impatience for the vulgar display of sovereignty which half-civilised nations have always shown. It is only as men learn that in the truest kingship there is a grand restraint, that they will recognise in this withdrawal an attribute of the Divinest Royalty. God can afford to hold back the face of His throne, and refrain from dazzling us at every turn with displays of His glory, *and yet be King.*

Now, every revelation of God to us is after all *a limitation of Himself*—a closing in of the face of His throne, so that it may be brought within the angle of our vision. This limitation is the condition of all true teaching. A senior wrangler of Cambridge teaches a class of boys how to do a simple sum in proportion, or he may cross-examine them in the multiplication table. He makes no mention of trigonometry, conic sections, or differential calculus. What is he doing by this strange reserve? He is "keeping back the face of his throne," but in so doing, too, he is teaching the boys. Had he repeated

the formulæ of the higher mathematics, instead of confining himself to the scope of his pupils' comprehension, he would have been exposing the face of his throne, but he would have taught no one. This is but an imperfect illustration of the graciousness of God's reserve in manifesting the resources of His power and majesty. He has many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them now.

2. He *spreads a cloud upon it*. "There is the hiding of His power." In the House of Lords the throne of England *is covered over* except on great state occasions. God, too, covers His throne with the obscuring drapery of clouds, except on great state occasions. It is no accident that God has so universally associated Himself with clouds. His words to Moses were, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud" (Exod. xix. 9). Strange are the coverings of God's costliest treasures and richest glories: who can tell what Divine glories a cloud may hide in its folds!

In this sublime imagery Job speaks as if God had one particular cloud which is peculiarly His, and wherewith He covers His throne—one specially set apart for that purpose, all others being too small and insignificant for that use—"His cloud." God's throne *earthward* has generally had its cloud. Perhaps He does not hold back the face of His throne—at least to the same extent—to the angels as He does to man. Clouds, however, have generally been associated with God's revelations *to man*. The first gospel after the Flood was written on clouds—"I have set My bow in the clouds for a token." There was also a cloud covering the summit of Sinai, and subsequently the mercy-seat; and in the sojournings of the Israelites, as God moved the cloud moved. In the days of our Lord's flesh there was a cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration; a cloud also took Him out of sight; and the prediction concerning His second advent is, "He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him." One wonders what God would do man-ward without clouds. In the Book of Revelation we have a further glimpse of God's throne, and there a rainbow *surrounds* it (iv. 3). Even there the old drapery is not dispensed with; it is only touched up with heaven's own light—for what is a rainbow but the tearful cloud transfigured by the very light it reflects in varied hues! In this last representation the ancient cloud still lingers round

the throne, and sends back in manifold colours the glory that streams upon it from His face who is the Sun of that bright land. The cloud was dark in the Old Testament times ; Christ has made it light, and has converted the ancient bow of the Covenant into a *complete circle*, whose perfected arc shall for ever encompass the throne of God. Thus, the cloud is the symbol of the mystery which shall *ever* envelop that throne, although the mystery shall no longer be a terror, but only another proof of His compassionate reserve and tender grace.

How gloriously this Divine delicacy contrasts with the bounce and fuss which so often accompany earthly greatness ! When in the fulness of time the great God revealed Himself as He never had before, how all was veiled ! Read the story over again of Jesus, born in a manger, toiling in a carpenter's shop, without a place to lay His head—betrayed, slain, and buried ! All the while He was holding back the face of His throne, and spreading a cloud upon it, lest it should dazzle men with its celestial brightness, or only awaken the curiosity of the carnal mind ! “Show thyself to the world,” was the passionate demand of His brethren, in which the impatience of the world found an echo ; and yet *He held back the face of His throne.*

Alas that in all ages so many only see the cloud, and never any part of the throne ! They are perplexed with the mystery of God's rule, but seldom see its glory. “Men see not the bright light which is in the clouds” (Job xxxvii. 21). How often does the glory from within transfuse the cloud with unearthly splendour ! How refreshing it was to hear Job, after all God's mysterious dealings with him, when God seemed to be quite hidden and His throne concealed, explain all in the words of my text ! Gleams of gladdening light had reached him through the mist, and had transfigured the cloud on their way earthward. We, too, often see the cloud, but do not catch the light that illumines it with heaven's glory. My friends, expect much from the cloud which besets your path : God is so often in the heart of it, and His throne enwrapped by it. It would have been as reasonable for the Israelites to complain of the cloud that led them on their way, and rested upon the summit of Sinai, where God stood when He gave His Law, or of the cloud over the mercy seat, through which the Shechinah shone in its subdued splendour, as it is for you

to complain of the clouds of sorrow and mystery in which God hides the brightness of His face, so that, without burdening you with the weight of His glory, He may be near you, and bless you all the while. It would be an evil day for the earth if it had no clouds, but only sunshine ; and it would be a calamity to you if the full brightness of God's glory and holiness were not softened by the mediating clouds of mystery and trial, by which you are enabled to know Him even now in part, and meanwhile, if you but accept His discipline, your sight is purified and strengthened for the full vision of Him in His glory, "when the day shall dawn and the shadows flee away."

"O Thou, who art our life,
Be with us through the strife !
Was not Thy head by earth's fierce tempest bowed ?
Raise Thou our eyes above
To see a Father's love
Beam, like a bow of promise, through the cloud.

"E'en through the awful gloom
Which hovers o'er the tomb,
That light of love our guiding star shall be ;
Our spirits shall not dread
The shadowy way we tread,
Friend, Guardian, Saviour, which doth lead to Thee."

LVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—JESUS SITTING BY THE SEASIDE.

“The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside.”—
MATT. xiii. 1.

My subject is—Jesus sitting by the seaside. It is a very homely subject, and ought to interest us. There are some little children born in the back slums of our large cities who have scarcely ever looked at the sea. To them the subject would not be so interesting, although it might awaken within them wonder, and a desire to have a glimpse at the sea. It is not so with you. You have all seen the sea a thousand times, and have often watched it when it has been like a mirror reflecting upon its smooth surface the glorious sky. At other times you have seen it in a rage, when the winds have lashed it into a tempest, and the waves have swept clean over our sea front. You have not known when to admire it most when it has been as gentle as a lamb or furious as a lion. On a bright summer day you have seen the sun kindle it into what appeared to be liquid fire, while at night you have seen the silvery moon cast a path of light,—the nearest approach to Jacob’s ladder that you could well witness—right across the sea to you. To each one there is given a similar path. Every eye has its own line of light, so that we have not all to run to the same point. I have often thought that it is so with God’s Word. It is only in part that we see its glory, but each one gets as much as he can take, and enjoy.

But I must not keep away from Jesus. On this occasion He went out of the house and sat by the seaside. How much of His life was spent near the sea! I am glad that He was very fond of it. If you take out of the Gospels all that Jesus said concerning, or did near, the sea, what a little is left! It was by the Sea of Galilee that He called His first disciples. The Galileans were despised by the people of Judæa. The dwellers among the hills have generally been despised by the dwellers on the plain. The Highlanders of Scotland have been despised by the Lowlanders; and you English people in times gone by—I think you have dropped it now—used to despise the Welsh who lived among the mountains. Yet it was with those Galilean mountaineers and fishermen that our Lord spent most of His life, and it was from among them that He chose His Apostles. I spent six years of my ministry in Cardiff among sailors. I never understood till then why Jesus selected seamen chiefly to be His first disciples. I do now. If you get a good sailor, he has the most

robust and sterling character you can find. Jesus went to seamen—fishermen and the like—who had been nursed in the storms and among the rugged hills which girt the sea, when He wanted men who would face the fury of the world for His sake. Thus, because of the men he had called from that sea, as well as the miracles He had wrought and the truths He had taught on that lake, Jesus loved to sit at times upon its pebbly beach.

Jesus was now probably weary. It is a grand thing when you are tired to sit by the seaside, and let it talk to you. You have only to listen carefully, and it is wonderful what the little waves at your feet, and the great sea beyond, will tell you, and how they will take away your weariness. Now, this sea-coast was seven hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. It was most favourable for the growth of tender plants and luscious fruits, but a very tiring place for workers. Our Lord now, therefore, went out of the house to breathe the fresh air that blew over the sea, and to look at the hills on the other side, and the more gentle slopes on the north where the sower was sowing the seed, probably at this very time. The multitude soon found Him, and He at once spoke to them of the sower, who was probably within sight, and, not forgetting the sea, spoke to them of the pearl of great price, and of the draw-net. These and many other themes had doubtless passed through His mind while He had sat quietly by the seaside. If we, too, stayed less in the house, and went out to talk with the sea and the mountains, how much wiser we should be! What an experience our Lord had of the sea! He stood and sat on its shore—slept in the storm—sat in the boat and taught—walked on the crest of the waves—and looked at the sea from the surrounding hills, the best sight of all. He never seems to have got tired of the sea. Thus, while Jesus knew so much about heaven, He did not despise our little earth, or even the little Sea of Galilee. Like Him, think much of the world in which you live. It is the work of God's hands. Learn of Jesus how to appreciate heavenly things; learn of Him, too, how to appreciate earthly things, for they tell of the heavenly.

LVIII.

SERMON—THE FIRST PSALM.

“Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,” etc. THIS psalm may be considered as a preface to the Book of Psalms. It has distinctive characteristics of its own. It

contains no confession, no prayer, and no ascription of praise. It is a summary of the character and blessedness of the godly man, presenting an Old Testament parallel to the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount, and like that taking the form of a beatitude.

The first word translated "Blessed" is plural, and the passage may be literally translated, "Oh, the blessednesses of the man!" The theme surpasses the psalmist's comprehension, still more his power of expression. The plural word "blessednesses" is used to express the varied and many-sided blessings of which the godly man is the recipient. The Welsh translation is very expressive—" *White is that man's world* who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." The translator gives up all attempt at being literal, and seeks to express the central and governing thought that no spot or blemish can mar the whiteness of that man's character, experience or life. This conveys the idea of the completeness and fulness of the blessings expressed by the word "blessednesses."

Again, the word "the" before "man" is emphatic, and may be more correctly rendered "*that* man." The one spoken of is singled out from the many for his character and conduct. Wherever he is, and however difficult to find, blessed is *that* man.

Let us try to understand *who* that man is who is the recipient of so full and exceptional a blessedness. He is described,

I. *Negatively.* "That walketh *not*," etc. The first verse is a striking instance of poetic parallelism of thought, a distinctly Hebrew principle of versification. Hebrew poetry largely consists of this "thought-rhythm," rather than the mere recurrence of sounds. This is an inestimable blessing—a gracious provision which makes it possible for Hebrew poetry to suffer less in translation than that of any other language. The first verse is a triplet, each line consisting of three members. The keywords are

- a* . . Walketh . . counsel . . ungodly
- b* . . standeth . . way . . sinners
- c* . . sitteth . . seat . . scornful.

Here the "thought-rhythm" the Hebrew is preserved in the translation. The description is progressive: we have first *walking*, then *standing*, and then *sitting*. There is a gradation, from casual intercourse on the way, to more leisurely converse, and then to the still fuller intimacy of boon companionship.

This gradation is maintained in the second series of words,

counsel, way, seat. At first there is a mere interchange of opinion, then an adoption of the path suggested, and then confirmed friendship.

The same applies to the last word in each line of the triplet, “*ungodly*,” “*sinner*,” “*scornful*.” The root-meaning of the word translated “*ungodly*” is *restless, without any stay*. This word describes the man whose evil consists in his having no decision of character, no strength of conviction.

The last word in the second sentence marks an advance. The root-meaning of the word translated “*sinner*” is one who *has deviated* from the right path—one who has erred, or wandered. In the preceding instance there was only restlessness, as in the case of the mariner’s needle when it trembles owing to the distracting presence of some metal which is just sufficiently powerful to make the needle waver instead of pointing steadfastly to the north. In this case the counter-attraction has *increased*, so that—like the needle which, *now* under a more potent influence, *points persistently* to the metallic substance on board the vessel, rather than in the direction of God’s star in the northern heavens, because the attraction of the former is greater than that of the latter—the man here spoken of no longer *wavers* or *hesitates*, but has allowed the *whole bent* of his nature to be turned toward evil. He “*standeth in the way of sinners*.”

Further, in the “*scorner*” we have the one who is not only confirmed, but also *hardened* and made audacious in his sin—one who not only does evil himself, but also mocks those who do good. He is not only a sinner, but also a tempter. He has now reached the consummation of human iniquity, and is on the borderland of the diabolic.

The transition thus described in each member of every line of this triplet is insinuating and subtle in its progressiveness, until at length it is complete. This verse epitomises with graphic intensity the history of a sinful life, and thus brings into glorious relief the picture of godly blessedness.

II. *Positively.* There is another parallelism between the first verse and this: “Blessed is the man that *walketh not* in the counsel of the *ungodly*. But his delight is in the Law [“*Torah*”—Directory, that which teaches men *where and how to walk* and thus prevents their going astray] of *the Lord*.”

1. The godly man *is joyous*—“His *delight* is in the Law of the Lord.” He accepts its teachings, not as a necessity, but

as a privilege, like the Psalmist (Psalm cxix. 54), who sang God's commandments, and set His Law to music. The words of Psalm xl. 8 upon the lips of David predicted that One Perfect Life which in the fulness of time was lived among men. Our lives may approach that to some degree. It is delightful to see some men make the most difficult tasks musical. Out of the discords of this toiling life the godly man can draw the sweetest harmonies. Men never realised how harmonious the sounds of the smith's anvil were until a master musician caught and reproduced them in the "Harmonious Blacksmith." This was one of his "Songs without words," but on that account possessing all the more of music. So men never knew how sweet and harmonious God's Law of Service was until inspired psalmists, like David, caught the symphony, and reproduced it in strains expressive of hidden inspirations, but far deeper than any words which even they could adopt: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is within—*within*—my heart."

2. He is *meditative*—"Doth he *meditate*." Augustine translates this word, "chatter." The meaning of the Hebrew word seems to be "to meditate aloud." It seems to denote an intensity of meditation that unwittingly expresses itself in words. It may possibly embrace all that is said in Psalm lxxvii. 12.

This meditation is *persistent*—"day and night." It seems to be in season and out of season. As Sir Richard Baker puts it, this is "the only delight that stands in construction with all tenses. The theme of this meditation knows of no exhaustion." "There is an end to all perfection," said the Psalmist: "but Thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Psalm cxix. 96). There is no end to God's thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts higher than our thoughts. His thoughts are like His heavens: the higher we go the serener it is, and the more marvellous the ever-deepening depths. Hence the Psalmist never gets tired of his study. He meditates in the night watches as well as in the busy hours of the day; in the night of adversity and sorrow, too, as well as in the day of prosperity and joy.

3. He is *strong and fruitful*—"Like a tree planted," etc. What a beautiful picture in a few touches! Every touch tells. There is not a line unnecessary dashed into it. Note the detail compressed into this small compass, "Like a tree—*planted—by the rivers of waters—bringeth forth his fruit—in his season—his leaf also shall not wither—whatsoever he doeth*

shall prosper" (or *mature*). The old psalmists and prophets could not get on without a picture or an illustration from nature which should explain their theme. Our Lord Himself could not. It was reserved for clever and dry metaphysicians to do that. But metaphysics are the language of the few, while poetry is the language of the race.

"Like a" are words which at once arrest attention. How frequently they did this on the lips of the Christ! They are words which tell us that there is a picture coming; and children are not the only ones who like pictures. It is Divine to draw pictures for our pleasure and profit; it is human to enjoy them, even if not always to profit by them. May we all profit by this!

"Like a tree." Thank God, the godly man is like something which *lives*—not like a dead thing, but like a living tree which expands and develops its resources day by day. He is like *that* noble perennial plant without which every landscape would be dull and commonplace, and the earth tame and well-nigh barren!

Again, "Like a tree *planted*." This is the same figure as that given by Jeremiah (xvii. 7, 8). both cases the tree is *planted*. It is a tree upon which the husbandman sets value, and to which he has paid much attention. He saw it grow wild on some barren spot, or on the edge of a steep and rugged precipice. He took it and planted it carefully by the side of a watercourse, or rivulet, which in the East so often irrigates the land. Thus the godly man is compared, not to a tree growing in barren soil and exposed to every destructive agency, but to that which has been carefully planted by its owner amid the surroundings most favourable to its safety and growth, so that, when the drought comes, the tree which has struck its roots down deep into the moist soil draws its nourishment from the living stream that makes glad the city of God. That stream must dry up before that tree can wither. If that be so, then how inconsistent it is of us who are godly to complain of our circumstances! Has He not *planted* us just in the place which shall in the end prove most favourable to our growth in the divine life? By complaining are we not calling into question the wisdom of the great Husbandman? "Planted"—then if He has planted us, who can uproot us? The Hand that planted us will protect us; but "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up (Matt. xv. 13).

“That bringeth forth his fruit in his season.” The godly man, like the tree spoken of, is *fruitful*. All trees of the Lord’s planting are fruitful. God is too wise a Husbandman to plant fruitless trees (Ps. xcii. 12, 13). The godly man is known by his fruits. A fruitless Christian is an anomaly which heaven does not recognise. Every branch that beareth not fruit the Divine Husbandman taketh away, etc. (John xv. 2).

“In his season.” His fruit shall always be adapted to the season, and therefore will be beautiful in its time. Peter enumerates the fruits of a godly life—faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity—and adds, “If these things be in you, *and abound*, etc. (2 Peter i. 8, 9). Ah me! how many of us who make great professions have never “*abounded*” in these things, and are therefore blind!

“His leaf also shall not wither.” The leaf, according to some commentators, refers to the “minor exhibitions of the godly man’s character.” I do not believe it. The leaf is at the basis of the whole vegetable kingdom. Hugh Macmillan tells us that it dawned on one occasion upon the meditative mind of Goethe that all the parts of a plant, from the seed to the blossom and fruit, are mere modifications of a leaf. Scientific men smiled at this as being only a pretty poetic fancy. Since then it has been accepted as a scientific fact. Hugh Macmillan adds that “the leaf-form and the leaf-structure are the primitive models” of all vegetable life, and repeats the words of Thoreau that “the Maker of the earth but patented a leaf.”

Again, look at the functions of the leaf in producing, under the influence of air and sunshine, from the liquid taken up by the roots the juice which becomes the life-blood of the plant, and which goes back coursing through the branches and trunk, giving vitality to the whole and supplying the resources necessary for the production of the fruit. Let but the leaves drop off before the fruit has formed, and all hope for fruit is gone. Let there be no leaves on the tree, and what becomes of it? The energy, yea, the very life of the tree depends upon the vitality of its foliage. I cannot, therefore, accept the statement that the leaf, which exercises so important a function in the vegetable kingdom, should be made here to represent the *minor* characteristics of the godly man, but rather that receptive power by which he appropriates to his own life those energies and subtle glories which he draws from the heavens. “His leaf shall not wither”—

he is ever in living touch with sunshine and shower, balmy air and bracing storm, yea, all the influences of the heavens by which his life is enriched and ennobled.

“Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper,” or, according to an old MS., “Whatsoever he produces shall *mature*.” Every grace and service shall ripen, and not fall to the ground like blighted and immature fruit. There shall be no failure in the final ingathering of that life.

III. *By contrast.* “The ungodly are not so, but *are like*—” Here again we come within the charm of the language of similitude. *Like what* are the ungodly?

1. Like something *dead*—“chaff.” 2. Like something *worthless*—the refuse of the threshing-floor. 3. Like something which has *no power of resistance*—“which the wind driveth away.” How sadly this contrasts in detail with the tree of which we have just read!

“*Shall not stand* in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” This is an awful figure, probably taken from the fate of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and their followers (Numb. xvi. 33). Read these words again in the light of that illustration,—a terrible figure to teach us that the wicked have no sure foothold anywhere!

Now observe that all this is said of “the ungodly” and “sinners,” the two classes less advanced in evil than “the scorner.” We dare not soften down the terribleness of a sinful life in its final issues. Young men and young women, you have seen the twofold picture. In which do you desire to be found? To which do you belong at this hour? You who are older, in which company have you been spending your life? Oh, *now* for the decision,—if we have never arrived at it before,—to live a godly Christian life; to rise to the level of its opportunities and to the high altitude of its “blessednesses,” upon which shall ever rest the light of God’s approving smile and inspiring “Well done!” Do not read this psalm without reading also Christ’s own beatitudes; and there, in the fuller light of our Lord’s words, life, death, resurrection and ascension, see new meaning in this ancient Song of the Sanctuary, and lay to heart the ever-increasing responsibility of those who are the recipients of these greater Gospel privileges, but all the while reject the Saviour whose Gospel it is.

LIX.

*A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE UNFINISHED SUM.**

“Joab, the son of Zeruiah, began to number, but he finished not. . . Neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of King David.”
—I CHRON. xxvii. 24.

My text to-day is, “The Unfinished Sum.” Those of you who during the past week have had your examinations, and especially those who have had a “stiff paper” in arithmetic, will sympathise with Joab, who could not finish his sum. Perhaps you had to write at the close of your arithmetic paper, just as you had almost completed a sum for which you would have had a goodly number of marks if you could have but finished it—“Time up.” How disappointed you were at having to leave it! but unfinished as it was, you hoped some account might be taken of your effort. On the contrary, Joab seems to have done all in vain, for the number, as far as he calculated, was not put in the account of the chronicles of King David. Now let us see what this sum was.

1. It was *the second sum* which Joab tried to do. He did the first sum very much against his will. Indeed, he did not quite finish that. You can read the account in I Chron. xxi. 1—4. David commanded Joab to number the people. He replied, “Why doth my lord require this thing? Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab, . . . and Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. . . . But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them; for the king’s word was abominable to Joab. And God was displeased with this thing.” Although God Himself had ordered the numbering of the people twice in the wilderness (Numb. i. 2, and xxvi.), yet He had said to Moses, “When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them” (Exod. xxx. 12). Perhaps it was for omitting to do this, or otherwise ignoring God, that the Lord was now displeased with David. The number, however, of all those reckoned by Joab was 800,000. Probably he was greatly praised for the accuracy with which he had added up so large a number, and thus he was tempted to undertake a reckoning on a still larger scale, but forgetful of God’s displeasure on the previous occasion. Thus—

2. This was *a very long sum in addition*. The number of those under twenty years of age would be very large. David had not even suggested that these should be reckoned, because of God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 17), and afterwards

repeated, that "He would increase Israel like to the stars of the heaven." David would not mock God's promise by trying to number the rising generation, for who could number the stars! Joab, however, in the excitement of reckoning, had lost his reverence, and ignored God. Thus—

3. This was *a reckoning out of which God and His promise were excluded*. God does not object to our sums and calculations,—some of you would not be sorry if He did,—but He *does* object when we omit all thought of Him and of His power from our calculations. That was what Joab did on this occasion, just as Philip unwittingly ignored the presence and power of Jesus when he said, concerning the hungry multitude, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not enough" (John vi. 7). God puts a stop to such unholy reckoning. He did so on this occasion. Thus—

4. This was *a sum that was not of any use*—"neither was the number put into the account of the chronicles of King David." There was nothing left to show for the amount of pains he took. Only God's anger was remembered, which put a stop to his calculations. What a lesson to us! There are many things which are beyond our power to reckon. *God's blessings are*. Hear what David says on another occasion concerning them: "Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to usward: *they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee*: if I would declare and speak of them, *they are more than can be numbered*" (Ps. xl. 5.) All God's ways are past finding out; thus, while we can calculate many things, we must put aside all our little sums and reckonings when we approach God. Yet He has graciously revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ as our loving Father in heaven, pitying all our weaknesses and forgiving all our sins. O that we all trusted Him more and served Him better! for who can reckon the cost of that sacrifice which our Saviour has offered for our sins! We *cannot* calculate; but we *can* and *will* worship.

LX.

SERMON—MAKING BATTLEMENTS.

"When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence."—DEUT. xxii. 28.

THE law of Moses consisted not only of the Decalogue, in which the fundamental principles of all human duty were laid

down, but it also entered into the details of life, touching it at every point, in every relationship, and in every form of responsibility. If you read this and other chapters you will see that there is full and solemn reference made to what appear at first sight to be the trivialities of life. There are some men who vulgarise high themes with their touch ; there are others who ennoble the apparent commonplaces of life by lifting them up into relationship with high and sacred principles. We have not to live long in the world before we find that there is a subtle relationship between the greatest laws and the smallest objects ; and that the same laws touch the infinitely great and the infinitesimally small. The same power is at work, only in different degrees, in the formation of a dewdrop and in the formation of a globe. The great thinkers of the ages remind us that there is a link uniting the smallest in the endless succession of gradations to the greatest. They teach us that in connection with the apparent trivialities of daily life there are sublime laws. Newton, as you well know, saw the law of gravitation in the falling of an apple. Moses, inspired of God, lays down here sublime principles and grand tests of human character as illustrated in what would appear to us to be the commonplace and trivial pursuit of birds'-nesting :—" If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, *whether they be* young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young : *But* thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee ; that it may be well with thee, and *that* thou mayest prolong *thy* days." *Here a man's days are dependent upon his conduct towards birds' nests !* Surely there is some meaning in this which we have not yet seen. There is some sacredness connected with a bird's nest, the young ones, and the dam, which we do not trace on the surface of the narrative. What is it? Think for a moment. What places that mother bird in your power? The love of the mother towards her offspring. Apart from that, she would be beyond your reach ; but her love, her affection for her offspring, places her within your power ; and Moses, as the servant of God, steps forward and says, "Thou shalt not take her." By so doing you violate the noblest impulse that is in the heart of God—love—and therefore the divinest impulse that is in His vast creation. See that you do not violate that. Touch not the nest. It is God's property. Touch not God's

bird. It is one of His little ones. He keeps watch over it, and the very bush in which the nest is built is luminous with His presence. Such teaching as this is ennobling. It lifts life up from the dead commonplace level, and teaches us that in connection with common things there are sacred obligations.

Again, Moses would teach the people that in building a house man is building on God's estate, and that God reserves for Himself the liberty of telling him how to build it. Now, in life we are surrounded by laws and forces which we cannot ignore. Man may be ignorant of a particular law, but he cannot ignore it. He has always found, for instance, that in order to gain force he must strike downwards: why not strike upwards? He knows that there is a force that works with him when he strikes downward, and that there is a force that militates against him when he strikes upwards; and so he conforms to that law which he knows not, but which in after ages he learns is the law of gravitation. All around we find laws to which we have to conform. All the details of life are touched by sacred and eternal principles. We learn that in all our activities we are either violating or obeying laws as old as the hills. By obeying them we make them our servants; by ignoring them we make them our irresistible foes. But if that is true physically, it is even more true when we look at life from a moral and spiritual standpoint. In all we do we are taught to conform to great and sacred principles. Moses taught the people that God is interested in the way a man builds his house. Why? Because he looks at it from a social standpoint. The safety of human life is involved in the way in which a man may build his house. This is not secularising religion, but sanctifying life. The tendency of God's revelation in all ages is to widen the sphere of morals and the scope and application of spiritual teaching. What a wonderful revelation of the sacredness of social life in all its bearings such teaching as this must have been—adding dignity to life and imparting importance to what man otherwise would have considered insignificant and trivial!

Now, there were days when it would have been comparatively unimportant how a man built his house. There was no law given to the patriarchs with regard to house building. When they were merely in families, such a law as this was not so much needed, but when the family grew into a nation, as social life developed, personal licence and individual self-will were

limited. Human society, after all, is a network of dependencies and responsibilities, becoming all the more complex as social life becomes perfected. Thus a new law was now given to the nation of which the patriarchs never heard, because of the new responsibility which national life involved ; and Moses, in the name of God, said to each one, "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence."

In our text, then, we have *one of the great principles of social life*, and, as such, a distinct protest against one of the types of individual selfishness. There is a mixture here of the temporary and the permanent. The symbol is temporary and local, but the principle that is symbolised is eternal and universal. The building of battlements to our houses is not a necessity in our country. We have not the flat roof which is the promenade of the family. But the principle that is involved in this command to build battlements to houses where the roof was flat, and where the family walked up and down in the cool of evening, still lives ; it permeates life, and it applies to our life to-day as forcibly as it did to the lives of those to whom it was first given. Now, if it is important in the sight of God how a man builds a house, is it not still more important how he builds up character ?

Let us look at the text for a moment. "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shall make a battlement for the roof, that thou bring not blood upon thy house if any man fall from thence." When thou buildest a *new* house : it is to be a *precautionary act*, and not an afterthought. The battlements are to be in the original plan. The man is not to wait until an accident occurs, and thus the necessity for the battlement is proved. He has to do with human life, and human life is too sacred to be experimented with in order to find out the percentage of probabilities.

But I can imagine *the selfish man* coming, first of all, and saying, "Nay, I will not build battlements to my house. I can walk the flat roof of my house without any danger of falling off : why should I provide for others ?--*I* am perfectly safe." The same argument is used to-day with reference to various social responsibilities. Just look carefully at that reply. By the law of mere self-preservation, the man would build battlements if there were danger for himself, but as there is no

danger for himself he will not build those battlements ; so that, after all, the highest impulse in that man's life is just this love of self-preservation. This instinct is universal. Every creature God made has it. It is not always very ennobling. The snake, with all its venom, has it. The ass has it—the rat in the sewer has it. Is that the highest principle of your life and mine—to do just what is necessary for our own safety, and never take into consideration the safety of others ? Will you openly acknowledge this, and not blush ? “ Am I my brother's keeper ? ” was the first defiant question put by Cain, in whose selfishness there was the spirit of murder. Brethren, we are here to-day in God's house, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached ; and if there is one thing in that Gospel more glorious than another, it is this—the teaching that the highest law of life is *not* the law of self-preservation—that the greatest law of God is the law of self-sacrifice ; that he is greatest who denies himself for the sake of others ; that even the Cross is greatest when it reveals to us how that, though rich, yet for our sakes Christ became poor. O selfish and self-involved man, be ashamed of thine answer ; if there is any danger to another, and it is in thy power by thine example to erect a barrier which shall prevent another from falling, then it is thy duty and privilege to do it.

But *the cynic* comes forward and says, “ Yes, I know it is possible for a man to fall over, but it must be through culpable neglect or exceptional weakness ; and am I to conform my life to such conditions ? Am I to build a balustrade merely because of the weaklings by whom I am surrounded ? Am I to take account of them ? ” God's law does. Human law, in so far as it is Christian, does. “ We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ” Let us see how Paul speaks of these weaklings. A man's heart very soon reveals itself in the phraseology he employs. Paul speaks of a case : “ But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee, which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols ? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died ? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend,

I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." At the same time he says that there was no evil in the act itself, that it was not wrong for him to eat that meat which had been offered to idols ; yet, lest it should make the weak brother to offend, for whom Christ died, he would not eat meat as long as he lived. *The Apostle linked the weakest brother to the greatest Saviour*, and the thought that any example of his might in any way militate against the redemptive work of Christ, and lead to the ruin of any one, even the weakest of the weak, but for whose sake Christ died, led him to abstain from that liberty which was lawful to him apart from such high social considerations.

Oh ! brethren, when it is a question of blood, it is a sacred question. The blood of any creature in the Old Testament was considered sacred,—it was life ; but when we come to human blood it is surpassingly sacred. If "*any man*" fall— if the man who blacks your shoes fall over through your neglect, there is blood on your house. The responsibility is not dependent upon the position the man holds. The moment you touch human life, that moment you touch an unknown quantity. There is eternity in it. Infinite possibilities are there. What does the Old Testament tell us about man?—That he was made in God's image. What does the New Testament say about him? —That for his sake Christ died. What more may yet be told of him I do not know. Whenever there is danger to human life there is a sacred duty with which you cannot trifle.

But, says the *self-assertive* man, "I am not going to give up my liberty. This is a limitation of my personal liberty." That cry is as fallacious as it is selfish. Personal liberty must ever run parallel with the well-being of the community. A man has no right to call personal licence by the name of liberty, that which in any way conflicts with the well-being of the race or community to which he belongs. I ask whether it is not sometimes worth while to give up that which is lawful for the sake of others. You have just heard Paul's argument. There is another instance to which I would refer you. David, you will remember, on one occasion longed for a draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem. There were the serried ranks of the foe between him and the well, but the expression of that wish kindled daring in the hearts of some of his followers, who made their way through the ranks of the enemy, and returned with the coveted treasure. What did David do? Did he

drink the water? Nay; he poured it out upon the ground as an offering before the Lord. It was too costly a drink for him. It was at the risk of human blood that it was obtained, and he could not accept it. Will *you* insist upon your so-called right, and gratify a desire which in itself may be lawful, at the risk of endangering the soul of any man? Apply this to the social habits—such as the use of intoxicants—in which many of you indulge. Influence is the subtlest thing in the universe. Will you use that power for the highest good, or not? Members of Christian churches, you to whom the great work has been committed of bringing to men the knowledge of the great Saviour, and leading them to the foot of the Cross, I ask you how far are you prepared to adopt the straight course, and to deny yourselves so that the weakest may be sustained by your example, and led to the Cross by your kindly arm?

Young men, as you build up a new character, see that you build battlements to that house; and see to it that not one of you, by the neglect of building battlements, which might protect those who are weaker than yourselves, shall in any way be the means of hastening their ruin. The greatest sin a man can commit is, not to bring about his own ruin, terrible as that may be, but, having brought about his own, to help to bring about the ruin of others. To err is human—to make others err and fall is satanic! It is a terrible thing to fall; but it is far more terrible, by indifference or hard-heartedness, still more by cruel cunning, to lead to the fall of others. There is a sacred obligation resting upon us to guard the weakest and most foolish from ruin. Remember, this is a precautionary work. Not many statistics can be presented. The good you do cannot be tabulated. Never mind that. After all, the precautionary work, the preventive ministry of life, is the grandest and best. God's work is twofold. He saves the fallen; but He also "keeps us from falling." The psalmist realised that when, with all the strength of heart that he could command, he said, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sin." In other words—"Build *Thou* great battlements around my life, so that I may not fall over." Shall we not engage in a similar ministry?—build battlements by our self-denial, and our example, around many a weak life, so that none shall be lost for whose sake Christ died?

LXI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE PRIEST'S THUMB.

“The thumb of their right hand.”—EXOD. xxix. 20.

OUR subject is the *priest's thumb*. In the service of consecration the blood of the slain ram was to be “put upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot.” There is nothing said here about the priest's tongue. He was never intended to say much. He was not appointed to be the teacher. The prophets were those called specially to speak; hence we read of *the lips* of the prophet being touched with “a live coal” from off God's altar. We have not heard of much that a priest has ever said worth repeating. God never seems to have taken any special care about the priest in that direction. He was to hear God's commands, offer sacrifices, and take a part in processions: hence his ear, hand, and foot were to be devoted specially by blood to His service. The *right* ear, hand, and foot are spoken of, because they have precedence over the left, and God wants the best we have. But why the *thumb* of the right, rather than the index finger (that is, the one with which we point, the next to the thumb), or any of the other fingers? Now, the human hand, as I have had occasion lately to remind your parents, is wonderfully made, and largely enables us to exercise power and authority over other creatures. But is there anything in the thumb that marks it out as more important than all the other fingers? Let us see. The thumb is placed opposite the other fingers, so that it can press powerfully, if need be, against each and all of them. It is thus that we are able to pick things up, and to hold them firmly. By being opposite the other fingers the thumb helps them wonderfully. Again, when you close your fist, your thumb is made to rest upon two or more of the fingers, and so keeps them firmly closed. Being the more powerful finger, it thus protects the others, and braces them together. Now, to satisfy yourselves that it is stronger than the other fingers, notice how I can press or resist anything with my thumb, so that my whole body has to give way before my thumb does. I cannot do that with any one of the other fingers. They could not stand the pressure. What accounts for that? There is a number of muscles placed in different directions, one overlapping the other, and bracing each other, so that whichever way the thumb, which moves in a socket joint, is placed, there is a set of muscles at its service

to strengthen it. Now, these run up as far as the bend of the arm. The finger with which we point is the only other finger which has a muscle extending so far. The others only reach as far as the wrist. Thus, on account of this bundle of muscles, which are placed tightly across each other, the thumb is by far the most powerful finger in the hand. In it the strength of the hand chiefly lies. If the thumb is wanting, how greatly you miss it! With what difficulty you would pick up objects, hold the pen or the bat or the marble! and what a difficulty little girls would have in sewing without a thumb! You could spare any finger better than the thumb.

You sometimes hear it said, "Mr. A. is quite under Mr. B.'s thumb." By that you are to understand that Mr. A. is completely in Mr. B.'s power—that is, that Mr. B. can do what he likes with Mr. A. Thus you are taught that the thumb is a very powerful member. Now, every religious teacher or guide has a great deal of power given him over those whom he teaches or guides. Thus God wanted the priest to use that power as in His sight. Priests have sometimes forgotten this. It is a bad thing to be under any man's thumb, but it is a most terrible thing to get under a priest's thumb by telling him secrets and confessing sins which we ought only to repeat to God. Once you do that, you are under the priest's thumb; and very powerfully do those use it who have not consecrated their thumbs—that is, their influence and power—to God. Under the law of Moses God said practically to the priests, "Consecrate your thumbs with blood; see that you do not oppress any one with them."

Again, the thumb largely distinguishes man from other creatures. The chimpanzee, I think, is the creature which has a kind of thumb resembling ours most. But there is a muscle in our thumb, and that a most important one, which no chimpanzee, or any other creature except man, possesses. No creature has a thumb like ours. Thus, when the priest had to consecrate his thumb, he was called to give to God the chief strength and glory of his hand. The same thing applies to the big toe. When we stand on tiptoe, it is on that we stand. It is that, with its muscles, that so largely gives elasticity to our step and spring to our leap. Thus you find that in barbarous days, when men wanted to cripple their foes, they, among other atrocious acts, cut off their thumbs and big toes, because in them consisted the strength of hand and foot.

Now, the great lesson which you children can learn from

this is, that at the beginning of life, when your hands and feet are full of energy for play and work, you should ask God to use them in His service and for His glory. Repeat from the heart the words of Miss Havergal in her hymn of consecration—

“Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love ;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.”

Then, when you use your hands and feet in play or in any kind of work, remember that you have asked God to make use of them in His service, and that therefore you will do nothing with them that will displease Him. Think of what our Saviour’s hands and feet did and endured for us, and then see to it that throughout life you think nothing too much to do in working hard or running frequent errands for Him to whom we owe so much. “We love Him because He first loved us.”

LXII.

SERMON—“WOMEN . . . AND OTHERS.”

“Women . . . and others . . . and others.”—HEB. xi. 35, 36.

WHAT a wonderful list of names we find in this chapter! It is drawn from a wide range of history—from Abel to Samuel and the prophets. The names represent a great variety of nationality, character, attainments, position and experience, but they are linked together by one word expressive of what all who bore them had in common—*Faith*. Amid all the diversity of gifts there is the same spirit.

As the writer proceeds the theme grows upon him. The noble procession of the faithful at first passes by with slow tread and in single file, then it speeds in its progress, and gathers volume and momentum as it moves, until at length the apostle is unable to recount the triumphs of each hero as he passes by, but only hurriedly recalls his name, and that of another, and yet another, as he exclaims: “What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon and of Barak, and of Samson and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel and the prophets,” etc. Ultimately he fails to name, or even to enumerate, the heroes of faith. They rush by in battalions. Among those who have already passed, and whose names are given, the writer has noticed Sarah, Miriam, and Rahab, and now among the throng who pass by anonymously he sees “Women . . . and others . . . and others,” etc. Even if the writer had time he could not name them all. The names of many of them

had not transpired. They had never been written by the historian ; yet those who bore those forgotten names must not be ignored, since God had taken note of them and acknowledged them as His own.

Here, therefore, we find an appreciative and sympathetic reference to the *unknown heroes of faith*. The apostle recognises the fact that all that is great in history cannot be catalogued under great names. God does not care to label all His wonders. The great men and women who are brought into prominence are only specimens of what may be found in lowlier spheres of life, just as the rocky strata hurled up through the earth's surface do but reveal the kind of deposit which is to be found everywhere down deep in the earth's bosom. Yet men, as a rule, have ignored that wealth of resource which does not project itself in huge protrusions before their sight. It is comparatively recently that even historians have learnt that human history does not consist exclusively of the record, however faithfully given, of the lives of kings, great warriors, powerful ecclesiasts, and other recognised rulers of men. This glorious Book has been the one grand exception. It has ever taught men that there is a mightier power than that of monarchs, which determines the destinies of nations, and works for righteousness, and which often works more powerfully out of sight than on the surface.

Here, after the names of patriarchs, kings, noted women, and the great judges of Israel, come the prophets, but only as a whole and unnamed ; and then the nameless “women . . . and others,”—not a jot inferior to those who have passed before them, and whose names have been echoed throughout the ages. The transition from “the prophets” to “women” is sudden, but not incongruous. The list of the faithful is not complete without women, those in whom faith triumphed in true womanly fashion—in the power of patient endurance. Theirs was a faith mightier than the wrench of death. They were great in what is pre-eminently the grace of sanctified womanhood—the passive virtues. One loves the domesticity of their faith as recorded here, its pathetic tenderness, and its clinging tenacity. Those women clung to their departed ones as David of old did to the lamb of his flock, until death—like the lion and the bear—had to give up its prey in the unequal struggle. There are two prominent instances—the widow of Zarephath, and the sisters of Lazarus—but what of those

unrecorded, of whom only God knows? Read fully the words of our text: “Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy); they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” With scarcely an exception the prophets were *great in action*; the “women . . . and others,” on the contrary, were *great in endurance*. What tragedies and surprisals these words cover! What a world of suffering and of heroic endurance is epitomised here! The writer has no time to tell more: the theme grows in its vastness; hence, under the pressure of a sublime necessity, he throws what has been left untold upon the shoulders of a few sentences until they stagger and are well-nigh crushed under their burden. By far the most powerful and impressive part of this chapter, as it seems to me, is *this* which begins with the thirty-second verse—“And what shall I more say?” etc. The theme is so majestic, and the rush of the record so mighty and tumultuous, that we are carried on helplessly by its irresistible flow into the whirling rapids of inspired rapture. The passionate inquiry, “What shall I more say?” with which the passage opens, is very suggestive. It is *our saying* that is defective, not *the theme—the sermon*, never *the text*. Here the grandest summary of all types of patient endurance, which we can find within the covers of this book, is associated with the lives of obscure men and women. Heroism is shown to be no monopoly of position or of sex, of age or of nation.

The favourite type of womanly devotion is presented not only in the words “received their dead to life again,” but also in those which apply to the more general epithet “and others,”—namely, “were tortured, *not accepting deliverance*.” How often is this illustrated in other days than those of persecution by the devotedness of consecrated womanhood to husband, child, sufferer and outcast, in toil, feebleness, suffering, and shame! How often have labours and hardships been gratefully accepted, and the suggestion of deliverance or exemption from such emphatically ignored! It is the summary of this indignant repudiation of deliverance from suffering, and even death,

when they have stood in the path of duty, that occupies one of the finest chapters in the illustrious history of faith.

Edwin Long gives a striking illustration of this type of heroism in one of his paintings, where he depicts a Christian maid who will not burn a single grain of incense upon Cæsar's altar to save her life, and that notwithstanding the eloquent appeal in the beseeching look of her lover, that for *his* sake she would do it. Not for *her own* sake; not for *her lover's* sake, whose heart is at the point of breaking, will she cast a pinch of incense upon the unholy flame; but *for Christ's sake* she will *die*, "*not accepting deliverance*," that she "might obtain a better resurrection."

What significance there is in the words, "*and others*"! They represent the forces which have not been tabulated in the ordinary records of triumphs, and yet they are the greatest of all. God in His record supplements every great name with "*and others*." Elijah in the hour of despondency thought himself alone as the centre and circumference of the true devotion of his age—"I, even I only, am left." God reminded him of the "*and others*," when He replied, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings xix. 18). Who won the battle of Waterloo? Wellington. Yes, "*and others*." Who have wrought Christian reformations of the past three centuries? Luther, Wycliffe, Knox, Wesley. Yes, "*and others*" in every instance.

Now, it is of these "*women and others*," anonymously mentioned here, that the writer adds, "Of whom the world was not worthy." Observe that this is not said of any of the great names mentioned previously. That went without the saying. But there was need of emphasizing this regarding the *unknown* heroes of God. The world has been well worthy of most of its kings, warriors, and rulers, and a great deal too good for many of them, but it was not worthy of those mentioned here—who, notwithstanding, were denied footing and shelter in it. It has been worthy of its monarchs, but not of its saints; it was good enough for the rich man, but not for Lazarus at his gate. How the world's estimate is reversed here—a prediction of the final reversal by God of its judgments! It has thought these "*others*" unworthy of itself, but the last verdict, to which there can be no reversal, shall be, "Of whom the world was not worthy." God has in all ages sent royal natures into

the world, which it has not duly recognised—yea, the King Himself came unto His own, and His own received Him not; there was no room for Him in the inn, and He sojourned through His own dominions as a wayfaring man, without a place on which to lay His head. The world which extended such poor hospitality to its King has, throughout the ages, made no room for the royal, although unknown, men and women whom the King has sent. One of the hopeful signs of to-day is that the world gives room to the good and the faithful as it never did before.

My friends, we too can belong, if we will, to the “and others.” Our names will not be added to those of the world’s great ones, nor yet to those of the more prominent heroes of faith, but we can belong to the nameless ones who yet have a glorious record to give. In reading the former part of this chapter we feel that we come into contact with extraordinary lives, and with names which have become historic, and thus occupy an exalted plane of their own; but in reading these verses we realise that we touch the rank and file of God’s faithful men and women, and feel as if we can fall in and join the procession. Are we unknown? So were these; yet the story of the triumphs of faith cannot be told without admitting their achievements into the record. So shall it be with us if only we are found faithful. They without us cannot be made perfect. This is God’s reason for providing “some better thing for us” than was ever granted them. No age of faith is final or self-inclusive. The one becomes the counterpart of the other. Every generation of faithful heroes shall strike its own note, until all ages shall unitedly perfect the grand chord of music that shall ascend to the ear of God, and thrill heaven with its full and rich harmony. They without us—and we without them—“shall not be made perfect.” You have heard of the master musician who on one occasion, while conducting an orchestral rehearsal of one of Handel’s oratorios, threw up his arms amid the tumultuous chorus of instruments, and called for the piccolo that had ceased playing, and without which the united performances of the thousands of vocalists and instrumentalists “could not be made perfect.” Believe me, in the rehearsals for a far grander festival than Handel’s, there is One who listens, and, missing every note which we omit to add to the growing harmonies of the redeemed, calls for it, though our instrument be but the piccolo or something

humbler still. The summons that comes to us from heaven is : " O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever. *Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy*" (Ps. cvii. 1, 2). Are *you* redeemed ? If not, it is not because the Lord's hand is shortened that it cannot save, but because you will not come unto Him that you might have life. *Oh, delay no longer !* But, if you are redeemed, "*say so*"—say "that the Lord is good, and that His mercy endureth for ever." Never mind how feeble the note is, if it be the best you can give. It will find its place, with that of the "and others," in the Hallelujah chorus, which John heard sung in response to the voice that came out of the throne—"Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great,"—and which bursts upon John's ears, "as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia ; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him : for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. xix. 5, 7).

Meanwhile let us seek to do our part, and thus ever be in training for the higher service from which the humblest of God's true servants will not be excluded. It is enough, indeed, if at last we shall be found among the "and others" who are ever increasing throughout the ages, and at length will make up the number of God's faithful ones—faithful in a few things, but yet the recipients of His approving "Well done," as well as of the greater trust and enlarged service which shall be the further pledge of His approval in being made "rulers over many things." Oh that the humble, trustful prayer of each of His servants, here and now, as we remember our many infidelities, may be,—

"Dismiss me not Thy service, Lord,
But train me for Thy will ;
For even I, in fields so broad,
Some duties may fulfil ;
And I will ask for no reward,
Except to serve Thee still.

"Our Master all the work hath done,
He asks of us to-day ;
Sharing His service, every one
Share too His Sonship may :
Lord, I would serve and be a son ;
Dismiss me not, I pray."

LXIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE NEW CART.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab.”—2 SAM. vi. 3.

THIS was not the first time that the ark of God was put upon a new cart. The Philistines were the first to do that in the early days of Samuel. As long as the ark, which they had taken away from the Israelites, was with them, they suffered from a very painful disease, and a plague of mice which consumed everything that grew in their fields. At last they decided to send the ark back to the Israelites. Now, peoples in the East, especially in olden times, attached importance and even sacredness to new things (read Judges xvi. 11; Luke xix. 30; John xix. 41 and 42). The Philistines were in great fear of the ark; they therefore would do nothing which would be a dishonour to it. In returning it to its rightful owners they would not put it on a cart which had been used for any other purpose, so they placed it upon a *new* cart, one probably specially made for the occasion. Now very many years had passed away since then. David had ascended the throne and taken possession of Mount Zion. His great ambition was to make that the capital of his new kingdom, and to have the ark of the testimony, which had been made in the wilderness nearly five hundred years before, placed there. He called together thirty thousand of the chosen men of Israel to join in the ceremony of taking the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion. It was a time of great national rejoicing. I say this to show to you that the people did not treat the ark with indifference. Many psalms were composed and sung on the occasion, as well as in later days, in memory of this event. In 1 Chron. xiii. 8 we read that “David and all Israel played before God *with all their might*, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.” The enthusiasm on the occasion was very great; the people threw their whole heart into the service. So that when they put the ark on a new cart they did not do this in any sense as a slight. It was a *new* cart, and no doubt the very best that could be made for

the occasion. Uzzah and Ahio drove the new cart. Everything went on smoothly until they arrived at Nachon's threshing-floor, when the oxen, possibly at the sight of the corn, or on account of the roughness of the way, stumbled and shook the ark. Uzzah "put forth his hand to the ark of God . . . and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." Thus the procession was brought to a very sudden and awful halt. The ark remained for three months in the house of Obed-edom before another attempt was made to take it to Mount Zion, and on that occasion it was not put, as now, upon a cart, but was carried on the shoulders of the sons of Kohath, by the staves fixed to it.

Thus we have an important lesson to learn from this event. David and the people of Israel by placing the ark on a cart *had followed the example of the heathen Philistines rather than the command of God through Moses.* Now I want you to read Numbers iv. 15. You see that first of all the priests were commanded to cover the ark with the veil that covered the Holy of Holies from the view of men. The sons of Kohath had to stand aside until the priests had finished, and then they came to bear it; *but they were not to touch it lest they die.* Now, if you read Numbers vii. 9, you will find a reference to the offering which the princes of Israel made at the dedication of the tabernacle. They brought oxen and waggons to Moses, and he divided them among the Levites for carrying the sacred vessels of the tabernacle, but to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because it was their duty to carry the ark *upon their shoulders.* They were not to use any oxen or cart, but they were to consider it their highest privilege to carry the covered ark, by staves placed upon their shoulders, without either seeing or touching the sacred chest.

Now, when the Philistines sent back the ark on a new cart, they probably did this in ignorance of God's command. Besides, they had none appointed like the sons of Kohath. They therefore sent back the ark in the best way they could, and did not venture to send any driver, but allowed the oxen to go their own way. *Thus God did not punish them.* But when David and the children of Israel, who *knew God's commandment,* followed the example of the Philistines instead of God's word, and when, moreover, Uzzah, who with his brother drove the cart, *touched* the ark, thinking that his feeble

arm would support the ark of God and prevent it from falling, God punished him, according to the warning which He had long since given to the sons of Kohath, for his irreverence.

You see that, *once you depart from God's commandment, you do not know where you will end.* The people had already broken God's law, when they put the ark upon the cart. But for a while everything went on smoothly, so that they gained confidence, and when the ark was shaken by the oxen Uzzah did not hesitate further to disobey God in *touching it*: but he did this at a fearful cost. The lesson which you and I have to learn from all this is *to obey God in everything which He has bidden us do.* All that God has commanded us should be the highest law of our life, and we ought never to presume upon deciding which of His commandments are important and which are not. We ought not to do that even with regard to our parents. How much less in relation to God! All the commandments given us from heaven are very important. Throughout life ask, "What does God require of me? What does Jesus ask me to do?" and then, when you have learnt what your duty is, consider it the greatest joy and privilege of your life to do it. Let us never throw upon others any burden which we ought to carry on our own shoulders. The Saviour is very patient with us, and often does not punish us for wrongdoing, but let us not therefore grieve Him more, but may His love constrain us to obey Him perfectly. He will enable us to do all His will if we but ask Him.

LXIV.

SERMON—THE HUMAN MINISTRY.

"Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."—ACTS xiv. 15-17.

MOST of us are familiar with the circumstances connected with the utterance of these words. Paul and Barnabas had come into contact with the semi-civilised people of Lystra, and had wrought a miracle among them. "When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech

of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."

Bishop Lightfoot repeats from Ovid the legend of "Philemon and Baucis, the aged peasants who entertained not angels but gods unawares, and were rewarded by their divine guests for their homely hospitality and their conjugal love," as one of the most attractive in Greek mythology; and adds that "it has a special interest, too, for the apostolic history, because it suggests an explanation of the scene at Lystra, when the barbarians would have sacrificed to the apostles, imagining that the same two gods, Zeus and Hermes, had once again deigned to visit, in the likeness of men, those regions which they had graced of old with their presence." Natural as it was for the Lystrans to arrive at this conclusion, it was all-important that it should be repelled at once by the great Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. This was done in the words which I have read for my text.

These words supply us with *the estimate which Paul and Barnabas formed of themselves and of their mission.*

1. *They recognised the existence and value of former ministries.* God had spoken in a thousand ways before ever they had opened their mouths. Unlike some modern teachers, they did not assume that Divine wisdom had been hermetically sealed until they were sent to disclose it. The living God had never been silent. It were an awful thing had He never spoken, for a silent God would have meant a dumb creation, since all the music of creation is but the echo of the Divine voice. He "gave the word," and all inspiration and song originated with that gift. All creation echoed it. He "gave the word; great was the company of those that published it": it flamed in suns, sparkled in stars, descended in the dew and rain, throbbed in earthquakes, thundered in storms, whispered in the summer breezes, burst forth in buds and blossoms, and waved in fruitful fields of golden grain. He "gave the word": it was set to the music of the spheres; it swept like an inspiration along the keys of nature's grand organ; all creation caught the harmony; "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

And these old teachers continued to tell the story as the ages moved. These ancient preachers did not die. They told the same tale in the same tones, and never grew weary of telling it. One of the saddest and most pathetic aspects of

the human ministry is its exceeding brevity. We no sooner begin to learn how to preach than we have to give up preaching. It was not so with these prophets of the Invisible. Their chain of testimony extended over ages, and embraced millenniums. They spoke in a universal language, unaffected by local dialect, and unlimited by the conditions of human speech. The sun that shone upon Abraham smiled upon the Lystrans, and the stars from which God bade the father of the faithful snatch the full meaning of the great promise which comprehended the destiny of his descendants, twinkled over Lystra, and still do over Brighton, in the solemn stillness of the night. In the words of David, "The heavens declare the power of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard" (R.V.). In other words, they speak with the sublime eloquence of silence, and flash their message from heaven to earth in light. Yet—"their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world," etc. (Ps. xix. 1—6). Paul and Barnabas did not ignore these great teachers of God, since, to use Paul's words to the Romans, "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Thus Paul here affirms, as the basis of his message, that God "in times past had not left Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Of this ministry all men had been recipients. But—

2. While not ignoring this ancient ministry, *Paul claimed to supplement it.* The former ministry had been ineffectual. Man had fallen; his ear had become deaf to the harmonies of creation, and his eyes dim to all the visions of the great Creator, as given in nature. He had lost the key to the mysterious hieroglyphics which had for ages been emblazoned in the heavens and graven in the rocks. Just as the hieroglyphics in ancient rocks had become a mystery to succeeding ages, until a duoglott tablet was found, which explained them, so Nature to fallen man had become unintelligible without the counterpart in a tongue that he could understand.

But even when Nature's testimony could be read it had no message for man as a sinner. The speech of the heavens was

unaffected by man's fall; his sin had not touched them, his discord had not entered into their language, and there was no adequate provision for him as a sinner in their message. When they were first endowed with speech man had not sinned. God gave them a message to man, but not to the sinner. *Thus Nature never has had regenerative power.* Moral degeneracy has lurked in all ages amid the most charming scenes upon which human eye has ever rested, and vice has flourished beneath the serenest skies through which God has ever looked. There was no "converting" power in nature. In this respect David contrasted the law of God with the heavens and the firmament—"The law of the Lord is *perfect, converting the soul*" (Ps. xix. 7). Hence the reason for the Divine forbearance which the Apostle announces here in times past. While the heathen, by reason of the voices which they had heard, were not blameless, yet although they had no excuse for the sin and vice into which they had fallen, God had "suffered" them, since they had not received the higher and more effective ministries sent by Him.

Here Paul and Barnabas claimed to bring good tidings concerning the living God, of whom the thousand voices of nature in rain and fruitful seasons had borne but imperfect testimony.

(1) *Their message was more complete.* They proclaimed *salvation* to men. God of a truth had dwelt with man on the earth. The story of the Incarnation, our Lord's life, His death upon the cross as the offering of infinite sacrifice for sin, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven and His intercession there, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the coming again of our Lord to recompense the good and the evil, were the themes which all the voices that the Lystrans had ever heard had never touched, but which were proclaimed in all their fulness, and emphasised in their all-important bearing upon the duty and the eternal destiny of all men.

(2) *The preachers were better qualified for the task.* As the bearers of these good news, *they claimed to be men*: that they were nothing less was all-important, that they were nothing more was all that the apostles cared just now to emphasise. I remember hearing that on one occasion in Wales a grand old preacher filled with Divine love spoke the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ with thrilling eloquence. Two boys in the congregation were greatly impressed, and at last were so

carried away by his utterances that they began to consult with each other. One asked the other, Is he a man or an angel? They discussed the question, and after a great deal of deliberation they came to the conclusion that he *must* be an angel. There is no misunderstanding of that sort in our day: *our congregations are too cultured, and preachers are so very human.*

The apostles, however, were anxious that the truth concerning themselves should be known. They were neither gods nor angels. There may be some disadvantage in certain directions in not being an angel, but none in the direction of preaching. Consecrated man is master of the pulpit. Angels have always been poor preachers. I do not want to be an angel; I would rather be a man redeemed by the blood of Christ, and be able to proclaim Salvation through Jesus Christ. Remember that the choicest gifts which God has ever given to the world have been in human form. The greatest gift He has ever given—the proclamation of which is to be a gospel to the end of days—was in human form, for the Son of God “took not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.” He is also the Son of man, One “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and having “suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” God’s greatest gift is not only in the form of man, but also of the Man of sorrows. That is the sublime pathos of the Gospel. It is this that imparts a thrilling tenderness to it.

Next to the pathos of a human and sympathetic Saviour, we have the pathos of *a human and sympathetic ministry.* There are ministries toward the sorrowing which angels cannot perform. “Weep with those that weep” is an exhortation which angels cannot obey. They have never unsealed the fount of tears. Only sorrowing men have done that; hence the uniqueness of the ministry which is thus made possible to them. We by reason of our humanity, redeemed and sanctified, can take the fallen by the hand, and, in the power of the Saviour whom we serve, heal them with a touch that is at once human and Christlike.

We are men, and as such we are to make known the Saviour of men to men. By our humanity we are united to the Saviour and to those for whom He died. Hence there is a warm glow in the human message of the Saviour’s love to sinful man. Our preaching must be an enthusiasm, or it is worse than nothing. What a great thing to feel that en-

thusiasm! There is no love like the love of the redeemed—excepting the love that redeemed them. Once a man has realised that he has been bought with the precious blood of Christ, and once he has heard the Master's voice bidding him go forth, he dare not be indifferent to the high claims which are made upon his best services. Have we been redeemed? Then it is our duty and privilege, in teaching the young, in distributing tracts, in visiting the sick and the dying, to make known the Christ who has redeemed us. Are we ready to spend and be spent for Him? If we give to the Saviour that which alone is acceptable to Him, we must give ourselves—all our energies, all our ambitions, all our aspirations. In all ages of the world God has raised up from the lowliest stations men after His own heart, laden with solemn messages, and inspired with great truths which they were to make known to the world. Outward circumstances have never constituted the greatness or the smallness of a life. Man may rise above them, or he may fall below them. Therefore outward circumstances cannot rid us of responsibilities, although in some instances they add vastly to them. The supreme necessity is that we should see the light and rejoice in it, know the Saviour and trust in Him, so that in the power of His truth, and in the inspiration of His love, we shall serve Him, and bless our race. Once we hear His voice, and rise to the enthusiasm and dignity of our high calling in Christ Jesus, the command which we obey shall find its consummation in the promise which will ever sound in our ears, inspire our hearts, and sustain us in our work—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

One word to you who have for years listened to this human proclamation of the Saviour's love. Human ministers have come and gone, having exhausted their energies upon you, and some of you are none the better for it all. The offer of pardon and peace has been steadfastly rejected by you. Has it ever occurred to you that there is a point at which *even Divine patience* may become exhausted, too, and in the tones of an infinite sorrow exclaim, "Ephraim is turned to idols; let him alone"!

LXV.

*A TALK WITH CHILDREN—PAUL GATHERING
STICKS.*

“When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire,” etc.—ACTS xxviii. 3.

You will remember that in giving you an address some time ago on “Making Cakes” I drew your attention to the fact that children had something to do in bringing about the happy result—that it was their work to gather the wood. I also tried to show you how specially fitted children were for that task, as fathers were for kindling the fire and mothers for kneading the dough.

Now, in addition to that instance, there are three references in the Bible to people gathering sticks. The first is in Numbers xv. 22. There we are told that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and that he was put to death for thus disobeying God’s commandment and desecrating His holy day. The second instance is in 1 Kings xvii. 10. It refers to the poor woman of Zarephath who had gone out to gather a few sticks, so that she might kindle a fire and prepare what she thought must be the last meal for herself and her son before they died of hunger. That story is very touching and pathetic. The third instance is that which is given in our text.

Here Paul, the great apostle, is engaged in gathering a bundle of sticks. If we had written the life of Paul we should probably have not considered that important enough to record. There are many so-called successors of the apostles who would be far too proud to do that sort of thing to-day. You know the story. Paul and his companions were shipwrecked and finally cast upon the shore of Melita—the modern island of Malta. The inhabitants of the island at that time were barbarous; but, notwithstanding that, we are told that they showed the shipwrecked strangers no little kindness. God seems to have specially touched their hearts and made them very sympathetic. In that group there was an apostle, whose life was far too precious to be lost, as well as others whom the world needed, cast upon the shore drenched and cold. The

poor barbarians came to them, and had pity upon them. They lit a fire and bade them gather round it. Little did they realise what valuable lives they were then sheltering; and yet they had heard of an aged couple named Philemon and Baucis, who, so it was said, once entertained gods when they thought they were only welcoming weary travellers. So these Melitans now gave a warm welcome and kind attention to Paul and his companions without knowing who they were.

Now, there are some of us who never get tired of being waited upon. Paul was not a man of that sort. On the contrary, he was never so happy as when he waited upon others. There was not an idle bone in all his body. He was full of activity, and always ready to serve; so he apparently said to himself on this occasion, "I am not going to let these poor barbarians, who have so kindly lighted the fire, carry all the sticks necessary to keep it burning brightly." Off he went in search of fuel, and returned with a bundle—not a few, as in the case of the poor widow of Zarephath, from whom all the spirit had been crushed, but a bundle—that would have frightened a bishop to see, much more to carry. Paul did everything with a heart, and on this occasion brought as many sticks as he could carry, in order to put them on the bonfire.

There are many lessons in connection with this incident, and I shall probably return to it some other day; but the lesson I want you to learn this morning is—*never to be above doing the humblest task* in order to be useful. If you turn to John xxi. 9, you will read these words—"As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." It is very clear, from the narrative, that our Lord Himself kindled that fire and placed the fish and bread upon it. Those sacred hands which performed such great miracles were not considered too good to be engaged in this humble task on the sea-shore. Those hands, too, on a former occasion took the towel and basin and washed the disciples' feet! The Lord Jesus was not above doing the humblest task. He had come to be servant of all. So Paul, who largely partook of his Master's spirit, was not above gathering sticks on this occasion. Ought we, then, to be too proud to perform the humblest service? Why, there are some of you who, when you return home from school, think yourselves too high and

mighty to go on an errand for your mother,—much more to fetch a bundle of firewood. If you soil your hands in any such service, you think they will never afterwards be fit for anything noble. Ah me! think of the Lord Jesus Himself, and think of the apostle Paul, and be ashamed of your stupid conceit. Even our Lord Jesus learnt a trade. So did Paul. The one was a carpenter, the other was a tent-maker. Every Jewish boy was taught a trade. I wish every English boy was as fortunate. I wonder what the folks who despise tradespeople would think of the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul, if they lived in their day. I suppose they would have exclaimed about the Saviour, with the proud professional gentlemen of His day—“Is not this the carpenter!” I think I can see the sneer that would play upon their faces. The same people would resent the thought of being taught by Saul the tent-maker. Children, be above that folly. Think of Paul, who wrote these glorious Epistles, and beckoned with his hand to his judges and vast audiences when he spoke to them, calling the attention of the elders of Ephesus to the same hands, and saying “Yea, ye yourselves know *that these hands have ministered unto my necessities*, and to them that were with me.” Some men who have crept up the ladder to a profession are terribly afraid that people should know their hands have ever been engaged in humble work. Not so Paul. He was never ashamed, but on the contrary was thankful that he had with his hands earned his daily bread. Now, I want you to remember that God gave you your hands not to be carried in your pockets, but to be busily employed. I think it is a sad calamity when we cannot help ourselves, but have to be waited upon by other people. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” If we love the Saviour we shall find constant opportunities of serving Him; and if we serve Him as we should, we must not be haughty and proud, but do that which is nearest at hand, and consider it a privilege to do anything that will please and glorify Him.

LXVI.

SERMON—CRIES AT THE CROSS.

I. THE CRY OF BLASPHEMY.

“And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads,” etc.—
MATT. xxvii. 39—44.

THIS is the hour and the power of darkness. Let evil men and demons have their short-lived rapture. It *is* short-lived! The Cross is the culminating point of the diabolic programme; but what if it be also an essential part of the Divine! The sequel will tell. Meanwhile the disciples are scattered every one to his own, and even John and the women stand dumbly at the Cross. The hush of a sorrowful mystery has descended upon them and enveloped them. They know not what these things can mean. Moreover, from the thrilling petition that has just gone up from the heart and lips of that majestic Sufferer, echoed from every brook and hillside as it ascended through the darkening heavens up to God, they learn that even the prominent actors of the hour—chief priests, scribes, elders, soldiers, passers by—“know not what they do.” And yet this gentle, pathetic cry, whatever effect it has had in heaven, has lashed the seething mob into fury, and made it howl and hiss in a thousand voices. This maddened throng repudiates the ignorance that might condone, and clamours for the guilt that must condemn. Strange are the cries which the Cross calls forth! This infuriated mob cannot look at it in silence. The sight of it makes blasphemy eloquent and wickedness ferocious. Man must become a saint or a devil at this Cross. Unutterable is the redemptive or the damning power of it. It is already “a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.”

In these utterances at the Cross we find sad revelations of the human heart. Such moments as these open up great depths. I am not sure that we realise as we should that nothing casts so intense and searching a light upon the mystery of iniquity, revealing it in all its ramifications, and forcing it to an open declaration of itself, and manifestation of its ultimate designs and issues, as the Cross of Christ.

1. The cry of *the passers by and unholy traffickers*. These were people who, from a combination of circumstances, were thrown into momentary contact with each other. They had

come from all parts of the land to the same feast. They massed at the point to the east of the city where the two great roads—the one from the north and the other from the south—met. On the rocky elevation where the roads fork the crosses were lifted up. It was the old place of executions: the holes into which the crosses were jerked, after they had been lifted up with their quivering burdens, had long since been hewn out of the rock, and had often before this done service. What a motley throng, consisting of well-nigh every variety of type, age, and condition, surged here, but all ready for a sight! Most of these had seen crucifixions before, and had been more or less hardened by the brutalising effects of such sights. But there was one distinguished—or, as they would think, notorious—Person to be crucified that day. The great bulk had decided upon His merits from hearsay,—the usual short cut at estimating character adopted by multitudes,—and had caught the prevailing sneer. They were a people who were not inconvenienced by such delicate considerations as the possible incongruity of taking part in the Feast of the Passover and of gloating over executions. The one was an agreeable set-off to the other.

Among others were those who had come to Jerusalem to traffic as money-exchangers and sellers of doves, and who smarted still with the memory of the two occasions—one three years before, and the other but a few days since—when Christ had scourged them out of the Temple. They rejoiced now in the irony of the situation. Since the time He had scourged them He Himself had received the lash. He had, moreover, said to them, as He drove them out of the Temple, “It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, and ye have made it a den of thieves.” Lo! now *He* is condemned with two thieves, and is crucified between them. Those hands, moreover, which held the scourge, and those feet whose approach had sent terror through them, were nailed securely now to that cross of shame.

According to Mark, these mockers begin their shout with a glee of ironical admiration condensed into a quivering interjection sent like an arrow to His heart—“Ah!” Fiends looked out through those flashing eyes, and demons danced in that tremulous sneer.

Brethren, here you have *the mad and blasphemous cry of vested interests* at the Cross of Christ. How do I know it?

Listen. What are the words of Christ which they remember—nay, travesty, for here we have a glaring instance of the immorality of misquotation? The words which they travesty were, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He had uttered these when, three years before this, He had lashed them out of the Temple, for these words do not appear to have been uttered in the second instance. How many things which He had uttered during those three years had they forgotten; but not these! They bore too close a relationship with the interruption of their unholy traffic by the quivering scourge. That was the unpardonable sin. Let the words which He then uttered be misquoted. These people were keen enough to see the difference, and diabolical enough to ignore it. Those men who had so recently profaned the Temple with their unholy trafficking were now mad in its vindication. The ages have rung with the pious cries of traffickers, from those who now mocked at the Christ to Demetrius, and from Demetrius until now.

Thus shouting and wagging their heads, this portion of the mocking throng would hasten with light heart to the house of God to ply their trade, fearless of the lash now. Others with less purpose would go leisurely to the Temple to praise God as aforetime, having done nothing better on the way than flung a passing sneer at the Cross and the Crucified One.

2. The cry of *bigoted ecclesiasts, professional scribes, tyrannical rulers and heathen soldiers*. “Likewise also *the chief priests* mocking Him, with the *scribes and elders*,” etc. From the record given by Luke (see Revised Version) it would appear that, while the people were looking on, beholding, “the rulers” were the first to break upon the silence with the coarse sneer. “Likewise,” says Mark, giving the same order as Matthew, “also the chief priests, mocking, said among themselves, with the scribes, He saved others,” etc. “*Among themselves*”—still maintaining an air of dignity and reserve, and yet joining in the rabble cry. What an instance of what dignified people will stoop to do and say, and still maintain their dignity! Ah! nothing vulgarises a man like bigotry and unholy passion. These are incapable of refinement.

Luke refers to the soldiers who, having quaffed their wine and probably drunk to the Sufferer, ridiculed Him as the humiliating embodiment of Jewish hope, saying, “If Thou be

the King of the Jews, save Thyself." We are not surprised that the rude soldiers of an empire which was drunk with the cup of its own prosperity should have so far partaken of its spirit as proudly to mock at the Crucified One; but oh the unaccountable blindness of the chief priests, that could let them join in this cry—join in the jeering shout of a heathen soldiery at the very hope that once inspired the hearts of prophet and seer, but which now they degraded with their laugh! This one shout, terrible as it is, is the culmination of ages of unspirituality. It is the ultimate expression of a degeneracy that has eaten all devotion and godliness out of the heart of the priesthood. These men cannot comprehend anything nobler than they have experienced. Priests have ceased to be self-denying, self-abnegating men; hence they cannot see the glory of the self-denying, self-abnegating Christ. "This is the condemnation—nay, the *damnation* (the judgment, Revised Version)—that the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" In other words, this was the great test which at once revealed the character and determined the destiny of men. The greatest damnation is to lose all appreciation of the good—all love for light. There is no hell lower than that for man or devil. That is to lose God's image in its entirety. That damnation is brought into a lurid light by the Cross in the persons of the chief priests who mocked the Christ of God as He suffered there, and "by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay Him" (Revised Version).

Oh what penal blindness befell these lovers of darkness! The whole scene is predicted in a Psalm which had long before been accepted as Messianic in Rabbinical writings, and the very words which now danced in mad frenzy upon the quivering and whitening lips of scribes and elders, appear all in that Psalm as the wild utterance of those "who, laughing the Messiah to scorn," "shoot out the lip" and "shake the head" (Psalm xxii. 7, 8). What a fearful irony of fate there is about this! Who can blaspheme like blind zealots! Ah me! the devil is but a fallen angel, and the deadliest malignity and coarsest blasphemy are but prostituted religious zeal and passion. Oh how fearful, and yet how subtle, the transition from piety to blasphemy, from the zeal that glorifies God to the passion that reviles His Anointed One!

Thus have we seen that around the Cross of Christ casual

passers by, unholy traffickers, religious bigots, sceptical scribes, dignified rulers and heathen soldiers vied with each other in blaspheming the Crucified One. This historic fact is also typical of what is still going on. The same blasphemous cry, in varied forms, ascends to-day from motley crowds into the ears of the Christ. Pleasure seekers, busy men, self-seeking traffickers, religious formalists, learned sceptics, haughty rulers, and coarse worldlings, still in many instances blaspheme the Saviour by their ignoble estimates of Him and His Cross. The Cross misunderstood, travestied, and mocked, is still the one tragic fact which proclaims human perversity and sin as nothing else can. We never could know how degraded and blasphemous man could be until it was revealed by the Cross how loving and patient God is. Superstition and unbelief, indifference and bitter hatred, all join in bringing dishonour upon the Saviour and His great sacrifice. Have we ever joined any group in this motley throng, who with conflicting motives and opinions rival each other in piercing the heart of Christ by a total misconception of His death, and of His claims upon our best love and fullest consecration? God forbid! There were other cries at the Cross upon which we hope to dwell, and which, I trust, better express our attitude toward Him who died that we might live. But meanwhile let every one examine himself as in God's sight.

LXVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—PAYING THE FARE.

“So he paid the fare thereof.”—JONAH i. 3.

You all know where Jonah wanted to go. The Lord had told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians,—the most bitter and powerful enemies of Israel,—and warn it against its wickedness. Jonah did not like the task. Why should Nineveh be warned at all? Let the worst happen to it. So he thought and desired. It is not always easy to do good for evil. Jonah, therefore, sought to run away from the presence of the Lord. Instead of going eastward he went westward. Having arrived at Joppa, a little seaport town on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, he took ship to Tarshish, or Tartessus, in Spain. He thus intended to cross the Great Sea, and be far enough from Nineveh, so as never to be obliged to preach repentance to those heathen oppressors, who richly deserved, as he thought, the worst that could befall them. “So he paid the fare” and “went down into” the ship.

At the outset, you see, Jonah is above working or begging his passage. He pays down his fare in a straightforward way, and passes for a very respectable passenger. If any one had accused him of being dishonest just after he had paid his fare and had gone down to the cabin, he would have shown his ticket, and angrily resented the suggestion. Yes, he was paying his own way through life. The last thing that would occur to him was to defraud a shipping company. If he had reached Tarshish he would have passed for an honourable man, who paid twenty shillings in the pound. Yet, all the while, Jonah was defrauding God. There are many like him to-day, who pay their fellows their due, and are too ready to think that is all that will be required of them; whereas every moment they are wronging God and wasting for selfish ends the talents which He has given them to use in His service. This is the worst form of dishonesty. They are unprofitable servants.

Again, Jonah paid his fare in advance. I do not think he could have helped doing so. Shipping companies have always been anxious to secure payment in advance for passengers. I suppose Jonah was to reach Tarshish on the usual conditions, “wind, weather, and circumstances permitting,”—but it was not so with the fare. Wind or no wind, weather or no weather, circumstances or no circumstances, Jonah was to pay his fare. *That was the one thing certain*; there was a charming uncertainty about everything else. There are some American friends

here to-day. They had to pay for their voyage before they left America. That was a certainty. But reaching England was quite a question of "wind, weather, and circumstances." So it was with Jonah. He had to pay the fare, and then *perhaps* he would reach Tarshish.

Well, we learn one thing from this record—*When a man goes away from God he goes at his own cost.* He has to pay dearly for every inch of the way. Jonah paid for a voyage which he was never permitted to finish. We know what took place. A mighty storm came on. The mariners were terrified, and, poor heathen as they were, they cried unto their gods, but there was no answer to their prayers. At last they said, "There is one man who does not join with us. We cannot get a blessing without united prayer." Those heathen sailors realised that. I wish some folks older than you remembered it on a Monday night, when we are praying to God for a blessing upon His work here. Well, these sailors felt that there was one voice missing. They must send to that respectable Jew who was sleeping down in the cabin, and bring him up to the prayer-meeting on deck. He had thought all was right now that he had paid his fare; the storm had failed to awake him, so there "he lay, and was fast asleep." But what the storm could not do the captain soon did. He woke him up without much ceremony, and said, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God," etc. Jonah was in a great fix now. He was told to call upon that God from whom he was trying to flee! The sailors, after casting lots in their poor heathen fashion, and cross-examining Jonah pretty sharply about his occupation and his former residence, at length found out the secret. They had cast out their cargo in the storm all because of him. Jonah, feeling that in the circumstances drowning was preferable to life on deck, and with some sympathy for those upon whom he had brought so much trouble, said to them, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea,"—which, after every effort to save him, they at last did, and there was a calm. Let us trust that, as the ship proceeded on its voyage, the sailors learnt to look up to that God to whom they had cried, and who now made "the sea cease from her raging."

Meanwhile, you know what happened to Jonah. The Lord mercifully prepared a fish for him, which in due time cast him ashore, a poorer but a wiser man. He had lost his fare and his baggage, but he had learnt a lesson worth all he had

forfeited—never to run away from his God again, but always to do His bidding readily.

Thus you see that *the way of the transgressor is hard*. But the best part of it all is just where the greatest hardness comes in. What a blessing that God does not allow us to sin without our being humbled for it! If it were not so, how sinful some of us would become! But God graciously stops us in our foolish ways, as He stopped Jonah, and, by a terrible dealing, brought him again to his senses.

Notice, too, *what misery Jonah brought upon others*. The people who took his fare made no profit out of it, and those on board the ship were no better for his company: on the contrary, he cost them great anxiety and care. The man who disobeys God does not benefit any one by his godlessness. What misery the drunkard and the gambler bring upon their friends! Indeed, they do good to no one in the long run.

I want you to learn, without having to pass through Jonah's severe discipline, that the only happy and blessed life is that in which the Saviour is honoured and loved, and His commandments cheerfully obeyed. Jesus said, "If ye love Me keep My commandments." May we hear His voice now, and obey evermore!

LXVIII.

SERMON—CRIES AT THE CROSS.

I. THE CRY OF BLASPHEMY—continued.

"And the robbers also that were crucified with Him cast upon Him the same reproach."—MATT. xxvii. 44 (R.V.).

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, Art not Thou the Christ? save Thyself and us."—LUKE xxiii. 39 (R.V.).

IN my last sermon I referred to the cry of blasphemy which escaped the lips—(1) Of *the passers by and unholy traffickers*; and (2) of *bigoted ecclesiasts, professional scribes, tyrannical rulers, and heathen soldiers*. Now it remains for me to speak of

3. *The thieves who took up the blasphemy*, and hurled it at the Christ in the hour of His deepest agony. There is every reason why we should refer to the thieves separately,—not only because they did not belong to the throng that seethed and foamed around the Cross of Christ, but also because we know what the result of blasphemy was in their case. There is a haze cast over the final destiny of the multitude. What became of many of the mockers in that heaving throng, when

they were dispersed, and especially when the story of the death, resurrection, and ascension was fully told,—how long each and all persisted in the blasphemy,—we know not. But we know *how blasphemy ended* in the case of each of the thieves who reviled the Saviour.

It appears from the record by Matthew that both thieves at first mocked Him, but we also learn from Luke that only one persisted in his blasphemy. It would seem, too, from the comparison of the different accounts, that the penitent thief did little more than assent by silence, or look or sneer that may have been allowed to play momentarily upon his countenance, although it is possible, but not probable in the face of his subsequent rebuke of his comrade, that he boldly uttered blasphemous words. Whether the point of divergence between the two thieves was arrived at soon or late, we are not fully informed, although I strongly incline to the former opinion. One thing is certain,—that there was a point at which the two finally severed relationship, and parted company for ever. Blasphemy in the one case broke down in penitence, and in the other deepened into the bitter curse of sullen despair. I hope again to dwell upon the petition of the penitent blasphemer. I must now accept the unwelcome task of emphasizing the darkening night into which the impenitent rushed madly.

But, before doing so, and in order to understand better the blasphemy that at first was levelled at the central cross from the two other crosses, it is advisable to avail ourselves of all the light which contemporary and later history throws upon the class of men of which the two robbers were representatives. The history of this period abounds with references to numerous insurrectionary movements in which fanatical Jewish patriots took part, with the hope of ridding themselves of the yoke of Rome. This mad hope was the then modern caricature of ancient Jewish faith. Barabbas had been at the head of such an insurrection. John tells us that he was “a robber,” and Mark relates that he lay “bound with them that had made insurrection, men who in the insurrection had committed murder” (R.V.). That he was the ringleader is evident from the prominence given to him in the narrative, and the reference to him by Matthew as “a notable prisoner.” His name is suggestive of his claims—Barabbas, or *Son of the Father*. If, in addition to this, the reading of Matthew xxvii. 17 in some cursive manuscripts and two early

versions be the accurate one, his full name was Jesus Barabbas ! This gives special force to the antithesis, as well as distinctiveness, of choice given by Pilate in the 22nd verse—"What then shall I do with Jesus *which is called Christ?*" In support of this it has been urged by eminent critics that the probability would be greatly on the side of reverent transcribers dropping out of the narrative the sacred name of Jesus in such a connexion, rather than irreverently introducing it for the sake of establishing a striking contrast. If that be so, then the choice between "[Jesus] Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ," is the more significant. Barabbas was the *Jewish* ideal of a Messiah, the Christ was the *Divine* ideal: hence the ease with which the chief priests could move the fanatical crowd who looked to the insurrectionist for deliverance, to cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Then immediately comes the significant comment by John, which casts a searching light upon the hidden meaning of the choice—"Now Barabbas was a robber." Place this side by side with the other accounts of this "notable prisoner" having been engaged in "sedition," and having, with others, "committed murder in the insurrection," and the picture is complete.

Now, too, we can better understand the annoyance of Pilate at the persistency of the Jews in clamouring for the popular but reckless insurrectionist rather than the One in whom he could find no fault, but who was, he knew, delivered to him only for envy. The presence of two other robbers is significant in the circumstances. If the people forced Pilate to commit that Just One to death amid his feeble protests of innocency from His blood, and to release unto them their favourite, but who richly deserved death, he on the other hand would take two other robbers, who were ringleaders among those who had been "bound with" Barabbas (Mark xv. 7), and thus, in the face of the triumph of public clamour, vindicate the authority of Rome against daring insurrectionists.

Again, these insurrections,—the last futile attempts on the part of the Jews to *rid themselves* of the yoke of hostile power,—were the more easily brought to a point at this time through the dismissal of forty thousand workmen, of all grades, by Herod, when the rebuilding of the Temple had been completed. A large number of these took to the highways, and, as hinted at in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Judæa was infested with robbers. These on the one hand readily joined in any

public clamour which had in it the possibility of booty, and on the other hand they, if they escaped punishment, readily subsided after such futile attempts against the ruling power—but successful efforts at looting—into their former habits, strengthened by their plunder, and additional companions, in maintaining their depredations among the hills, and their defiant attitude against law and order. Many of the better-principled fanatics who joined in sedition had often no choice, when the insurrection was suppressed, but to join these bands of brigands. Now, it was from this class, essentially criminal, but yet varying somewhat in intensity of vice, that these thieves were taken.

This fact casts a light upon the thieves joining in the mocking cry. Of course the history of crucifixions supplies parallel instances. While the Christians who were crucified blessed their persecutors, ordinary criminals not infrequently gave vent to their intolerable sufferings by cursing their judges, and spitting, in the last despair of helpless rage, upon onlookers. We must not ignore this fact now. Again, the pride which would inspire men with an effort to appear to be above the necessity of shrieking with anguish, while it found a substitute for such necessity, would lead these men to sneer haughtily at the central Sufferer. Also the desire to secure the favour of the throng, any one of whom could, and in such cases frequently did, jerk the cross, and thus cause infinite anguish to the quivering burden which hung upon it, would readily induce these tortured criminals to join in the public cry. But, over and above this, the facts which I have already stated supply a motive for personal bitterness on their part. This great Sufferer had been placed over against their leader in the recent trial. True that Barabbas had been released, but only at the cost, probably, of Pilate giving vent to his chagrin by crucifying them. In any case they were fanatics who had no patience with a Messiahship that did not supply its credentials in such deeds of violence and sedition as those in which they had engaged. Thus, on these three crosses we have the true and the false ideals of Messiahship, and in the mocking cries of the thieves we trace the bitter hostility of the false against the true.

The break-down of blasphemy in the case of the penitent robber will be the subject of a future discourse, but the bitter blasphemy of the other, even in death, and so near to the Cross of the Saviour, is the awful subject which thrusts itself upon

our notice now. Men instinctively love to think of the penitent thief, and to forget the other. We sympathise very strongly with that feeling. But we must not forget the warnings of Calvary while we remember its encouragements. Cowper sings :

“ The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day.”

Yes, *one* dying thief *did*, but *the other did not*. One robber broke down in his blasphemy, and was saved while nailed to his cross ; and thus was revealed the mighty power of the Cross of Christ. Another thief persisted in cursing the Christ with his dying breath, and in dire despair turned the last gasp into a quivering curse, and his last look into an angry scowl that had in it the glare of hell ! Here we shudder and learn the damning power of evil—the terrible possibility of being hardened in sin, so that the most gracious influences are resisted, and man becomes very like a devil ! In the presence of this scene I cannot ignore the fact that by wicked persistence in an evil course there is a moment *possible* (I earnestly hope that this will never be realised in the experience of any one here) in the life of some men, when God at length has to exclaim, “ Ephraim is turned to idols, let him alone ! ” As I look upon the Cross of Christ I rejoice to proclaim a love great and tender enough to save the world ; but I must also emphasize the other fact which the story of the Crucifixion presents to us in a lurid light,—that it is possible for men who lend themselves “ to *iniquity unto iniquity* ” to be very near the Cross of Christ, to see all that can be seen, and to hear the divinest utterances of forgiveness that Christ ever proclaimed among men, and still to persist in evil and defy the Cross with their last breath. I know it is generally said that men who curse the Saviour in life will not do it deliberately in death. I rejoice to know that this is the rule ; but there are *startling exceptions*. There was one on Calvary, and there have been many since.

Observe what the ostensible grounds for this blasphemy were. First, “ Thou that destroyest the Temple,” etc. I have in the preceding sermon referred to these words. I will now only point out that the thieves could appreciate this sneer. They had probably been employed in rebuilding the Temple. They knew how long forty thousand men had been engaged upon it. The false meaning which the high priests had given to the misquoted words of Christ appealed powerfully, therefore, to the thieves as reasons for bitter mocking.

The second reason for mocking Christ was His claim to be the King of Israel. The heathen soldiery had called Him, with a side sneer at the Jews, "the King of the Jews"; now the chief priests and others took up the sneer, adapting it to their own religious phraseology, "*If* He be the King of Israel." The "if" comes as the echo of the Satanic "if" in the earlier temptations of Christ's life. The demand was that, if King, He was to save Himself. They had no higher conception of kingship than this. The world's kingships have always pointed in the direction of self-preservation, and not of self-denial. They had not learnt, or would not learn, that the Christ was King because He saved not Himself, but died to save others.

The last ground for mocking was His claim to be the Son of God. This was the greatest. In all ages the bitterest sneers at the Cross are the outcome of a repudiation of this claim. If Christ was not the Son of God, then this last challenge was *not blasphemy*. But believing, as we do, that He was "the effulgence of His glory, and the very image (or impress) of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power," we look upon this "If" as but the repetition of the Satanic sneer in the wilderness—"If Thou be the Son of God." There must be no doubt of His Divinity at His Cross, or, if there be on the part of some, we can have no religious fellowship with them. We *must* belong to those who exclaimed "*If*" at His Cross, or to those who, with the centurion, exclaimed, "Truly this is the Son of God." Who shall tell how much of the responsibility of the impenitent thief's persistency in blaspheming the Christ rests upon chief priests and scribes who first challenged His Divinity! To me everything depends upon whether or not we accept the Crucified One as the Son of God who had power to lay down His life and had power to take it up again, and who did all that He might save me from my sin. It is this Divine One, who has offered the one all-sufficient atonement for our sins, whom I preach to you to-night; "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The one question that will echo unanswered throughout all the ages will be, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Accept it now, and live! At the foot of Christ's Cross exclaim, "My Lord, and my God!"

LXIX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—LODGINGS IN THE COUNTRY.

“Let us lodge in the villages.”—SONG OF SOLOMON vii. 11.

I HAVE no doubt that you have heard a good deal about “lodgings in the country” of late. Some of you have been for a short stay in the villages, and have had a very happy time there. You have been allowed to put on some of your old clothes and to tear them to any extent by leaping over the hedges in gathering flowers and chasing butterflies. You have also got up early and gathered enough mushrooms for breakfast. I know, too, that some of you have been playing havoc with the orchards, and shaking down from the trees all manner of fruit. You have even had milk warm from the cow, and enjoyed a great many other luxuries, which are so welcome and refreshing to children. Then again you have heard the thrush, blackbird, and bullfinch, sing outside your bedroom window, or among the trees. Sometimes we seem to want a change, even from Brighton: how much more do those who live in large and smoky cities need it! Yesterday I had to pass through the East End of London. There was such a dreadful tumult, that the rush and noise of people seemed to oppress me, and I was glad to get into the country, out of the rush of life into the hush of it, and thus have a moment’s peace. I heard the sweet birds sing among the branches, and saw the beautiful trees clothed in their best green, and my heart once more gained freshness and strength.

Now, I am quite sure that you can understand that, for I have never yet seen a child who was not passionately fond of the country, and all those experiences peculiar to country life. Your parents have only to say to you, “Let us lodge in the villages,” and they are greeted with shouts of delight, and with the question “When?” The word “lodge” used in my text means *a short stay*. It is a different word from that which is translated “dwell” or “abide,” so that this is an invitation to leave the town for a brief visit to the country. It would be a sad thing for England if, as in the case of Israel in olden times, “the villages ceased.” I do not think it will ever come to that, although it looks very much like it at times. As soon as a quiet village is known, people from the town rush into it, and convert it into another town, and the primitive simplicity of

the village soon dies out. It is well that townspeople should feel their need of villages, for, in times past, villages and villagers have too often been despised: for instance, "pagan" meant at first one who dwelt in a village, a "heathen" meant one who dwelt on the heath, and a "villain" was only another word for villager. It is full time that conceited townspeople should feel their dependence upon villagers for some of their joys. Towns cannot get on without villages. It is the country that, after all, supplies us with food, and it is often in the villages that people who breathe smoke all the year round in large manufacturing towns are able to breathe a little fresh air, and thus clear their lungs of some of the dust which has been accumulating there. Those who are active from morning till night, and whose brains are well-nigh worn out, are often glad to go to some humble lodgings in a village to enjoy a little rest and breathe a little of God's fresh air. The lodgings very probably are not equal to their own homes for accommodation. They are not overdone with carpets. There is a little cocoanut matting that covers the parlour stone floor, and a little narrow strip of carpet of uncertain age and design in the best bedroom. The staircase is not always the widest or straightest, or even safest, but as a rule it is a kind of patent staircase for detecting burglars, because, if one but touch it ever so lightly at night, the whole household is sure to hear it creak. All the furniture looks well worn, and in the parlour there is a corner cupboard, a few chairs of different kinds, and a table that was made for the great-great grandfather of the present tenant by the then carpenter of the village, a little over a century ago. Withal there is a homeliness about everything—even about the glazed earthenware teapot—which is very refreshing.

Well, the invitation on this occasion was, "Let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranate bud forth." All are to get up early. Everything calls them forth. The air is so bracing and invigorating, and everything in the morning is so beautiful and fresh—before the sun comes out in all his power, when he only just casts enough light to make every blade, leaf, flower, and fruit beautiful,—that only confirmed sluggards can withstand the temptation to go out early into the garden, orchard, and field. It is so interesting to watch the growth of flowers and fruit, that children long to be out all day, barely finding time for their meals,

until the evening comes, when they return wearied with play, joy, and fresh air, and ready for bed until the early morning, again to go forth with laughter and song.

Now, I want you to remember that in all ages God has thought much of the villages. Our Lord Jesus, too, loved the poor peasants who were neglected by the learned Rabbis, and "went round about the villages, teaching." We read also in the Book of Acts of the apostles preaching in the villages of even the Samaritans. And ever since Jesus Christ has been in the world, the villages have not been overlooked or despised, as they were before His advent. Who can tell how many true disciples the Lord Jesus has had in obscure hamlets? We know that some of the most faithful and powerful ministers of the gospel have come forth from little village churches where they first learnt to trust the Saviour. Just as large towns are kept going by people who come from villages, so our town churches receive some of their best members from the village churches of our land. In secluded hamlets Jesus has faithful men, women, and children who love Him dearly, and seek to serve Him faithfully. When, therefore, we go into the country for a brief stay, let us not feel separated from those who spend their uneventful life in those quiet spots, but let us remember that like ourselves they need the Saviour, and in many instances have learnt to trust in Him and rejoice in His love. What a blessing that Jesus loves townspeople and villagers alike! But country people are denied many advantages which we enjoy. Then we should see to it that when we go to the villagers for our pleasure we try to do them all the good we can in return. If we know more about the Saviour than they do, because of the good teachers we have had and the good books we have read, we should tell the little villagers what we do know; then our visit will not only be one of pleasure, but also of loving service for the Master and gentle deeds toward those whom He loves.

LXX.

*SERMON—CRIES AT THE CROSS.*2. *THE VOICE OF PENITENCE.*

"But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" etc.—LUKE xxiii. 40-42.

THIS is the first broken link in the chain of blasphemy. In our last sermon we had occasion to show that blasphemy had

reached its full measure. Matthew having written the words, "The thieves also who were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth," significantly adds, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land." It was full time the darkness should come on: the circle of iniquity was now complete. It was "the hour and the power of darkness." Luke, however, records the first break-down of blasphemy just as the darkness came on. All the voices which had been heard during the Crucifixion up to that point were blasphemous. There is a protest now. It comes from the least expected quarter: not from the disciples, nor even the women who had already bewailed the Christ; but from one of the robbers in whose united mockery a little before blasphemy had culminated.

We know not to what extent the thief, who afterwards became penitent, joined at first in the blasphemy, but we know that he acquiesced in it to such an extent as to become a blasphemer in Matthew's estimation. The transition must have been sudden and complete; the silencing of the mocking cry, if such there were, the subsidence of every blasphemous thought, and the bursting forth into powerful expression of a new governing conviction, and intense yearning, must have been the work of but a brief period. This seems to have been an instance in which overpowering light streamed with startling suddenness into a dark soul, and when a revelation which contained infinite issues was compressed into a moment of time. Yet, connected with this sudden illumination, there is a distinct sequence of thought traceable in the earnest words of this robber.

His utterances consist of: I. PROTEST; II. PRAYER.

I. THE PROTEST. It is a striking fact that all the testimonies for Christ, and the protests against prevalent false estimates of His character, at this dark period of His life, came from those to whom we should have looked last of all for such, while those whom we should have expected to speak in vindication of Him were silent. Those who protested against His guilt as none others did were Judas, who in the phrenzy of despair exclaimed, as he hurled from him the price of blood, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood"; Pilate's wife, who, sending to her husband on the judgment seat, said, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man"; Pilate himself,

who, washing his hands before the multitude, said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person : see ye to it"; the thief upon the cross, who exclaimed, with a voice strong in death, "We receive the due reward of our deeds : but this man hath done nothing amiss"; and last of all the Roman centurion, who, in the face of the calumnies of the Jews, lifted up his soldierly voice and said, "Certainly this was a righteous man"—"Truly this was the Son of God."

The protest of the thief on this occasion shows that he was impressed with—

1. *The sacredness of fellow-suffering.* The mere fact that he and his comrade were "in the same condemnation" was a sufficient reason in his sight why Jesus should be protected against their ridicule and scorn. Even if others could mock at Him and still retain their humanity, the two who suffered "the same condemnation" could not mock Him and retain a vestige of decency. The sanctity of fellow-suffering, so he thought, should at least suffice to exempt Him from the humiliation of their mockery.

2. *Awe in the face of death and in the presence of God.* He felt that the hour of death was the wrong time for any man to jeer. Moreover, their death was the due reward of murderous deeds. Those who were deservedly driven out of the presence of their fellows for their sins might well pause before they stood in the presence of their God. It was a fearful thing for a criminal against Divine and human laws to die. He had something better to do with his last breath than to revile with the blaspheming crowd.

3. *A profound sense of justice*—or a keen appreciation of the vital difference between innocence and guilt, even when the Rabbis and the so-called religious leaders of the people had lost every vestige of it : "And we indeed justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds : but this man hath done nothing amiss." The penitent thief sought to teach his companion that the obligations of silence, at least, on their part were all the greater because theirs would be the sneers of the guilty against the guiltless. Here we find a condemned culprit recognising the justice of his own condemnation, but standing in awe at the thought of incarnate innocence suffering the penalty of guilt. At the sight of the shedding of that innocent

blood,—the recollection of the betrayal of which had already driven Judas headlong into despair,—this robber could mock no longer, nay, he could not even be silent, he could only protest and pray.

We have briefly referred to *the protest*: let us now consider briefly *the prayer*.

II. THE PRAYER. It is hard to pray after blaspheming, or even acquiescing in blasphemy. The difficulty is at first to break upon the silence, and say "Lord." When that is done all else is easy. The penitent thief began with that word, and thus crossed the Rubicon and cut off every way of retreat. He threw his whole weight upon his petition, and risked everything upon the answer.

1. It was a *prayer in the article of death, and to One dying*. Why should a man pray with his last gasp? Why should the thief by one supreme effort converge all his energies in the hour of direst agony into one petition? It is because he felt that death is not all, that man does not cease to be when he breathes his last here. He believed that Jesus and he would live after this in a state in which present events could be remembered. There was to be a continuation of conscious being. Death would not annihilate his personality. The relationship formed upon the cross between that Divine Sufferer and himself was one which, if Christ would, might be continued beyond death! What a vista that opened up!

2. It was a *prayer to a King, although as yet uncrowned*. "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." The superscription put up by Pilate, partly out of spite toward the Jewish leaders, and partly from a feeling that it might be more true than it appeared at first, was now accepted by the thief as the statement of the sublimest fact—a fact upon which he could rest all his hope in death. The others had said "If," and he had probably joined in that "If." Now he had no doubt about it. The thief, imperfect as his conceptions must have been, at least looked upon the cross as a step to the kingdom. He prayed to One whom he accepted as the Messiah, and whose death was His proclamation as King. Observe that this was when all others either thought otherwise, or were too timid to assert this conviction. What an advance in the world's faith is traceable in this solitary cry for royal

favour which reached the ear of the Saviour of men when dying upon the cross!

3. It was *a prayer that he might be remembered*. I shall not now dwell upon the deep yearning in the human heart to be remembered, and how far even the Christ was partaker of this human feeling when, having broken the bread and poured out the wine, He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." What I desire now to emphasize is that, unlike the other thief, he did not ask for instantaneous deliverance from the cross, its agony and shame, but rather that when the cross had played its part, and death had intervened, he should be remembered. Now, what was there in him that he thought worth remembering? We have only to read his words to the other thief to be convinced that he was profoundly conscious of being unworthy of the least consideration or kindness from the hands of his fellows. But in the presence of that Great Sufferer who had already prayed that even those who wickedly crucified Him might be forgiven, there was a new hope awakened in his guilty heart that there might be a love stronger than even his sin, and tender enough to cherish a kind and pitying thought of even an outlawed rebel and a crucified murderer. But such a love could only find place in the heart of the Messiah of God; hence, with hands and feet nailed to the cross, with the traces of iniquity upon his rough countenance, and the penalty of his sin quickening the pains of perdition in every nerve of that throbbing body, he condensed all that was left of consciousness, and all his newly-begotten hope, into that one petition, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." What kind of kingdom that would be he little knew, but he believed that even he who had been justly adjudged unworthy to be the subject of any earthly kingdom might yet find a place in the loving heart of that Great Deliverer, and thus be yet permitted, through infinite mercy and grace, to become a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. Contrast this with the unbelief of the chief priests and scribes, yea, even with the despair that seemed to have taken possession of the disciples at this time. How Jesus must have marvelled now, even more than ever before, at finding faith where it might least have been expected! When the disciples had fled, the mocker bore his testimony, and prayed. So, too,

if we are silent at the Cross of Christ, God will make the stones speak!

Thank God for the voice of penitence at the Cross! This was possibly the only prayer offered by this man. It was certainly the last. There was no time for vain repetitions, and there was no desire for such. Intensity of desire expressed itself in brief, burning utterance. This earnest man condensed into a moment of time a petition that would take an eternity to fulfil, although only the next moment to answer in the responsive "Amen, Amen" ("Verily, verily") of the Christ. Blessed is the man to whose prayer the Saviour of men adds His twofold "Amen." Such a seal is the pledge and proof of its answer.

This was a prayer which made it impossible for Christ to be silent any longer. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth": "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." When men mocked and scourged Him He maintained unbroken silence, but when a penitent cried for mercy, He was silent no longer.

Thus early a broken-down man called upon the Christ. Yes, let the world have its sneer. Broken-down men have in all ages flocked to Jesus, and, more than all, *He has received them*. He will now and here receive the prodigal who cries for pardon, however far he has wandered. At the same time, see to it that you do not sin that grace may abound; nor underestimate the boldness of the thief's confession or the daring of his prayer. He did all when the hostile forces by which he was surrounded made the task most difficult. We thank God, and adore His grace, because one thief broke through all the trammels of sin and found pardon when nailed hand and foot to the cross; but we also would remind men that there was another thief who even by the Cross of Christ died in his sin and sank into despair. I beseech you, leave not your salvation to the exigencies of your dying hour. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!"

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—LODGINGS BY THE
SEASIDE.

“He lodgeth . . . by the seaside.”—ACTS x. 6.

PETER on this occasion was lodging by the seaside, an experience common to many who are here to-day. He had previously been staying inland at Lydda, ten miles distant, in the beautiful valley of Sharon. There he wrought a miracle. Soon after that Dorcas died at Joppa, and the disciples sent to Lydda for Peter. Peter arrived, and restored Dorcas to life, much to the joy of the disciples and the surprise of all, and after that “he tarried many days in Joppa.” Now Joppa had a history. There the cedar and pine wood from Mount Lebanon were landed for the erection of Solomon’s Temple, and in later times the timber was landed there for the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel. It was there, too, as I told you a few Sundays ago, that Jonah, when he ran away from God, took ship for Tarshish. Now Simon, the son of another Jonah, was there; and we shall see what experience “Simon the son of Jonah” had where the prophet Jonah made such a terrible mistake.

The first thing we learn is, that *he lodged at the house of one Simon a tanner*. What! lodging in the house of a tanner? That would not be a very promising sign in the estimation of a Jew. Tanners were engaged in a despised calling, and were not allowed to carry on their trade within ninety feet of any house in the town where they lived. One Rabbi had said, “It is impossible that the world should do without tanners, but woe unto that man who is a tanner.” So that in many respects the tanner was an outcast. We are not surprised that the Jews did not wish to have a tannery very near their dwellings. We are rather glad that they had such notions of sanitary arrangements. The thing to be regretted is that they despised tanners. Simon’s house was by the seaside. His trade demanded that he should be near plenty of water, and there he had enough. The waters of the Great or Mediterranean Sea came up to the sea front, which was probably the wall of his tannery yard. Now Peter did not attach much importance to the standards of respectability which were set up by the polite society of his day; and, like his Master, who gladly sat with publicans and sinners, he did not think it beneath his apostolic dignity to lodge in a tanner’s house after the wonderful miracle he had wrought, and when many others would have gladly received him.

One wonders what made him go there. Perhaps Simon the tanner *felt a special interest in Simon Peter because they both were of the same name*. A man came to my house the other day; he

was all smiles and bows. He sent in a note in which he said he was a Welshman in distress, and signed it, "David Davies." I was bound to see a Welshman in distress, and all the more because he bore my name. I saw him, but, alas! I recognized in him a companion of another man who had called at my house a fortnight before, professing to be a Welshman, but was only an inhabitant of Whitechapel on a voyage of discovery to Brighton. This namesake of mine, however, told me that he had just arrived from London; and, when I looked at him incredulously, he finished up with, "Besides, my name is David Davies." "Yes, I have no doubt," I replied, "and a near relative, I suppose." I said this in a tone which convinced the visitor that I did not believe him, and I supplemented these words with others, which led to the quick withdrawal of the impudent impostor. But that man appealed to a principle which lies deep in human nature—that you should treat with *special* consideration a man of the same nationality, and bearing the same noble name as yourself. Simon the tanner wanted to give the best welcome in his power to his great namesake, and possibly he was one of the disciples who had sent for him to Lydda.

One day about noon *Peter went up to the flat roof on the house-top*—the only esplanade of which Simon the tanner could boast, and the place, too, which was specially favourable for quiet meditation and prayer. From that roof Peter could look far out over the Mediterranean Sea, and behind him was the beautiful hill upon which Joppa stood, covered with orange and citron groves, and at the foot with gardens containing pomegranates and water melons. You know that still Jaffa (or Joppa) oranges are among the choicest in Palestine and Syria. Thus, within sight of the Great Sea, and within reach of the fragrance of the beautiful fruit which grew near, Peter stood on that house-top. Perhaps this was the first time he had gazed at the Mediterranean Sea, although he was formerly a fisherman, and had spent many a day and night on the Sea of Galilee. But this was unlike the Sea of Galilee, which was only a few miles in length and breadth, and whose shores could easily be seen the one from the other. This sea, on the contrary, seemed to have no shore beyond. Possibly, looking out from that house-top over the expanse of waters which in the far distance disappeared beneath the horizon, and seemed to be lost in sky, he thought of the way Jonah in olden days had taken, and what had occurred during that memorable voyage. He probably, too, thought what a pity it was that Jonah was so bigoted and

stubborn. Meanwhile Simon Peter got very hungry—just what most of us would have done in such a place. But while the servants were preparing the food Peter fell into a trance, or an ecstasy; and then a vision was given to him, in which he was taught that nothing was common or unclean; no, not even the poor heathen far away over the Mediterranean Sea, in the islands of the Gentiles,—the poor Britons of this country included. Thus Simon, the son of Jonah, learnt a lesson at Joppa which the Jonah of ancient days did not learn till after his very trying and eventful sea-voyage, and even then not very well.

One likes to associate with these humble lodgings by the seaside a vision by which *Peter was taught to preach the Gospel to the poor Gentiles* as well as to the Jews. I think that looking out at that wide sea, and thinking of the multitudes of people that lived far away, expanded Peter's thoughts and sympathies, and prepared him for this vision. Now little children who have lived inland ask new questions when they come to Brighton and look at the sea from our sea front, such as, "Mother, what is beyond the sea? Are there any children playing on the other side?" and so on. Thus the sea expands the minds of little children, and makes them think of the thousands of little children who look at the same sea, only from the opposite shore. Then they think of all the channels, seas, and oceans which join each other and touch all lands. Now the sea had the same effect upon Peter when he looked out from his lodgings at Joppa, and it prepared him for what God was about to reveal to him. What a blessing it would be if the little children who come to Brighton for a visit, and those who always live here, were but to cherish kinder thoughts of others far away, as the result of looking at the wide, wide sea, and, like Peter, resolve to send the Gospel to them, since God has not only made of one blood all nations to dwell on the face of the earth, but also our Lord Jesus Christ, on that "green hill far away," "died to save us all."

LXXII.

*SERMON—CRIES AT THE CROSS.*3. *THE CRY OF MISAPPREHENSION.*

"And there followed Him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented Him" (R.V.)—LUKE xxiii. 27.

See also MATT. xxvii. 47-9 (R.V.), and LUKE xxiii. 47.

MY subject to-day is, "THE CRY OF MISAPPREHENSION."
This cry is threefold.

1. The cry of *mistaken sympathy on the part of the women on*

the way to Calvary. This resulted from a combination of feelings and motives which were inseparably connected with a false conception of the nature of Christ's suffering and death. In that company of women there were doubtless some moved to tears by reason of

(1) *Woman's horror of tragic suffering.* Their womanly nature was in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Law of Moses, to which crucifixion was abhorrent in the extreme, and inadmissible under any combination of criminal intent and deed. A section of the women of Jerusalem had formed themselves into a society, the object of which was emphatically womanly: to provide a drink—an anodyne—which should deaden the sensibilities of those who suffered the anguish and humiliation of crucifixion, and thus render the fearful penalty of their crime as bearable as the circumstances would permit. Such women would be deeply moved at the sight of any man, even a hardened criminal, going to such an awful death. Therefore this cry arose largely from the exceeding sensitiveness of woman to the brutality of crucifixion.

(2) *Woman's delicate and instinctive appreciation of innocence.* They had looked into the countenance of that meek Sufferer with that intuition which is so often and so specially the gift of womanhood, that they shuddered at the guilt that could under such aggravating circumstances shed innocent blood. Many, too, had heard His words. They were "not the words of a man that had a devil." They had never heard a criminal speak as He did. Some of them had seen Him, while the multitude breathed out cursings against Him, remain calmly silent as He looked the maddening crowd in the face with the majesty of conscious innocence. Others had seen many of His mighty works; they had been impressed not so much by the power as by the beneficence of them. At the heart of every miracle they had recognized a tender, self-forgetful love. They could not think evil of that One who had performed such gracious deeds. They knew something, too, of the religious authorities of the day who were compassing His death; they knew how from time immemorial they had trampled the populace underfoot, and had blatantly repeated their favourite cry, "The people who knoweth not the law are cursed." Thus the women, with an instinctive appreciation of the innocence of the great Sufferer, and a quick detection of the envy and hatred of those who hounded Him on to the death, wept loudly for Him,

Again,

(3) *Womanly sympathy with sorrowing widowhood.* Not only did they sympathize with Jesus, who meekly bore the shame, but was too weak to carry His cross, and was too delicately strung to endure, save at the cost of agony, the fearful coarseness of that angry multitude; but they also felt for that loving mother who, with the lines of unutterable anguish upon her brow, followed her great Son to Calvary. She had long since known what bereavement was, and her heart had been shadowed by the early death of Joseph, who had shared with her the mystery of a high destiny, and who by humble toil had been the stay of her humble home; but all the while she had kept in her heart the words which the angel had uttered concerning her Divine Son. The expectation of their fulfilment had compensated for all the loss which had impoverished her life. But now even the last glimmer of hope seemed to vanish into darkness. How much of this was known to the women we cannot tell; but the more they knew—and her widowhood and her present motherly anguish at least were but too apparent—the more they sympathized with that noble woman, all of whose hopes were so soon to die. Through the suffering Son they pitied the suffering mother.

(4) *Gratitude for the blessing which He had bestowed.* These women, in the first place, could not have been ignorant of the general influence which Christ's teaching and life had exerted over the position which woman was destined to occupy. No leader of men had dealt so generously with woman. In His teaching were the beginnings of a new movement which should lift woman up from the low position which she occupied to that of honour and influence. Again, He who had performed so many miracles in the homes of the people, in healing their sick and bringing back their dead to life, had touched almost every family circle in the land, and laid it under a lasting obligation. As I read the Gospels, the mystery to me is that He who had done so much to ameliorate suffering, and to banish sorrow from the homes of Palestine, could have ever been crucified there. There is no wonder that the chief priests and scribes in the development of their wicked conspiracy feared the people. It required all their subtlety and cunning, and the exercise of all their influence over the rabble of the metropolis, to accomplish their end. But the wonder was that even they succeeded. It was not surprising that there were

a band of women, who in some instances had received back their dearest ones from the verge of the grave, to be found who would bewail loudly the sad end of so glorious a career; the surprise is that there were no men heroic enough to join them. There were women, too, in that throng whose children Christ had received into His arms and blessed. What wonder that they shed tears now! What a touch of tenderness, too, in the light of that fact do we find in His reply, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, *and for your children.*" Those hands which were so soon to be nailed to the Cross had rested in blessing upon their children's heads. What mother could help weeping!

Yet all this sorrow—although tender, true, and creditable in many respects—arose from a misapprehension of the Cross, and of the nature of our Lord's death. I will not dwell upon His reply, save to show that He could not accept pity, however sincerely offered. He claimed to be the *source* of pity, and not its helpless *object*. He demanded not their sympathy, but their reverence, their gratitude, and their love. If they must weep at His Cross, let them weep for themselves, and for their children. Thus this cry, tender, womanly, pathetic as it was, nevertheless was a cry of misapprehension as to the high significance of the Cross which was to be uplifted.

2. *The cry of the onlookers and attendants during the crucifixion.* When Christ uttered that cry, the most mysterious and solemn that ever rent the air—"Eli, Eli, lama sabbachthani," "Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias." Thus the deepest cry that ever went up from man to God was brought down to the dead level of old traditional conceptions. That cry of the Christ, which is the greatest proof on record that there is no depth of agony, even to the consciousness of utter desolation, which Christ has not touched, was now made to do service as the possible repetition, if not indeed the exposition, of an old Rabbinical conceit.

Again, notice the inquisitive suggestion which followed—"The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him." I cannot believe with some commentators that this was a cry of blasphemy, or of ridicule. Darkness had reigned for three hours. Such darkness at midday, with all the attendant mysteries, was enough to crush blasphemy out of the greatest mocker. I have not seen men blaspheme in utter darkness; as a rule, they pray then. They may have false

conceptions of the nature of the darkness, but they are never flippant then. The chief priests and scribes and elders were now no longer found near the Cross. They had slunk away three hours earlier in the gathering darkness, into the still darker recesses of their own dwellings, fearing lest a flash of lightning might reveal their whereabouts. They were not to be found among the remnant of the throng that still in spite of the terrible darkness watched for the end. This cry, therefore, appears to have been sincere enough; yet it was the inquisitive utterance of those who, having mistaken the significance of that "loud voice" from the Cross, tried to construe it according to an old fusty version of an ancient prophetic announcement that Elias would come.

3. *The centurion's first cry at the close of the crucifixion.* "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke). According to Matthew and Mark the centurion exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God." Luke, I believe, gives the foremost cry of the centurion as the result of his first impression of the tragic event, and its thrilling surroundings; whereas Matthew and Mark record the final cry of the centurion "*and they that were with him.*" The utterance now under our consideration was the cry of a brave man upon whom half the truth had already dawned, and upon whom greater light would soon shine. It is the preliminary cry of a Roman soldier who is ready to receive the light if it but come, and heroic enough to confess it against the world when once he has been convinced of it. Here we have an illustration of the progress of faith. The whole truth does not always flash upon a man with the suddenness of lightning. In the presence of the Cross the centurion, ere he uttered his first cry, had recognized that it was no criminal against his country, and sinner against his God, who had just breathed his last. He had never seen a criminal die like that. A man who could expire as He did upon that Cross *must be "a righteous man."* Thus, noble as the cry was, it was the exclamation of a man who still misapprehended the meaning of that Cross; but there was hope of that centurion who saw "a righteous man" where others only saw an impostor, and, bravely setting at nought public opinion, asserted his belief. There is hope of every man who receives in right earnest the truth according to the light given him. The first essential condition of progress is sincerity of conviction, and a readiness to receive all the light that comes.

When this Roman centurion exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man!" he was taking a step in the right direction. This cry was the pledge and promise of a nobler confession which should yet escape his lips—"Truly this was the Son of God." "Then you have hope of a Unitarian?" asks some one. Yes, if he looks upon the Cross with the receptiveness of heart and mind with which the centurion looked at it. "But," my friend adds, "you told us the other Sunday that you could not admit a Unitarian into Christian fellowship." I say so still. I cannot recognize as a Christian brother any man who does not recognize in Jesus Christ the Son of God. All my faith revolves around His divinity. If Jesus Christ is *only man*, however excellent, then with profound reverence I affirm that He is not the Saviour upon whom I can implicitly trust for time and for eternity. Take away from Him His divinity, and I care comparatively little what else you leave me. I despair, I die of a broken heart. What consolation then can I have in fellowship with the man who denies my Lord's divinity? I can only look upon him with solicitude, and earnestly hope and pray that, as the centurion began with the cry, "Certainly this was a righteous man," but ended with the higher confession, "Truly this was the Son of God," he may tread in the centurion's footsteps, and finish with his final confession. Meanwhile, I can do no more. I believe from the depth of my heart that Christ Jesus, "being (*"being originally,"* Greek) in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross" (R.V.). These are not my words, but the words of Paul. You may treat this message with contempt if you like—that is one of the fearful liberties of man; but God forbid that you should be lost through any want of distinctness or earnestness on my part in the proclamation of it. I shall meet you all again. I pray that before God's judgment seat my hands may be free from the blood of every one of you. I entreat you to accept the Christ whose love has been preached to you, to trust in Him for all that you need; then with the joyous assurance of the forgiveness of your sins will come to you the deeper consciousness of grace to help in every time of need. God grant it!

LXXIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—HUMBLE LODGINGS.

“Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall ; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick : and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”—2 KINGS iv. 10.

My subject this morning is “Humble Lodgings.” Elisha was to sleep, study, and pray in this one little room. It was on the wall, and probably above the main entrance of the house. The front of a Jewish house, with the exception of the door, was a dead wall, and any room just within that wall, or built upon it, was called a chamber in, or on, the wall. This was probably built on the top of the front wall, and upon the flat roof. It was one of the upper rooms referred to in the Bible, and frequently used for meditation and prayer. I suppose that if Elisha came to Brighton to-day, he would have better lodgings than these offered him, and yet he was greatly honoured in his day. He had merely to finish the great work which Elijah had begun, and thus he was largely a favourite among the people. He was a man of genial manner, and gentle spirit. Thus he received a kind welcome everywhere. He had passed through Shunem many a time before now ; but the wealthy lady to whose house he was now invited had not realised what a good man he was. She said to her husband, “Behold, now I perceive that this is an holy man of God.” What a lesson we learn here ! How often we let a good man pass by without knowing how good he is, until it is too late to give him the welcome he deserves of us !

This lady was determined that she would not let him pass as a stranger any longer ; hence she spoke to her husband in the words of our text.

The word “make” does not necessarily mean to build ; it also means to prepare or make ready, and that is probably the meaning here. It does not appear that it took a very long time to get this room ready. I am afraid that it was not furnished quite as elaborately as the other parts of the house. It certainly was not overstocked with furniture. There is no mention of a looking-glass ; prophets had very little use for them. He simply had a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick. He could not well have had fewer things. His needs

were by no means great. It is wonderful what use men like Elisha can make of such a small room and such poor furniture. John Bunyan, when in prison, had a chamber in the wall—drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, and kitchen all in one—and that room was not up to much; the window did not let much light in, and the furniture was of the poorest kind, but it was *there that he wrote his "Pilgrim's Progress."*

There was one poor boy a long time ago in Wales. His name was John Elias. He was a poor apprentice, and at night had to go to bed without a light. But John was allowed one ounce of butter per day. John ate his bread, but kept his butter, melted it, and then dipped into it the pith of rushes, so that when he had to retire for the night he sat in his little bedroom, and in the light of those rushlights learnt how to read well, and to write, and to store his mind with knowledge. He would probably use as many as fifty rushlights the same night before he was satisfied that he had done his task. But out of that little room John Elias went out at length like a prophet, and moved all Wales with his powerful message. I will tell you what else happened, when John was about nineteen years of age. He was then engaged in preaching. One night he lodged at a humble cottage. Before the people of the house retired for the night, John Elias read and prayed. They closed the door, but a neighbour was on the way to the well with an empty pitcher in his hand. As he passed he heard sweet sounds coming out of the cottage. He drew near, and heard John Elias pray. Still he drew nearer, and listened at length through the keyhole. When all was over he returned home with the empty pitcher, having forgotten his errand. "William," said his wife, "how is it you have not brought any water home?" "Ah," he said, "I am so sorry I have forgotten; the fact is, in passing by our neighbour's door, I heard that young preacher pray: I listened, and I have heard more of heaven through that keyhole than I have ever heard before." You see that a man of God, if he but have a humble cottage or a small chamber, can make his voice to be heard even though it be through a keyhole.

There is one other instance which I will give of a great life having been lodged in a small chamber. When Christ was born there was no room in the inn, He was therefore placed in a manger. How small and how humble was that place! Yet

therein was born the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. All the story of our Lord's life and work begins in that humble chamber. Little children—those of you who may have poor homes—think more of your little rooms. Think of all that has been done in rooms quite as small, and how much the world owes to poor homes. Some of the choicest and best men whom God has ever sent to bless the world and to lead others to the Saviour have been born in humble cots. Martin Luther came out of a miner's cottage; yea, even our Lord Himself appeared first in the manger, and then came forth for His wonderful work among men from the carpenter's shop and home in Nazareth. As long as we remember that the greatest gift of heaven was first placed in a manger, so long shall we cherish tender thoughts of the lowliest dwellings and think kindly of the humblest poor.

LXXIV.

*SERMON—CRIES AT THE CROSS.*4. *THE CRY OF TESTIMONY.*

“Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”—*MATT.* xxvii. 54.

IN the first sermon of this series I said, “Let evil men and demons have their short-lived rapture.” How short-lived it has been! At first we heard nothing but the voice of blasphemy from the motley crowd that surged around the Cross. Then there occurred suddenly a breakdown in blasphemy where we should have least expected it—a cry of penitence from one of the thieves, who at first had joined in reviling the Christ. Then there came voices of sympathy, and even of testimony, but largely inspired by a mistaken conception of the nature of our Lord's suffering and death. Now there comes a clear, emphatic and final testimony from the centurion who presided over the execution, and those that were with him—“Truly this was the Son of God.” Nor were they alone in their final protest against the deed of blood in which they had taken part, but “All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned” (*Luke* xxiii. 48).

The vindication of the Great Sufferer was now complete. Even Judas, Pilate, the penitent thief, the centurion, the soldiers that were with him, and the multitude who witnessed the tragic sight, have protested at length. The only exceptions were the chief priests, scribes, elders, and the unholy traffickers. They had reached a point of diabolism from which retreat was well-nigh impossible.

I would, however, at the outset call your attention to the fact that already the world had *begun to change its opinion* of the Cross and the Crucified One. Even now our Lord's own prediction was being fulfilled—"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." But observe that the testimony of even the centurion is couched in the past tense. It was an after-thought at the Cross when the Christ had breathed His last—"Truly this *was* the Son of God." The world—the penitent thief excepted—did not begin to form the right estimate of Jesus Christ until it had "by the hand of lawless men" crucified and slain Him. His life had to find its consummation in His death before He was understood.

The thief seems to have broken down at the prayer of the Divine Sufferer,—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He could no longer mock One who could offer such a prayer. It was divine and kingly thus to pray. Hence he offered to Him the petition, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.”

Now the centurion exclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God.” I have already referred to the confession which escaped the same lips, and prepared the way for this. What, then, brought conviction of our Lord's divinity to the centurion and those that were with him? In comparing the different records we find that a large variety of means was adopted to make conviction possible. Men are differently affected.

To some *the thickening and descending darkness* would be awe-inspiring. I shall never forget the effect produced upon me by a thunderstorm, which darkened the heavens on a beautiful morning in May, as I looked upon Munkacsy's painting of Calvary.* How much greater must have been the awe that was inspired by a darkness as sudden, and far denser, upon the men who saw Calvary itself, yea, took part in the deed of blood! How terrible must have been a darkening

* See “Sacred Themes and Famous Paintings.”

heaven to them! and how still more terrible was the continuance of the awful gloom for three desolate and mysterious hours!

Others would be more affected by *a trembling and yawning earth*. A friend of mine assures me that ever after an earthquake which he experienced he has never felt safe again, even though he has stood upon the firmest rock upon which human foot can be planted. The earth has never since been a *terra firma* to him. Nothing more terrible can befall most men than a consciousness of having a convulsed and heaving earth beneath their feet. Let such men further realise that they have no foothold at the moment when *the conviction of wrong-doing has taken hold upon them*. To men of such temperament it would seem, in that dark hour when the Son of God was thrust out of the world He had made, that there was no safe foothold left; that the foundations of things were shaken when He expired.

To others the most awe-inspiring thing possible would be the experience of being *brought into contact with the world of departed ones*. The yawning graves would be to them far more terrible than splitting rocks or the trembling earth. Nothing could be so terrible to them as thus to be brought into contact with the spiritual and unseen world.

To others *the rending of the sacred veil* meant more than all. Those upon whom all else would be lost as strange enigmas, or the astounding action of the elements, or at most the expression of an angry God against an impostor, would see a painful significance in the rending veil. It was afternoon; the priests were in the Holy Place preparing for the evening sacrifice, when a hand from above, at the point nearest heaven, rent the thick new silken veil—for it was renewed every year—from the top to the bottom, and let in the glare of day into the sacred gloom of the Holiest Place, and thus openly exposed its mysterious and awful seclusion.

There can be no doubt that to the enlightened mind of the Christian this symbolises the fact that a way was now opened and made manifest to the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus. But to the reflective Jewish mind of that day the feeling would come that this might be God's protest against the existence of a Holy of Holies among a people who had shed the blood of His Anointed. What spot among such a people could remain holy any longer? They, forsooth, had laid lawless

hands upon God's Holy One, and stained them with "the innocent blood." Let not the delusion and sham of a Holy Place be maintained among them any longer. There is a point beyond which the sacredness of symbolism cannot be violated. The Jewish priests and people had reached that point. And there must have been some in that crowd who began to realise this now. There are traditions of other startling occurrences in the Temple at this time, such as the breaking of the great lintel of that Holy House; but enough has been told us in the Gospels concerning the rending of the great veil to throw a lurid light upon the significance of the hour to every devout and thoughtful Jew.

There was another powerful influence at work. Mark reminds us that the centurion *stood opposite the Cross*. He watched the countenance of the dying Christ and heard His calm and gracious utterances as He breathed His last—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." He had never seen men die so soon on the cross, or seen them die so strong. Moreover, he had seen many a Roman soldier fall upon the battle-field, and with a hand that could no longer grip the sword write upon his shield with his own blood, "I have conquered." He, too, had seen gladiators with brave hearts enter the arena, and, touching their helmets, shout, "We, who are going to die, salute thee, O Emperor!" But he had never seen a face like that in death, and never heard such words from human lips in such an hour; hence, in the rapture of a great surprise and the strength of a new conviction, he exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God"; and others caught the testimony and repeated it as the darkness around gave way to returning light.

To all, moreover, this was *the hour of reflection*. A sense of the irreparable came over them,—that sad, awful feeling which comes to men when a deed cannot be recalled, when the voice of the one they have wronged is silenced, and can be heard no more, and when they at length are surrounded by an ominous hush, a deadly calm. Such awful moments come a thousand times intensified to murderers. It came to Judas before now, and persistently dogged his footsteps until suicide became a relief. When there was no room for repentance, and no breathing-space on earth, he hurled himself head foremost out of a reflection that had in it the bitterness of hell,

with a conviction that nothing worse could possibly await him. So, according to the wilfulness of the guilt, came the bitterness of reflection to those at the Cross now. But to those who had *unwittingly* crucified the Lord of Glory came even now the hope of mercy—the mercy for which the Crucified One had prayed in their behalf and in their hearing—since they had known not what they were doing, but did it ignorantly in unbelief.

But I have already called attention to the fact that in the case of the chief priests, scribes and elders, all influences failed to convince. At most they only terrified those bigoted ecclesiasts. It is terrible to realise how hardened and blind men may become by too much familiarity with sacred things. These men would not cross the threshold of Pilate's palace that morning, lest they should be defiled. They would have shuddered at the thought of having the three crosses nearer the city than Golgotha, or of having them remain erect with their ghastly burdens after sunset, lest the sacred feast should be defiled; yet they steeped their hands in the blood of God's Anointed One, and with the selfsame hands offered their sacrifices to God.

But with this glaring exception, what a change has come over the multitude! The words "those that were with him" are very significant and touching. The Evangelist might have said, "Those soldiers who had mocked—who had drunk to the health of the dying Victim—had divided His garments and gambled over His vesture"; but he does not so record the fact. When there was penitence on the part of the soldiers, there was a large charity on the part of the Evangelist that covered over a multitude of sins. So, when the penitent thief cried for pardon, there was nothing said about the previous mocking; when the Prodigal Son returned home, the Father made no mention of the wandering. It is ever thus: the story of wandering and sin is forgotten in the joy over the return.

This is our great encouragement in returning to God,—that while He does not forget us, but remembers us in mercy, He blots out as a thick cloud our transgressions and as a cloud our sins. He forgives us graciously, and loves us freely; and although our best confessions, like the centurion's, are associated with but limited conceptions of the meaning of the great words we utter, yet He accepts them as the outcome of

His own indwelling presence and love, since flesh and blood have not revealed unto us the little we do know, but our Father which is in heaven. That is the best pledge of growing light, and ever deepening conviction, until the day dawn and the shadows flee away. Who will now for the first time join in the centurion's confession, and supplement it with the exclamation of Thomas, when all his doubts vanished in the presence of his risen Lord—"My Lord and my God"? God grant that many of you may do so in prayer, in song, and in life, to the rejoicing of your own spirit, and the boundless delight of the Saviour's heart!

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

LXXV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—BAD LODGINGS.

“I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”—PSALM lxxxiv. 10.

THIS Psalm is called “A Psalm for (or ‘*of*’) the sons of Korah.” There is no doubt that the sons of Korah sang it, and that it was composed by one or more of their number. Now, we should like to know something about Korah, whose descendants they were. If you turn to the Book of Numbers, the sixteenth chapter, you will find an account of Korah. He was one of the leaders of the rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. Dathan and Abiram were the other leaders. Korah was a Levite, and as such he had to do a humbler work than that given to the priests, such as keeping the door of God’s house. The sons of Korah for ages continued to be doorkeepers. Korah, however, was not satisfied with doing his humble task, but wanted to be a priest—yea, even to be a high-priest like Aaron. Now, Dathan and Abiram were not Levites, and therefore could take no part in the service of God’s house, but they were descendants of Reuben, the *eldest son* of Jacob, and therefore they did not see why Moses should rule over *them*. The chief complaint of Korah was against Aaron, and the great grievance of Dathan and Abiram was against Moses. Well, you know what happened: Moses said to Korah, “Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord to-morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.” On the morrow Korah and his company came right up to the entrance of the tabernacle, carrying their censers, in which they had put incense and fire; and the Lord consumed them on the spot for their daring sin, and made the earth swallow up the companies of Dathan and Abiram, who had refused to go to Moses, but remained in their tents. Now, while you remember these facts, I want you to note that this psalm was composed by the descendants of that very Korah who was dissatisfied with being a doorkeeper, and who aspired after the office of Aaron and his sons. How unlike their ancestor Korah these sons were, who exclaimed, “I had rather be a

doorkeeper," or, as the Hebrew has it, "I had rather stand on the threshold—or *lie on the doorstep*—of the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness"! On the occasion to which I have called your attention, Moses said to the people, with reference to the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in their sins" (Numb. xvi. 26, 27). The sons of Korah had learnt a lesson from his terrible end, and now affirmed that they would rather not only be a doorkeeper, but even as a beggar, to lie on the threshold of God's house, than dwell in wicked homes, however beautiful and comfortable they might appear. To them, the lowest position in God's service was better than the highest which could be occupied in sin. What a fearful end that was which awaited Korah and the others, who were not satisfied with the position which God had given them in His service! While they thought they were safe, God consumed one company with fire, and made the earth swallow up the two others. Remembering that terrible judgment, the sons of Korah had now learnt to be satisfied with the humblest position which God gave them, even if it were only a place on the doorstep of His house. They knew there was no rest, satisfaction or safety, in any dwelling-place where God was not loved and served. God's poorest place was to them better than the world's best.

Now, children, I want you to learn from this that:—

1. There is *no rest* where wickedness lodges. Evil thoughts and habits are terrible fellow-lodgers. They are never at rest together. When one is quiet the other is sure to be boisterous, and thus give us no peace. Sometimes they are all awake together, and great are the noise and the tumult. When I lived in London, I used to go sometimes to the back slums, and enter a poor hovel of a home. I was then greatly struck with the restless look of every one there, even the little children. There was no quiet, loving restfulness there. Every one was on the look-out for the main chance. Such homes were tents of wickedness. And there are some who do not live in back slums, who nevertheless live in sinful homes and surroundings, and are equally restless at heart. As long as men try to live without God, they must be restless and anxious, it matters not how comfortable the home and how soft the

pillow upon which they try to sleep. Any place where wickedness lives is a poor restless lodging for any one, however luxuriously furnished it may be. Jesus exclaims, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest.*"

2. It follows that there is *no satisfaction* in such lodging-places. You hear, about some boarding or lodging houses, that the food is not good, or that it is not properly cooked, and therefore is not nutritious. So, there is no satisfying the hunger of the soul for God in tents or homes of wickedness. In wicked companies God is shut out ; and how often men make friends of evil thoughts and purposes, and yet long for something that can satisfy their craving, but never can be satisfied until evil is cast out and the Saviour Himself takes full possession of their heart and life ! You remember how the prodigal son left his father's house, and went from bad to worse, until he had to lodge and feed with the swine, but could not satisfy his hunger. That illustrates the need and misery of all those who are without God in the world. Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life ; only He can satisfy all our hunger.

3. There is *no safety* in the tents, or lodging-places, of sin. They are surrounded by dangers. Sometimes the wicked man, like Dathan and Abiram, thinks that he is safe, but that is often when the greatest danger is near. He says, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." But, as a rule, the wicked man has no sense of safety. He fears lest something might suddenly befall him in his sin. How different is the life of the one who has learnt to trust in the Saviour ! He exclaims, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Jesus has taught him to call God "*Father,*" therefore he feels safer and more happy on the doorstep of God's house than in the most beautiful mansion where God is not loved. Children ! love God's house more and more, but love *Him* even more than His house, and remember that Jesus to-day, as when on earth, receives the little children into His sheltering arms, where they shall be for ever safe from all evil.

SERMON.—THE JOY OF HARVEST.

“They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest.”—ISA. ix. 3.

Joy, like all the simple emotions of our nature, is not easy to define. We can only learn fully what it is by experience ; and if a certain kind of joy be as yet inexperienced by us, it is only by comparison with what we have already known that we can even partially understand what it is. The prophet, in foretelling the joy which the advent of Christ would give specially to the benighted people of northern Palestine, compares it with a joy that was very familiar to the Jewish nation as an agricultural people. He cannot define it, but he can illustrate it by another : it is a joy “according to.”

There are many joys spoken of in the Bible. “The joy of the hypocrite,” which “is but for a moment.” The joy which the dawn of day brings with it—“Joy cometh in the morning.” “The joy of the harp,” which “ceaseth.” The joy of conscious strength—“Rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.” The joy of loving ownership—“He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.” The joy of God’s salvation—“My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation” ; again, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.” In the latter part of this verse we have the joy of the victor—“As men rejoice when they divide the spoil,” and in the former part the joy of harvest—“They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest.” These figures, and many others, teach us how numerous the avenues are through which joy may flow into the heart and life of man.

The joy of harvest is a proverbial expression having reference to the great rejoicing in all ages and all lands at the gathering in of the fruits of the earth. This is pre-eminently a human joy, because, first, it is largely confined to man ; and, secondly, it is not confined to any particular people or age.

The joy of harvest has its peculiar characteristics :—

1. It is the joy *inspired by a triumphant and beneficent life.* Triumphant because it has sprung out of the icy grave of winter, and in the face of many difficulties developed its resources and vindicated itself ; beneficent because at length it has reached its consummation in a bountiful provision for needy and dependent creatures.

How much of joy is associated with life in its thousand forms and aspects! It is life that gives inspiration to spring and gladness to summer. What would even the light of heaven be to us, when it comes to us in its sunniest garb, if life did not leap forth to welcome it from every leaf, blade, and flower? What if, when the sun shone brightest in the serene heavens above us, no tree awoke out of its wintry slumber and "clapped its hands" to greet it; and the feeble grass of winter did not lift up its head and quicken its growth in joyous response to the sunshine; and no flower involuntarily leaped out of its sheath to blush in the consciousness of a new and brighter life? A summer like that would be unendurable; the meridian splendour of the skies would become a terror to us, and be spoken of only as "the heat and burden of the day." But, when in spring, as the heavens smile upon the earth, every bud—bursting its hermetically sealed wrapper, which, during wintry months, sheltered its life—peeps forth at the returning glory of the seasons, every flower, like a joyous infant, smiles back the smile of heaven, and every blade of grass, like a prophet, points to the skies, there is something over which to rejoice. Wherever we see such a response, even though it be a tender blade liable to be nipped by every passing frost, we rejoice, for it is life. But we rejoice still more when the blade has developed into a stalk which bears upon its summit its golden crown, the burden of a more abundant and glorified life, and gracefully waves before the eye of day the trophy which it has snatched from the cold earth and fought hard to preserve. It now rejoices in a life more abundant. The blossoming and flowering of spring, so full of freshness and vigour, have passed away, but only to give way to a fuller and mellower life—the life that has culminated in fruit-bearing. Thus the life of spring and of early summer speaks in tender blades and lovely flowers and blossoms, but the life of later summer days and early autumn finds its full expression in fruit. The joy of harvest is essentially the joy of fruitfulness.

2. The joy which *the consciousness of Divine bounty imparts*. God in nature seems to be never so near as in harvest. It does us good to go out to the country sometimes, if it were only to realise that there are such things in the world as sowing and reaping. We are so absorbed in town or city life, so

captivated by bakers' shops and flour stores, that we forget the lessons of the fields, and get away from primitive faith and simplicity of trust and gratitude. We forget that long before we eat our daily bread God has touched the wheat with the subtle beauty of the skies and made it wave its crown of glory over distant fields. It is marvellous how near starvation the human family is every year. One harvest totally withheld would mean desolation and death everywhere. How few would survive! Every harvest tells us that the great God has not forgotten us, but has once more provided for our wants. In all ages and all lands men have instinctively felt that the harvest must be the work of a deity. How clear the conviction of the bounty of God in harvest among the Jews! The Feast of Pentecost was also the Feast of Harvests. It is, too, very significant that the only temporal blessing which we are taught to ask for in the Lord's Prayer is "daily bread." The God to whom we pray is verily the Lord of harvests. We touch God's greatest temporal gift to man when we touch the waving corn in the harvest-field.

3. The joy which *God gives by linking our feebleness to His almightiness.* Heaven and earth, God and man, are here at one. He deals with us as we do with our children. When we give our child a present—a toy it may be—we know that in the child's estimation it is all the more valuable if we have made it. If we are wise we shall still increase its value by letting the child himself have a part in making it. It may be very little,—just to hold the hammer, or fetch the nails,—yet in the parent's eyes it is something, and when the toy is finished the joy of the child is twofold: first, because his father made it, and secondly, because he was allowed to take some little part in the work. Even so God is pleased to associate His greatest operations with feeble human toil, and thus permit us to have our little share in the result; to be workers together with Him. Especially is this true with regard to cereals. Corn, the wide world over, is a gracious reward of the human toil. It never grows wild. It is God's blessing upon man's labour. There is no reaping of corn without sowing in human husbandry. The harvest-field, therefore, is the smile of Heaven upon the industry and toil of the husbandman. Hence one reason why the time of harvest is a season of great joy. God and man meet together here as they do nowhere else in nature.

4. The joy which comes *with the fulfilment of patient hope*. Few things demand more faith and hope than sowing and reaping. The law of cereals is that they never live to see their offspring. The oak is often surrounded, in old age, by the young oaks which have sprung up from the acorns dropped from its branches; but the grain of corn must *die* before it bringeth forth fruit. The farmer must bury the little stock of corn which he has left before he can hope for more; and *he does this every year*. What an amount of corn is buried each year *in faith* by the husbandman! The harvest is the vindication and reward of this trust, and, as such, brings great joy with it.

5. The joy *of mutual interest*. What a strange blending of sympathies in the harvest-field! All classes—old and young, rich and poor—feel their dependence alike, and rejoice together. The tendency of harvest is to break down all the exclusiveness of caste, and to encourage the spirit of universal brotherhood. Thus the joy of the harvest-field is the joy of unity.

6. The joy that comes *with the consciousness of completeness*. Nature has run its course. Winter, spring, and summer have all been preparing the way for this. The harvest is the happy consummation of all the ploughing, sowing, and waiting, and all the frosts, snows, rains, and sunshine of the seasons.

7. The joy *of a new hope*. The harvest is not only a fulfilment, but also a prophecy. It is a significant fact that the harvest unites summer to autumn, vigorous life to decaying energy. It would seem as if no joy of earth is quite perfect without a touch of sadness about it. Earthly beauty is, perhaps, most striking, and has additional significance, when it is touched with the mellow tints of decay. It is certainly so when we associate with autumn the rich prophecy which every harvest-field gives, that as its abundant life has sprung from the grave, so it shall be with dying nature around. What now dies shall rise again. In the presence of the harvest-field we learn to hope anew that dying nature around shall live again!

It is with this manifold joy that the prophet compares the joy of nations beneath the healing rays of the Sun of Righteousness, the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the

world. (a) It is the joy imparted by a life that is full of beneficence and tenderness, and that has triumphed over the grave—the joy of resurrection! “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (b) The joy which the consciousness of Divine bounty imparts—“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”; “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (c) The joy which God gives by linking our feebleness to His almightiness—“I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” (d) The joy which comes with the fulfilment of patient hope in the advent of Him who is “the Desire of all nations.” (e) The joy of mutual interest, for in Him “is neither bond nor free.” (f) The joy which comes with the consciousness of completeness, because the work is perfect and lacks nothing. (g) The joy of a new and lively hope that because He lives, we shall live also. No one has given the world so much joy as Jesus Christ—crucified, buried, and risen again. No other joy can compare with this. The joy of harvest suggests a few points of comparison such as I have given. But all comparison fails when we would speak of the blessings which the Saviour bestows on a needy race. He Himself has made sowing and reaping typical of His own death and resurrection. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.” Great indeed will be the rejoicing when the harvest of His love shall be finally gathered in, and not a sheaf be overlooked; when he who sowed in tears shall reap with infinite joy. Every plentiful harvest on earth is to us God’s prophecy of that glorious harvest-home. What share shall we have in that harvest? “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

LXXVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—BAD LODGERS.

“How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”—JER. iv. 14.

WE have had much talk of late about “lodgings,” the last address being on “*Bad Lodgings.*” Our subject now is “*Bad Lodgers.*” They represent a very large class. Lodging-house keepers could tell you a great deal about them, and I will try to tell you a few things.

They come generally with a *great deal of show*. They have much luggage, and are many in number. They do not like to have other lodgers in the same house, and, if possible, they take all the apartments, or at least insist upon having the best. They do not want the trouble of catering for themselves, so they wish to board as well as to lodge, reminding the landlady that they must have the best of everything and plenty of it, and of course they promise to pay liberally! The butcher, baker, grocer, draper, the wine-merchant, laundress, and a host of others, soon learn that a very stylish and wealthy family has arrived. Soon they have the run of the house, and if any other lodgers are there when these arrive, they are made to feel that they are not wanted. Soon, too, the landlady learns that she must largely re-furnish some of her rooms, in order to make them tolerable for these very respectable people, who tell her that their own home is quite a large mansion in its own grounds!

Meanwhile time passes by, and the landlady daily expects to hear something about settling the account, and at length suggests that a little money would be acceptable. They are greatly surprised and vexed. It is such a worry to bother about small accounts; they say that they would never get any peace if they did not *make it a rule* that they settled only on quarter-day. The landlady apologises and withdraws, and longs for quarter-day to come. Meanwhile these lodgers are getting more and more extravagant and haughty. Large fires are lit; and the gas flares in every room and far into the night. Quarter-day at length arrives, but the father of the family is called suddenly away and will not return for a time. Meanwhile, if there is any application made for payment, these stylish people profess to be greatly annoyed at being worried when “papa” is away. By-and-by it, however, gradually appears that they had not paid for their lodgings at their last place, and that the only way of getting rid of the tribe is to starve them out. The longer they are kept the greater the loss. Prompt measures are the best, even if help has to be called in to turn them out. Happy is that one who can get them out without much anxiety and trouble!

Now I am going to speak to you about other lodgers very much like them. They are Satan and all the evil thoughts and passions which he brings with him into human hearts. These, too, are very vain, and require the best accommodation and attention. They are very costly lodgers; they take up the best time and eat the best things of those who accommodate them. Many, like the prodigal son, have spent all in trying to satisfy their proud claims, vainly hoping that they will be rewarded in time; but at length the disappointment comes, and these lodgers have to be cast out at every cost. But evil thoughts and desires, once they get possession of the heart, are very hard to get out, and only Jesus can cast them out for us.

Now I want you, who are young, and whose hearts are newly and beautifully furnished, not to allow Satan, and all his train of evil passions and wicked thoughts, to come in and spoil it all, trampling every fresh and pure thought and happy feeling under foot. Ask Jesus to take full possession of your heart and to guard it, and then greater shall He be who is for you than he who is against you. But those of you who have already given shelter to some of those evil suggestions and wicked passions, which Satan always brings with him, pray now to the Saviour to cleanse your heart from all evil and to make it His, and not to allow a thing to remain behind that He will not own. There was an old man in Wales who had received Jesus Christ into his heart, but who still occasionally gave way a little to his old thoughts and feelings; at last he cried out in prayer, "Lord Jesus, Thou didst cast out Satan from my heart long ago, but he has left a little of his furniture behind, and he comes now and then to see it; Lord, help me to cast his old furniture out too!" You know what he meant: he asked Christ to help to cast out every evil thought and every wrong pleasure. May the Lord help us all to do the same, so that our hearts may be a fit dwelling-place for Him!

LXXVIII.

SERMON—THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took, etc."
—MATT. xiii. 33.

THIS chapter is a chapter of similitudes: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man which sowed good seed in his field" . . . "like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took" . . . "like unto leaven which a woman took." These parables tell us not what the kingdom of heaven *is*, but what it is *like*. Hence

the need of many parables to present the different characteristics of this kingdom. When all have been uttered, they fall far short of expressing to us all that this kingdom is. All figures and comparisons fail to represent the reality. They can only present certain points of resemblance—certain facets of the sparkling diamond of truth.

Here our Lord says that it is like unto leaven. What startling originality do we find here! Under the old Dispensation, leaven was strictly forbidden in all offerings made to the Lord by fire, and thus presented on the altar, as contrasted with those which were eaten by the priest; and especially in connection with the Feast of the Passover the Israelites were not only prohibited from eating it on punishment of death, but also for seven days from having any leaven in their houses. Partly as the result of these and similar prohibitions, leaven in Scripture is made to symbolise either in general a subtle progressive influence, or in particular the insidious energy of evil. This instance stands prominently forth among Scripture similitudes as the one striking and daring exception. Christ on one occasion after this conformed to the general usage of the term—then, however, defining clearly the nature of the leaven to which He referred—when He exclaimed, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. xvi. 6); but now, when for the first time He takes that word upon His lips, He says, “The *kingdom of heaven* is like unto leaven.” “What! the *kingdom of heaven* like leaven?” shouts the rabbi learned in sacred symbolism. “Like unto leaven!” are the emphatic words which still go forth in clear and sonorous tones from the lips of this great Teacher. “But,” say some commentators of later times, “this word must mean the heresies of the Church, since when used elsewhere it refers to the insidious influence of evil.” These men speak as if Christ never originated an idea, or subverted an ancient custom, much less flooded the world with a revelation. It means precisely what He says it means—no heresy, false doctrine or false spirit, but—*the kingdom of heaven*. These good people seem to forget that Christ on other occasions uttered one parable in which the great God was compared to the unjust judge; and another in which He compared Himself to a Samaritan, contrary to the whole tenor of Jewish teaching; yet it was not the injustice of the one nor the heterodoxy of the other that He emphasized. Is it strange, think you, that He who would not confine the scope of His

teaching even to the Law of Moses, would not confine His parabolic illustrations within the bounds of conventional symbolism? Leaven had been all but doomed to illustrate the power and operation of evil; the Redeemer of men, with His transfiguring touch, redeemed this figure from hopeless ignominy. To Him nothing was common or unclean.

Again, like unto leaven which a *woman* took. The kingdom of heaven is like something in humble life—thank God for that!—sowing the seed—a grain of mustard seed which a man took—leaven which a woman took: the man in the field, the woman in her home, alike supply a theme for the highest teaching, and a symbol of the sublimest fact. How the illustrations of Christ must have lacked dignity and style to the learned rabbis! Just imagine His talking about “the kingdom of heaven,” “leaven,” “woman,” “meal,” all in one breath! They had never imagined that leaven and woman could by any exercise of charity be made to illustrate the kingdom of heaven and its operations. The disciples wondered that Jesus talked with a woman. It is strange, by-the-bye, that they did not wonder that He talked with *them*. How much more must learned rabbis have wondered at His talking of a woman when He would explain to them the nature of the new Theocracy! In their estimation He was one who had no adequate conception of the sequences of thought, the proprieties of style, and the association of ideas. He had in turn said that the kingdom of heaven was like unto a shepherd—a sower—a fisherman’s draw-net—a woman—a merchantman seeking goodly pearls—and, on one occasion, a king going into a far country; but in no instance had He allied this great kingdom with the life of the priest, the rabbi, and the Levite, except in a parable which daringly exalted the hateful Samaritan at the cost of their humiliation and shame.

It was so. There was nothing in their lives that could illustrate what the kingdom of heaven was save by contrast. When angels came to earth to announce the coming of the kingdom in the birth of its King, they went not to the temple or synagogues of the land, where priests and rabbis congregated, but went to the fields and to the peasant shepherds to sing their song; even so, when the King Himself would teach men the nature of His kingdom, He had to go out to the fields and into the homes of the peasants for His illustrations, and in their unconventional but homely phrase

to speak to men. The kingdom of heaven was like unto nothing that pertained to the priests and rabbis of the day, but like unto many things in the life and experience of the poorest of the land—it was “like unto leaven which a woman took.”

I now direct your attention to a few aspects of this kingdom which our text illustrates :—

1. That the kingdom of heaven is *brought into the world, and not produced by it*. It is not a spontaneous product of earth : it enters it from without. The leaven was placed in the meal. The world has no such transforming force in itself as this leaven represents. The power that works for righteousness comes from without and beyond this world of ours. In the natural creation all that touches the earth into life and beauty is from without, and generally from afar. The earth would die without the constant smiles and benediction of the heavens. It is a pensioner of the skies ; it lives and flourishes only as the heavens continue to bless it. Every blade of grass looks up, every flower lifts up its head, and says, “I receive warmth and moisture from above, I live because the earth is not left to itself, and because heaven arches over me.”

How still more true is it with regard to the spiritual power that transforms the world, that it comes from without ! Our race by its own inherent energy has never produced a Saviour or a kingdom of heaven. These are Divine provisions. The Saviour of the world must come to it, and the kingdom of heaven must *come*. All begins with the story of an *advent*. “Every good gift and every perfect gift *is from above and cometh down* from the Father of lights.” Surely the greatest of God’s gifts must come from that direction.

2. That its presence at first *is unostentatious and undemonstrative*. It is hidden. At first it would seem as if it were lost. What a connection between hiding and revealing in the history of seed sown ! “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo here, or lo there, for behold the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke xvii. 20, 21). These were the words which our Lord uttered to the Pharisees who demanded of Him when the kingdom of God should come. It had come, but they did not know it. Like the leaven hidden in the meal, the kingdom of God was hidden from them. It was working its way beneath the surface, and at the very heart of mankind, and all the while those learned

rabbis were blindly clamouring for it. Nothing can more forcibly illustrate the possible issues of apparently insignificant beginnings than the origin and early history of the kingdom of heaven among men. The old law that germination goes on quietly and out of sight, that growth advances without noise or ostentation, finds its completest illustration in the founding of Christ's kingdom among men.

This is true of its origin and growth in each individual heart. Its influence is subtle, challenging all scrutiny into the mystery and detail of its growth. Men are renewed in the spirit of their mind—that they know—but they know not how. To change the figure, and overlooking the silence of its operations for the moment in order to emphasize the mystery of them: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The beginnings of great reformations in all ages illustrate the same mysterious process. But they have not only been mysterious. Far down, deep at the heart of every spiritual operation in the individual or the community, there is a deep silence. Men have not known of it until it has quietly developed its resources and astounded men with the results which it has wrought.

3. It works *from the centre outwardly*. I suppose all life works in growth from the centre, and not from the circumference. This kingdom does. It would seem as if, when God would endow life with special capacity for growth, He condenses it into small compass—a seed or germ—so that from that centre life-giving energy may go forth. So, when He would have His kingdom grow in the world, He deposits it either as a seed—the smallest, like mustard seed in the earth, or a morsel of leaven in three measures of meal—and from that small centre causes it to work according to the law of its life outwardly. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6). Science to-day pays much attention to the power of littles. It appears that life is threatened most by invisible bacilla and spores. This is but one side of a great truth—the power of littles, the energy that works out of small centres.

Again, our Lord in all His teaching asserts that the evil pertaining to man and society is internal rather than external, that the individual and the race need not so much a correction of

surroundings as a radical change at the heart, which in due time will accomplish a change in the surroundings. "Son, give me thine heart," is the request of the great Father. Even in expounding the Decalogue, our Lord teaches men that the beginning and the soul of evil is not in the outward breach of the commandment, but in the subtle desire that is so often hidden out of sight. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment," etc. (Matt. v. 21, 22). Elsewhere He exclaims, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," etc. (Matt. xv. 19, 20). What applies to the individual man applies to the community and the race; hence God in His redemptive work begins at the very centre, at the heart whence come all the issues of life. Down deep beneath all that is superficial the kingdom of heaven begins its work. You have seen this in the life of individuals, as well as in the history of missions at home and abroad.

4. Its influence is *diffusive, penetrative, and assimilative*, in converting the mass into its own nature—viz., leavening the whole lump. Herein this parable presents a striking contrast to the parable of the mustard seed. They present two different aspects of the progress of God's kingdom in the world. Both are illustrative of great results issuing from small beginnings, but in the one case it is a development of the inherent life of the seed, in the other the acquisition which results from intimate contact. This leavened meal spreads its characteristic energy by contact with the surrounding particles, and those in turn by touching others nearest them. Precisely so, by close and sympathetic contact with men, is this spiritual power to extend. We know what importance in healing men Christ attached to *touching* them. Try to imagine the Christ touching the leper with kid gloves on, in order to prevent the stain of infection. Nay, oh nay! He gave him no *dead* touch. He touched him with that throbbing, pulsating, human hand of His, and there was warmth and life in that touch. Christ never thought of catching the infection from the leper, but on the contrary rather He was bent upon making the leper catch the infection of His own purifying and healing touch. That touch was at once a pledge and a symbol. This is the law of the kingdom. Christ has founded

a Church so that men may be brought into the closest relationship of sympathy with each other, and thus that the good in each may flow into the life of all. We are brought together thus, in order that we may be brought into more sympathetic touch with each other, and thus be the better able to diffuse Christian influence among each other. How far we avail ourselves of this opportunity is a question which each one should ask himself seriously. There are people who come and go from various places of worship, I fear, who are never spoken to by a Christian friend. There are young converts who have scarcely ever received a word of encouragement from an experienced Christian. Before you leave this place this morning speak to some one who is sitting near you, but to whom you have never spoken before. I address many of you to whom such an advance could only be natural and right. Make it impossible, by your united effort, that any one shall leave this place to-day without receiving a friendly grip of the hand. No one can tell how much virtue will go out of you—yea, and flow into you—by that sympathetic recognition. You will be able to worship God better at the next service for it, and be able to realise the joy of Christian work as you have never hitherto done. Further, the whole congregation will be permeated with a spirit of brotherhood and love, and all will feel and rejoice in the glow of a warm Christian fellowship. It is only thus that the leaven of your Christian life shall diffuse its influence and pervade the community to which you belong.

5. *Its success is certain.* That will be gradual, no doubt. In the very nature of things it must be so. But it need not be as gradual as it has been. Oh, how often we say "Thy kingdom come," and all the while we are retarding its progress! We hold ourselves, far too frequently, aloof from Christian work, and from needy men and women. We are not in touch with God, and as the result we are not in touch with man and with our work. Let us who are Christ's have confidence in the energy with which we are charged by the Spirit of all grace, and in the grand possibilities of well-doing which are before us let us forget our dignity, remember our duty, and in the spirit of consecration do it, and God, even our own God, will bless us, and that blessing shall do its part to hasten another and a greater—when "all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."

LXXIX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—GOOD LODGINGS.

“One Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.”—ACTS xxi. 16.

THE apostles considered it a very important matter where they lodged. They were itinerant preachers, going from place to place, and were largely dependent upon the good-will of those whom they visited. When our Lord first of all sent out the twelve apostles, He said, “Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.” One might have thought that the question they would have to ask when they entered a town would be, “Who in it is kind enough to receive us?” Yet that was not what Jesus taught them to ask, but “Who in it is worthy?” It was a privilege for any one to receive them, did he but know it, and they would not knowingly go into any house that was not worthy of them. No home would be too poor for them to enter, but there were other reasons why they should not lodge in some places. We find that the apostle Paul would not lodge in the house of any one who had not learnt to love and to serve the Saviour. There were many reasons for this; I will only give one or two. You must remember that by lodgings in these instances we are to understand friendly hospitality and kind shelter, for which no charge was made. Now, Paul, and the other apostles, desired that all those who extended this kindness to them should do it for the sake of Christ, and as an expression of their love to Him. Now, those who had not received Jesus as their Saviour could not do this. Besides, there were certain customs in the family of a heathen man,—idol worship, and the like,—against which an apostle would have to protest at every turn. He could not sit to partake of any meal without seeing something to which he would have to object. Now, Paul, or any one of the others, was too much of a Christian gentleman to do that. Thus he could in no instance accept the hospitality of a heathen man, for to object to the arrangements and customs of the household would be discourteous to the host, while to be silent would be unfaithful to the Lord Jesus. He and others, therefore, went to those who would receive them as brethren.

Now, I want to show you that if it was important to Paul where he lodged when he preached the gospel in different places, how much more important it was where he should lodge during the short time left him before he was taken prisoner and put to death. Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem, although he well knew what awaited him there. The disciples at Cæsarea, who tried to prevent him from going, gave way at last, and sent a few of their number with him. They also found one Mnason, an early disciple—one of the very first who believed in the Lord Jesus—at whose house they should lodge. Mnason of Cyprus, like his fellow-countryman Barnabas, seems to have had some means, and to have had his country house probably in Cyprus and his town house in Jerusalem. It was in this house that Paul and his friends now lodged.

Notice that on this occasion Mnason knew that Paul was about to be taken prisoner soon, and yet he gave him lodgings beneath his roof. There were others who would have been glad to receive Paul when there was no danger, but who would have hesitated to do so now. But Mnason received him even at the risk of being taken prisoner himself for sheltering the apostle. How true, tender, and strong, is Christian love !

What a blessing it was, too, for Paul to lodge in the house of one of the very first disciples, who had all those years proved how faithful he was—one who would sit down and recount all the Lord's doings with him, and cheer Paul's heart in view of all the suffering that awaited him ! One would give much to know what Paul, Mnason, and their friends chatted about ; just as we should much like to know the talks that our Lord Jesus Christ had in the house of Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany, immediately before His trial and crucifixion. We rejoice that both our Lord and His great apostle had in such a trying time the warm shelter and the loving fellowship of friends. Paul was better able to bear his chain, and even our Lord Jesus to bear His cross, for their brief stay at the homes of those whom they loved and trusted.

Now, if the apostles were anxious not to lodge anywhere where it would be more difficult for them to love and serve God, since "evil communications corrupt good manners," how anxious we should be to have our homes and our friendships such as Jesus would approve of and bless ! So much depends upon our friends and our homes, that we ought always to ask

God to dwell in our homes and to choose our friends for us. It is important in the sight of God who your little companions are, and He will help you to select them. He will also make your homes better and more helpful to you if you trust in Him. Thus, when you have grown up to be men and women, you will thank God for some good example or kind word which you received in your early homes—for some one who led you, when you were but a child, to the feet of Jesus, and taught you to love and to serve Him, as well as to find your greatest happiness beneath His bright and loving smile.

LXXX.

SERMON—SILENCES AT THE CROSS.

“Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother,” etc.—JOHN xix. 25.

I HAVE, in a series of sermons, already dwelt upon “*Cries at the Cross*”: my subject on this occasion is “*Silences at the Cross*.” It is a strange fact that, while much has been said about the “voices” on or at the Cross, very little appears to have been said or written about the “Silences of Calvary.” The subject seems to have been largely overlooked. Yet the more we think of the matter the greater is the meaning of the pauses of those terrible hours. Is it not a striking fact that our Lord was allowed to die under such conditions of cruelty and wrong-doing without a single protest, so far as we can find from the record, from the lips of an apostle, disciple, or well-wisher? This is a fact which we ought honestly to consider. We know that the disciples were scattered every man to his own. To each came the awful solitude of separation from all others of kindred sympathy and hope. The unity which was born of mutual fellowship had for the moment been broken, and *every one forsook Christ and fled*. There was one exception. But even that was only partly so. We cannot read John’s record of the Crucifixion without tracing the period of even John’s absence, when as the result of our Lord’s bequest he took Mary to his home. There was a time during the Crucifixion when our Lord had no disciple near. Moreover, even John—the one exception to the universal absence of Christ’s disciples from the Cross—seems not to have uttered a word. The chief priests, Pilate, the false witnesses, the multitude, the thieves, the centurion,

and the soldiers, all had their say ; the only silent ones were the disciples and the women. In the story of the Crucifixion we find the Church silent at the Cross, while the world speaks first in triumphant blasphemy, and then with the discordant voices of conflicting thoughts and emotions. That is the beginning of the story ; but as ages pass by the Church becomes growingly triumphant, and the world silent, in the presence of that self-same Cross. The apostles at first had no confession to utter at the Cross—it was the one enigma which silenced them ; but soon after this even the apostle who had denied Jesus exclaimed, “ My Lord and my God ! ” and the greatest of the apostles—in the enthusiasm of a new conviction, as one born out of due time—exclaimed, “ God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world ! ” Catching a new inspiration, the apostles became eloquent in the proclamation of that Cross whose mystery while it was uplifted had silenced them.

But meanwhile we have the glaring fact that, so far as we can learn from the record, no protest was uttered or confession made by a single disciple of Jesus Christ at His Cross. What writer of fiction would introduce so daring a surprise into the narrative, and thus give it such an unlooked for and incredible turn? Yet here it is, and we ought to learn something of its meaning.

1. Let us consider the silence of some *in the presence of a strange and painful surprise*. In order to understand this better, let us recall some of our Lord's preceding utterances to His disciples. See how repeatedly He discourages the possible suggestion of resistance. He had also said, “ No man taketh it (My life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” He further intimated, when danger seemed to threaten Him prematurely, that there were twelve hours in the day, and that His hour had not yet come. In His last discourse to His disciples, He emphasized the duty of non-resistance to the power of the persecutor, at first announcing that two swords were enough, and subsequently adding to the significance of that announcement by reproving Peter for his passionate resistance, and intimating that one sword wielded like his was one too many : “ Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels ? ”

But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" Throughout it was not resistance, but passive endurance, that Christ taught. It was this, moreover, that He practised, even when, after the first mighty repulse of His majestic "I AM HE," the band of men went backward and fell to the ground. From that hour until He breathed His last on the Cross His course was one of patient, passive endurance, without an answer for idle and criminal curiosity, or a protest against blasphemy. In each case He answered them nothing! The seven subsequent utterances at the Cross were in perfect harmony with all that preceded, since in no instance was an answer given to idle questioning, or to bold daring mockery, or to cruel infliction of suffering and death. None of these things moved Him—even as much as to speech. Now, all this must be taken into account before we can understand even in part the silence of John and of the women at the Cross; and who shall tell how far the passive endurance of our Lord was an enigma which, *through the failure of the others to enter more fully into its meaning in Gethsemane*, now helped to confuse and bewilder them, so that they were scattered every one to his own! But that is not all.

2. We must not forget that the absence and silence of the majority of the disciples arose also from *fear of the apparent triumph of evil*, and the successful conspiracy of wicked men. Their fears weakened their grasp of Christ, and when that was done there was nothing left for them but flight. Not an apostle's voice was heard at the Cross. They alone of all men were those who had nothing to say! In the face of that silence the question comes to us, "How could these men ever speak again in the name of that Christ? How could they ever break upon the silence?" Did they not forfeit, by their silence on Calvary, the privilege ever to speak again of Him as their Lord and Master? Only the appearances of the risen Christ, and His reassuring words, could give them enough courage to call Him Master again. Indeed, nothing less than the commission and its accompanying assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," could suffice to inspire their hearts with a new hope. With what gracious assurance Christ's commands, "Feed My lambs,"—"Feed My sheep,"—"Feed My sheep"—came in the train of the threefold questioning, "Lovest thou Me?" to Peter! And with what a high sense of privilege the commission came to those who

had so recently been silent when they might have spoken—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"! It came to them as the restoration of a forfeited right ever to speak again for Jesus, since that gift had been neglected in the supreme moment of need.

3. Here, too, we find *the silence of helplessness* in the presence of tyrannical force—a silence that would largely pertain to the women. They felt that if a sight of the great Sufferer was not convincing, and if the prayer which He offered at the outset on behalf of His persecutors did not break down their bitter hatred, nought that they could say would avail. Thus, even the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and had ministered to Him of their substance, those who in the darkest hour had displayed the bravery and heroism which the disciples so sadly lacked, now stood at the Cross in the consciousness of utter helplessness, and were dumb since words seemed fruitless, and every protest but an idle cry.

4. Again, this was *the silence of love in the presence of inscrutable mystery*. This would above all apply to Mary. The cries of blasphemy which now rent the air, and pierced her ears, but ill accorded with the harmonies of the angels' song which still lingered in her memory. Was this the anti-climax of the heavenly announcements of the birth? Could it be true that heaven had then entrusted its confidences to her motherly heart, and that the angels had ever sung their song over the fields of Bethlehem, and flooded the darkness with celestial light? Could all that occurred at His birth be a reality or a dream? Thus love in the presence of mystery pressed its lip and spake not a word. Mary had been silent for many a year when the mystery assumed a more pleasant form than this. She was a woman who knew how to bear the burden of mystery amid intense expectancy, and yet not talk flippantly about it; and now, having passed through that prolonged training, she can bear the tension at the Cross and be silent still. Had she spoken now, her heart-strings would have snapped with the recoil. There are times when our only safety is to be quiet, to bear passively the burden of mystery, and to look conflicting providences in the face and answer them nothing.

5. Closely connected with that silence is another, *the intense grief that could only speak—if it spoke at all—in tears, since words were too weak*. Some women wept. There were others whose pallid faces told of an agony that could not weep, and

who subsided into a silence that was more eloquent than tears.

6. *The silence of faith that could wait for the solution.* I believe that Mary and John and the women at the Cross had that faith in a great measure. There might have been other obscure disciples in the crowd who had it. I wonder sometimes that some of the deaf and dumb to whom Christ had given speech and hearing did not use their new-born speech on this occasion ; but it may be that in that throng, as well as in the smaller group near the Cross, there was at least one here and there who could look the mystery in the face and say, "I cannot solve it, but I will wait. He that believeth shall not make haste." Even at the Cross of Christ, and among that tumultuous throng, there was a faith to be found in solitary hearts that could leave all with the Crucified One. Those who loved Him had heard Him decline the proffered sympathy of the daughters of Jerusalem as "they bewailed and lamented Him." What was the secret of that refusal? Was it a hard heart? Oh, nay: His was the tenderest heart they had ever known. It responded to every touch of sorrow and of sympathy. Why, then, His want of response on that occasion? Wait! Had He not said, "No man taketh my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it up again"? To some at least who had heard those words, the suggestion would come, "What if this be after all but the expression of His power? What if the Cross be but the Gospel in paradox?" If these hidden questionings only came as a fond hope, and not as an emphatic assertion of a strong faith, even then the silence was more eloquent than words or tears, and the hope would soon find its fruition in certainty.

While, therefore, there is much in the silences at the Cross of Christ that fills us with humiliation and shame, we will not indiscriminately condemn all the reticence of that hour. In some instances the silence was but the expression of a passive power as real, though by no means as great, as our Lord's when He was silent before the chief priests, Pilate, and Herod. There are times in every true life when silence is the expression of the mightiest faith. One man speaks and ejaculates, yet all only reveals hysterical weakness ; the other man waits, is calm, and utters not a word, because he is strong enough to be quiet. He does not know the solution of the problem that weighs

heavily upon him, and therefore he will not guess it; but he knows that, as sure as God is in the heavens, the solution is at hand, and until God speaks he will be silent. I believe that, in a few instances at least, this was the attitude of some who stood mutely at the Cross of our Lord. Brethren, the Cross of Jesus Christ is too sacred, too sublime a thing for us to talk of until *we know* something about it. God forbid that I should say anything of which I am not sure! I would far rather be silent. I would not speak to you of the Cross of our Lord, unless I knew that I have been made partaker of the redemption which was wrought upon that Cross, that the Saviour who died for me has also died for you, and that even the mystery of Calvary which once silenced me need silence me no longer, since in the heart of the mystery is the certainty that "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

If you do not know that, the best thing you can do is to be quiet, and look at that Cross in silence. Do not talk flippantly, much less scornfully, about that in which you have no share. Never smile at the man who speaks from the depths of an earnest conviction about the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin, and which has cleansed him. Let there be no trifling on your part though you see no meaning in such an utterance—yea, let there be solemn reflection just because you can see no meaning in it while others do, and gladly stake all their hope upon it. When standing near the Cross you are on the threshold of God's most sacred place, and it behoves you at least to take your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground. You have never been so near God as when standing by the Cross. Until you can rejoice in the Cross, it behoves you at least to be reverent in its presence; and that reverence, if you earnestly seek God's guidance and blessing, will result at last in a clear vision of, a mighty faith in, Jesus Christ as the Son of God and your Saviour, whom men with wicked hands have crucified and slain, but whom God has raised up having loosed the pains of death. In the presence of His Cross the world is now silent for very shame, but we who have trusted in Him are in its presence filled with a joy which shall sustain us in all sorrow, and find its consummation in the rapture of that eternal world, where Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, and where we shall face to face behold Him who has washed us from our sins in His own blood.

LXXXI.

*A TALK WITH CHILDREN.—HARD AND SOFT
PILLOWS.*

“And he (Jacob) took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.”—GEN. xxviii. 11.

“And He (Jesus) was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.”
—MARK iv. 38.

MY subject to-day is *Hard and Soft Pillows*. Jacob's pillow was a very hard one. He was no longer under his father's roof and cared for by his mother. I have already told you the story of his running away from home. He had on the first day walked forty-eight miles, and this was the first night he had slept away from home, and out of doors. There was no door opened to receive him, and no one near to care for him. Toward night he ascended the slopes of that range of hills that runs through the centre of Palestine. It was a very stony ascent. He trod upon slabs and boulders every step of the way, until at last he reached the top. He could go no farther. The darkness was gathering; besides, he was very weary, and the hill-top was the safest place for him to rest for the night. He took of the stones of the place for his pillows, and as he laid his aching head upon that hard cushion, and his weary limbs upon the stony ground, he would naturally think of the rough way which he had walked that day, and then of the lesson which it taught him, that “The way of transgressors is hard.” Now, if Jacob were to write anything on one of the stones which he had taken for a pillow, I think it would be these words. But he took at least one other stone. Now, I wonder what text he would write in the darkness of the night on that other stone, when in that solitary place he could not sleep for thinking of the cruel wrong he had done his brother and his poor blind father? As he remembered all these things, and could not forget the evil he had done, but earnestly wished he had never been guilty of such wickedness, I can imagine Jacob writing another lesson on the second stone,—“Be sure thy sins will find thee out.” Ah! this was a hard pillow for any man to lean his weary head upon for sleep and rest. Jacob must have prayed much before he slept that night. Then in his sleep he dreamed a dream. Perhaps if he had not had such a hard pillow he would not have dreamt at all. Thus God is very merciful and kind even to poor wandering sinners. He meets them on the way.

To poor Jacob He granted a dream far more glorious than any he ever had before. Upon that stony pillow—which Jacob had thought hard and strong enough to hold anything—the ladder rested which reached God's throne, and along which glittering angels went up and down. So Jacob learnt even on that stony pillow that there was forgiveness for him yet. And so he saw the first glimpse of that great truth which we have learnt, I trust, "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,"—for Jesus long after this taught Nathanael that He Himself is the ladder which joins earth and heaven (see John i. 51), and upon which the angels of God come to this poor world of ours and ascend again. Thus, in that ladder which Jacob saw he was permitted to see, centuries beforehand, that which represented Jesus the Saviour of the world. What wonder that Jacob after this made an altar of his stony pillow, and thanked God that he had ever laid his head upon it, and had such a glorious vision of God's mercy and love!

But I want to speak to you briefly about another pillow: that upon which our Lord rested His head in the hinder part of the ship in a storm. There was nothing that could terrify Him. You remember that when He was baptised of John the voice of God came from the open heavens, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The pillow in the ship was a soft one, but softer still was the Father's approval that came from heaven. That gave Him sweet rest in every storm; and even as on the Cross He stooped His head and died, He leaned it upon His Father's tender love, and said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." In our little way we can lean and rest upon the same pillow—the love of our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives two little pillows which are specially suited to children. The first is—"Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xix. 14). I want you to write opposite that verse,— "One of my little pillows." What little child will hesitate to come to Jesus and trust and love Him after that! Jesus never wants little children to be kept at a distance. The other little pillow is (1 John iv. 4)—"Little children . . . greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." However weak and helpless you are, you need fear no one if you trust in your almighty Saviour. Lean upon Him as you do when tired at

night upon your pillows, and you will find perfect peace. Thank God for such soft pillows for little children! Remember the two, and if one be not enough put one on the other and lean on both.

LXXXII.

SERMON—YOUTHFUL ROMANCE AND MATURE EXPERIENCE.

“They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.” (Matth. “*in Thy kingdom.*”)—MARK x. 37.

“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.”—REVELATION i. 9.

THESE words were uttered by the same man, but in different periods of life and from two different standpoints. What a contrast between these utterances, and yet at the very centre what a similarity! Few things have struck us more forcibly as we have looked over old papers—sermons, essays, or letters—which we had all but forgotten, than the process of change which we have undergone, and yet beneath all the change the identity which has been maintained. At such times each of us has asked himself, “Could I have ever written this?” but when we have read a little further, we have involuntarily exclaimed, “Yes, I still recognise myself here. Many of these words and phrases I should not now repeat, but notwithstanding all the change which has taken place during the intervening years, there is a wonderful similarity of thought and feeling; far down beneath all the varying phrase or expression there is the same spirit struggling to give itself utterance, as that which is still in me prompting me to speak and to act.” Just as when you look at your likeness taken when you were a child, you scarcely recognise yourself in it, but in looking closer you see that the eye through which the soul then looked out had much of the same expression as it has now, so in this case there is the same eye of reason beneath all those crudities of your earlier days as that with which you look upon things to-day, only that now the eye has had its vision trained by years of experience to more correct observation and keener insight.

With regard to our text, we instinctively ask, “Can the same man, the same disciple of the Lord Jesus, have uttered these two verses?” Only the direct assurance that it is so, that

John, one of the sons of Thunder, was in later years known as John the Beloved, and then spoke in the tenderest accents of love—the thunder having been lost in the love—could at first reconcile us to the thought. Then we try to imagine with what feeling John himself, when nearly one hundred years of age, would read the record by Matthew and Mark of his early interview with his Lord—an interview in which he was accompanied by his mother and his brother James, and which he had no heart to relate—how he would dwell with strange wonder and painful misgivings over the details of that incident, but would at length exclaim, “Yes, I remember it well; but this was after all only my youthful, crude, impulsive way of expressing in those early days what I still feel in the very centre of my heart, but can now express a little better, since the desire itself has been purified and perfected, and thus has been preserved,—the desire to be identified with my Lord and King in His kingdom and His glory. *Then* I thought His kingdom was in perfect accord with my youthful impatience; *now* I know that it is ‘the kingdom and *patience* of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ and that the baptism and the cup of which He spoke are among the choicest of His Kingly favours.”

It is with the conviction that John would account for these words very much in this way, only with that greater light which his personal experience and his special inspiration would supply, that I have ventured to take these two verses, the one relating to his earlier days and the other to his latest, and linked, or rather bracketed them together, because in the first place they seem to, and in a sense do, present a striking *contrast* the one to the other, and in the second place because beneath all the contrast they reveal a striking *identity* of desire, though in the former instance somewhat disfigured by youthful impatience, ambition, and even vanity, and in the latter case clothed with an unearthly beauty by all the mellow and golden lights of humility, patience, and loving trustfulness with which the setting sun of a consecrated life bathed all.

Let us consider :—

I. *The youthful utterance of John*—“Grant unto us,” etc. He feels, in common with James and his mother, that he is destined and qualified to occupy a position of great honour and influence. What young man who has had anything in him—any energy which as yet has not been expended in hard

toil—who has not sometimes felt this? And what mother, however discreet in other respects, has not occasionally given way to this amiable weakness? There is scarcely a position which some young men will not accept with an alacrity and self-complacency which terrifies older men. There is nothing which they cannot do, and there is certainly no honour which they are not prepared to bear with becoming dignity and grace. And even when difficulties are suggested, and the conditions of greatness are plainly stated, as in this instance by our Lord, and a question asked which would completely silence older and more experienced men, young ambition, unshocked, replies, “We can.” Of course there is nothing which such a young man cannot do. And yet, smile as we may at the bright colours in which young men paint the part they are to take in life, how often do we find in the exaggerated notions of youth the prophecy of a future which will be none the less noble, though not always quite as imposing, as the youthful fancy pictures. Joseph’s dream was a prediction as well as a dream. There is a predictive or prophetic period in every true life. Prophecy is an attribute of youth, as hope is its inspiration. Indeed, it was when Revelation was in its youth that prophets spoke. It was the allotted task of the maturer ages gradually to explain those prophecies,—*how gradually* the story of millenniums alone can tell. What is true in general is also true in the life of each man and woman. What great expectations inspire the youthful heart when life lies before us in glowing perspective! It is natural and right for “sons and daughters” to “prophesy,” and for “young men” to “see visions.” Experience will place the right construction on the prophecies and correct the wild fancies of the dreamer, but it will not mock the dream itself. How often do we find beneath all that is vain and ambitious in the wild romantic dreams and utterances of a young man, who as yet has not measured strength with hindrances, a yearning of high birth, which, when toned down by opposing forces, and above all by the mellowing influences of the Divine Spirit, becomes an incentive to that which is noblest in the life and character of one of God’s greatest servants! I think we shall find this to be the case with John, for he who in early days gave utterance to the crude desire to which I have already referred, in later years cherished those maturer thoughts and feelings which found so noble an expression in the second verse of my text.

Let us consider :—

II. *John's more mature utterance*—"I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation," etc. Tribulation has a strange power to form companionships. The Lord said to Israel, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." A strange place in which to choose any one ; and yet the truest Christian friendships are after this divine type. In the furnace of affliction, and the white heat of trial, we find the necessary power of fusion. The exact figure, however, used by John here is the opposite of that used by the Lord through the prophet, although the truth taught is similar. The word translated tribulation means "pressure," while the word "tribulation" itself is from the Latin word *tribulum*, which was, according to Dr. Smith, "a thrashing sledge, consisting of a wooden platform studded underneath with sharp pieces of flint or with iron teeth." John was the companion of those to whom he wrote by reason of having to pass with them through the teeth of the thrashing sledge of persecution, or beneath the pressure of the world's hatred.

But he is also their companion in "the kingdom and patience" of Jesus Christ. Notice the order : tribulation—kingdom—patience. "In the world ye shall have *tribulation*" (John xvi. 33). "We must *through much tribulation enter the kingdom*" (Acts xiv. 22). "Knowing that *tribulation worketh patience*" (Rom. v. 3). How gloriously these passages harmonise with our text !

John still lays claim to a share in the kingdom, but how differently from the way in which he first gave expression to it ! Men of royal natures yearn after a kingdom. John and James did. But early in life they could not construe their own yearnings, or explain the nature of their own ambitions. They knew they had something to do with a throne. They instinctively came to that conclusion. They vainly tried to articulate their desire. Jesus, however, knew what they meant. We too have heard children try to tell out their hopes and ambitions ; and, crude as their utterance was, we knew what they desired. John now, however, could give mature and explicit expression to his better defined hope and assurance. Had not Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" ? John now knew the nature of that kingdom. The companionship in it, too, appears to him far greater now than before. At first it consisted of his brother James and

himself; now it consisted of all those Christians to whom he wrote. We all begin life as Hyper-Calvinists,—“My brother and I” are the aristocracy of heaven,—but by-and-by our conceptions are enlarged, and we find that the kingdom of heaven is bigger than our little family circle. At first, like John, we forbid men because they followed not with us; further on we learnt that they were after all our companions in the kingdom. I know of a large-hearted, generous Christian man, who a few years ago, when a little lad, prayed, “Lord, bless my brother and myself, and may we sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” That child’s ambition was on a large scale. He and his brother were somehow to sit on twelve thrones,—on six thrones each, I suppose, unless he himself claimed the majority. But all the while his heart was small, for there was only room there for his brother and himself. That was equally true of John in his early days; but how different when in his later years he claimed brotherhood and companionship with all the faithful scattered throughout Asia! His words on the latter occasion showed how thoroughly the exclusive idea of honour and position to which he had formerly given expression had now vanished. It is thus that the best of men outgrow their petitions, remodel their prayers, and refashion their greetings on a more comprehensive scale. The very ruins of mistaken hopes supply material for the foundations of a nobler structure that shall rise on the same spot, and thus the ancient prediction finds a new exemplification in individual lives. “The city shall be builded upon her own heap.”

“We rise on stepping stones
O our dead selves to nobler things.”

So here, the old narrow exclusive petition of John had to die, but out of that came a confession that claimed a wider relationship and a nobler and maturer faith.

What a marvellous “and” is that which joins “the kingdom” to the “patience”! One of the sons of thunder who had once desired to call fire from heaven upon the Samaritans in a moment of angry impatience, now claims fellowship with those obscurer brethren, who throughout “Asia” bore bravely the brunt of persecution, in “the kingdom *and* *patience* of Jesus Christ.” Impetuosity comes to us early in life; mellowness, as a rule, only as we near its close, and not always then. The active energies soon find scope in youthful ambitions, but the

336 *Youthful Romance and Mature Experience.*

passive virtues come later on, to adorn the maturer experience of the disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the vision of our Lord Himself, "enduring the cross despising the shame," that gradually reveals to us the glory of longsuffering patience; and from the vantage-ground of Calvary we learn the significance of those words uttered by His sacred lips on another mount, "The meek shall inherit the earth." How often we are made to realise the glories of Calvary in the school of affliction! We know then more of the deep meaning of that divine patience which triumphed when, being oppressed and afflicted, the Saviour of men opened not His mouth; and when, being brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before her shearers, "He openeth not His mouth." Then, too, comes to us the assurance which associates God's greatest sympathy with His people's greatest suffering. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them." It is as we realise this that we learn to seek no higher honour than to be companion with God's faithful ones "in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (or, according to R. V., "*which are in Jesus*"). The dictation and impatience of early days give way to the submissive reverence and patient trustfulness of mature experience. Yet beneath the utterances of youth and old age may be, as in the case of John, the same desire of being closely associated with our Lord in His kingdom. How graciously does He correct our early mistakes, ripen our crude thoughts, and clear our imperfect visions of our high destiny, if we but sit at His feet and learn patiently of Him! Blessed indeed is he who has begun to learn of Jesus Christ. To that beginning there will be no ending here,—"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." But there are many here who, notwithstanding the weariness of life's journey and the weight of its crushing burdens of sin and sorrow, have not yet learnt the first lesson of trust and love at the Saviour's pierced feet. O listen to His loving call and gracious assurance:—"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

LXXXIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—ON AWAKING.

“Awake up, my glory ; awake, psaltery and harp ; I myself will awake early.”—Ps. lviii. 8.

SLEEP is one of the greatest blessings which God gives us : “He giveth His beloved sleep.” How sweet and refreshing is sleep to the weary child, or the tired man or woman ! We never know its value until we are really tired.

God, too, in ancient times greatly honoured sleep by giving very special dreams, by which He made known His will to His servants. You know that it was in sleep Jacob saw that wonderful ladder which reached heaven, and upon the rounds of which he beheld the glistening feet of angels as they came and went. The Bible abounds with instances of glorious dreams given by God to His servants in sleep.

Yet sleep is a blessing which may be sadly misused. People often sleep too much, and at the wrong times. It was in sleep that Samson’s locks were cut ; and it was when men were asleep that the wicked man, of whom our Lord spoke, sowed tares in his neighbour’s field. Our Lord warns us against being asleep when we ought to be awake, in the parable of the foolish virgins, who, while the bridegroom delayed coming, slept, and who were therefore unprepared to receive him when he came. Sleep is thus spoken of as a state of neglect and carelessness into which we may get. Our Lord bids us watch and pray. The apostle Paul, too, says, “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” In this sense even children are called upon to awake early out of sleep. You know that you have certain powers in you which are yet barely awake.

David in our text called *first upon his “glory” to “awake up.”* What was David’s “glory” ? What is the glory of any man or any child ? It surely must be that *spirit* which God has breathed into every one of us : that which within us is most like God ; that which makes us different from every creature on earth ; that by which we commune with Him, and by which we pray to Him or sing His praises. David calls upon *that* to “awake up.” That is how each child ought to feel. He ought to exclaim, with David, “Bless the Lord, O my soul ; and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

Then, when David’s spirit was thoroughly awake, *he called upon his psaltery and harp to awake.* These were two stringed instruments of different kinds, but David could bring harmony out of both. He was a splendid musician, and he practically said on this occasion—“Now that my whole soul is awake, I

want this old harp and this psaltery to awake up." Then he touched each instrument with his fingers and brought sweet harmonies out of them. He awoke the old harp out of its dead sleep. It required a man with a soul all alive, and filled with music, to awake such a harp as David had; but he made it speak out some of the joy and gladness which were in his heart.

Last of all, David *turned back to himself*, and said, "I myself will awake early." He was a very wakeful man, and made everything around him awake—even the echoes from the surrounding hills as he played his harp. On this occasion he made up his mind to awake even the morning,—for the correct translation is, "I myself will awake the dawn." He had already awaked his soul, his psaltery and his harp; now he undertook to awake the day. Now, was not that a splendid resolve? The dawn fails to awake most of us; but David would not wait long enough for the dawn to awake him, but made up his mind that he would be up before the dawn and awake it. This reminds me of an old story of a Welsh bard of the same name as the Psalmist—"David, of the White Rock." The White Rock was the name of the small farmhouse where he lived. He had been playing his harp in a mansion during the earlier part of the night. It was summer, and on his way home he became weary, and, sitting upon a mossy stone, leaned his head upon his harp and slept. By-and-by the lark arose out of its lowly nest, and began to pour forth its carol to the awakening dawn. Immediately the poet was aroused out of his slumber, and, snatching the cover from his harp, played for the first time one of the sweetest Welsh airs—"The Rising of the Lark." In our text the greater David, like the Welsh harpist, was awake with—yea, even before—the dawn, and poured forth music that rose in widening circles, like the lark, to heaven.

Well, you children are in the early morning of your life's day. If God graciously spares your lives, most of the hours of the day are before you. There are some older ones here who have borne the heat of the day, and to them the night is near at hand. They are not sorry for it, for beyond the present there is a bright day for them which will know of no night. But *you* have all your life before you. You are scarcely awake yet to all the glorious things in which you will by-and-by rejoice. I tell you one thing you ought to awake to very early.

That is, *the tender love of God toward you.* You have already learnt that your father and mother love you dearly. Of that you are quite sure. Yet they will tell that all the love they have toward you they have only received from our heavenly Father. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to teach us how dearly He loved us. Now, as Jesus, when on earth, loved little children, so He does still ; and that often when the little ones know least about it.

Then, when once you awaken to that fact, you will learn that *you should do something in return. You will love Him because He first loved you.* When once you realise that Jesus loved you so much as to give His life for you, and that He loves you still to such an extent as to watch over you every moment, to guard you against every danger and guide you all the way you should go, you will do all in your power to please and obey Him in return.

But you will soon feel how very weak you are, as new duties will crowd in upon you. Then you will awake up to another fact—*that Jesus is always ready to help you.* As soon as you learn that you can do nothing without Jesus, you will also learn that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Then you will greatly rejoice to know that in His strength you can do a grand service for Him. Yes, and as you grow older you will find constantly new opportunities to do His will and to bless all those whom He loves.

I hope, therefore, that every child will now begin to awake up and learn how much Jesus loves him, then ask what Jesus would have him do, and then look to Him for strength to do His will. Dear children, what a blessing it is to awake up early to obey and serve so kind and loving a Saviour as ours is !

LXXXIV.

SERMON—THE RESTORATION OF THE OVERTAKEN TRESPASSER.

“Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness ; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted,” etc.—GAL. vi. 1 and 2 v.v. (R.V.)

OUR text presents to us *one phase of Christian duty.* We notice

1. The occasion that calls for it.
2. Its nature.
3. The qualification necessary for its proper performance.
4. The spirit in which it is to be done.

5. The personal consideration which will impart additional grace and efficiency to it.

6. The law of which it is the fulfilment.

1. *The occasion that calls for it.* Many explanations are given of this phrase, "overtaken in a fault," but chiefly two. It may mean—*a.* A man taken by surprise, one who has not deliberately sinned as the result of set purpose, but who has been seized by the tempter without warning, and at a fearful disadvantage to himself. Illustrations of this abound. A ship is taken by surprise when a storm rushes upon it with startling suddenness and almost irresistible force. A dove is taken by surprise when an eagle swoops down upon it and wounds it before it is aware of its foe's presence. The Prince Imperial was surprised by the Zulus while on foot, before he could mount his horse. The enemy in ambush rushes suddenly upon an unsuspecting company of soldiers and thus surprises them. The history of warfare supplies a thousand such illustrations. In that sense some read, "If a man *be overtaken* in a fault." *b.* But suggestive and forcible as that is, I cannot accept it as the correct view of these words, and in this I am sustained by the Revised Version, which has—"Brethren, *even* if a man *be overtaken*," etc. The *even* emphasizes and aggravates the meaning of "overtaken" rather than palliates it; thus it appears to mean—"Even if a man *be surprised in the very act*"—caught in sin, and the charge be unmistakably brought home to him, as in the case of the woman who was a sinner—*then* there is an occasion presented for the exercise of a noble ministry.

Now, the word translated "fault" in the Authorised Version, and "trespass" in the Revised Version, literally means a *false step*, hence *a fall*. In this latter sense it is used three times in Rom. xi. 11 and 12 v.v.—"Did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?" (R.V.) It is the same word that is translated "trespass" in our Lord's prayer, and is used in Rom. v. 15—20: "If by the offence ('trespass' R.V.) of one, many died." It is also used in Eph. ii. 1—"Dead in trespasses and sins." These instances will show that though the word presents the blundering and mistaken phase of sin, it is nevertheless *sin* in all its deadly effects that is referred to here. Notice further the word "any." Whatever the kind of trespass

may be, however daring and inexcusable, it offers an occasion for a ministry of restoration.

2. Now *let us inquire into the nature of this ministry.*—The great question is, what are we to do with the fallen? Are we to pass them by in indifference, as the Levite and priest did in the parable, or as society in all ages has done? are we to stand aloof from them with sanctimonious airs and offended piety, like the Pharisees of old? are we to denounce them, like the more demonstrative of Rabbis and Scribes? or are we to restore them as Christ did? Our text gives us the answer—“*Restore such an one.*” This fact of sinfulness, established by unmistakable evidence, calls for the exercise of a noble ministry. It is true of God’s dealings with us that where sin abounded grace has much more abounded. It ought to be true of our dealings with others. There is a gracious ministry which only the sin and misery of the fallen can render possible. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He could only have done that in a world like ours. “The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” Salvation is God’s response to sinful and lost man. And on the same principle the ministry of restoration ought to be the response of every spiritual man to the sin and miseries of fallen men around.

3. *The qualifications necessary for its proper exercise.* “*Ye which are spiritual,*” etc. To restore men is the prerogative of *the spiritual.* This is a qualification which every Christian to a large extent should possess, but which some possess to a marvellous degree. There is no other redemptive force on earth. Sinners can instigate or denounce sinners as the case may be, but only men of decided spirituality can *restore them.* “God is (a) Spirit.” The “spiritual” are those who are “partakers of the divine nature,” and by reason of the divine indwelling have received the ministry of restoration. The apostles were to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Ghost was given them in the fulness of its energy and joy. Then, and then only, were they adequately equipped for the task of restoring fallen men to communion with God. This is the mission of the Church. It exists not for its own sake, but to bless the world.

There is no work that requires more *skill and tact* than this. The figure is taken from a dislocated limb that needs the skill of an educated eye and the touch of a trained hand to reset.

This ministry demands similar experience and tact. Ye which are spiritual, ye who have the clear vision and the delicate touch of the pure in heart, restore such an one. The work of restoration must be done by those *who possess*—

- a. *A proper estimate of the value of even fallen man.*
- b. *A due estimate of the claims of every man upon their sympathy and help.*
- c. *An intimate knowledge of the nature of the work which has to be done in order to restore others.*
- d. *A readiness and qualification for that work.*

4. *The spirit in which it is to be done.* "In a spirit of meekness." Nothing is more evident than that much good work is spoiled by the wrong spirit in which it is done: Paul constantly emphasized the need of meekness in Christian life and work. Christ Himself said "The meek shall inherit the earth." There is no Christian work in which we can engage that requires more meekness than the work of restoration. It cannot be efficiently performed in any other spirit. Cynicism and censoriousness never yet restored any one. These are cheap articles, which, like sourness in the fruit, come to us, if at all, rather early in life and before the fruit is ripe. Bad digestion and a naturally irritable temper are among the foremost requisites in the make of a cynic or censor. Intolerance and sourness, if they accompany spirituality at all, accompany a very feeble kind of spirituality.

He who would restore the fallen, must do it in no spirit of self-satisfaction, but with gentleness and meekness. The haughty man can do much, and it is wonderful how much can be done by self-assertion and impudence; but he is not the man who can lift up the fallen or restore the dislocated members of our human race. There are some rough hands which would only aggravate the evil, so clumsily they do the work! The danger is specially great for us to lose our meekness in this service. All Christian service is not of this kind. There is a preventive ministry; and a noble ministry that is, although it has but few statistics, if any, to present. Among the young it consists of guarding them against the formation of evil habits or companionships. No one can tell how much is done in this way. Such results cannot be tabulated save in heaven. Now, the work of restoration is more demonstrative, and more easily reduced to statistics. It is more apparent to all. It is just here that the danger lies, lest we should presume, and lose our

meekness, and thus unfit ourselves for the work to which we desire to consecrate our lives.

5. *The personal consideration which will impart additional grace and efficiency to the service—“ Looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* What a source of sympathy here—a similar nature and similar temptation! It would appear as if the very Christ, to be sympathetic, must be partaker of our nature, and be tempted in all points like as we are. A touch of nature and of kindred experience brings us very near to men; and this should inspire us.

a. A sense of danger, in such a work as this, lest, *being watchful over the souls of others, we neglect our own.* “They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song of Solomon i. 6). This is the great danger connected with all beneficent ministries. How easy it is to overlook our own spiritual condition in our desire to bless others! God guard us against the dangers which beset us even in our most sacred services and our holiest things!

b. *A consciousness of our own liability to sin* should give us charity and patience, and thus inspire us with meekness. So much of our consistency arises from the fact that we have not been tempted to the extent that others have. There are other instances in which men appear to be exemplary because they have never been found out. All men, even the most spiritual, are subject to temptation and open to fall; this ought to impart much gentleness to our treatment of those who have fallen.

c. *A dread lest we should become the prey of self-deceit.* The spirit of censoriousness—that which is the opposite of meekness—is *the most likely thing to lead to our own fall.* I know no man more likely to fall himself than he who has no charity toward the fallen. How many instances in the memory of us all emphasize this fact!

6. Let us now consider *the law of which it is the fulfilment*—“Thus fulfil the law of Christ.” There is a change of figure in this verse. Sin is no longer spoken of as *a fall, or dislocation of a member* through a fall, but is now referred to as *a weight.* Sin is here presented in its burdening and crushing aspect. The remedial ministry in this instance is to bear the burdens of others. If we were more ready to take up other people’s burdens, we should be less taken up with their “faults” or “trespasses.” How sad that some Christians see the faults but seldom the burdens of the world’s fallen ones!

To see those burdens and to bear them is to fulfil the law of Christ. We cannot find that this law ever existed until Christ came to teach it; and we cannot find it expressed in these precise words even by Him—"Bear ye one another's burdens." Yet the *whole tenor of His teaching* was to this effect. Besides, *the whole tenor of His example* was in the same direction,—“For even Christ pleased not Himself,” but “bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” In the presence of that Cross His words—“Love one another as I have loved you”—derive a new significance. “As” is the measure of that love which He possessed who bore the Cross and died upon it for us. What an example of burden-bearing, and what an exposition of the law to us to “Bear one another’s burdens”! The love of Christ constrains us to imitate His example and to obey His law, yea, and to recognise it not so much as a law as a privilege, or the glad expression of our grateful enthusiasm in willing service. Obedience is perfect when our sense of duty becomes identical with our sense of privilege, when it is our meat to do the will of Him that sent us, and to finish His work. The law of Christ is the law of love, and all obedience to it must be the obedience of love. It is from the Cross that the law is given, and it is at the foot of that Cross that we would receive it. The love of Him who redeems us is the love that must transform us into His likeness, making us partakers of the mind that was also in Christ Jesus. God grant that blessing to us all, and enable us to exclaim:—

“Never further than the Cross!
 Never higher than Thy feet;
 Here earth’s precious things seem dross;
 Here earth’s bitter things grow sweet.

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

* * * *

Here we learn to serve and give,
 And, obedient, self deny;
 Here we gather love to live,
 Here we gather faith to die.

Symbols of our liberty
 And our service here unite:
 Captives by Thy Cross set free,
 Soldiers of Thy Cross we fight.”

*A TALK WITH CHILDREN—JESUS WATCHING THE
CHILDREN PLAY.*

“Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets (‘market-place,’ Luke), and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.”—MATT. xi. 16, 17.

OUR subject to-day is, *Jesus watching the children play*. Have you ever thought of Jesus as being interested not only in children; but also in children when at play? Now, our text clearly shows us that He had often watched them as they played their games in the open market-places of Palestine. Children need play; and no one knew that so well as Jesus. You have often heard that couplet,

“All work and no play
Makes Jack a dull boy.”

I do not much admire the rhyme, but I very much approve of the sentiment. Now, that was as true of every little Hebrew Benjamin or Joseph as it is of the little English “Jack” or “Tom.” I have never yet seen a child who was up to much, who did not like occasionally to play; but I need not dwell long upon that, as I have a keen suspicion that your failings are not in the direction of playing too little. But what I want you to remember this morning is—*That Jesus feels a great interest in all your joys as children, even in your innocent games.*

Notice, too, that Jesus not only watches children at their games, but also *watches them when they disagree and sulk*. This is as true now as when He was on earth. The children to whom He refers in our text were engaged in games very well known at that time in Palestine. In those days there used to be a great many wedding and funeral processions. People were engaged to play and dance in weddings, and also to make very doleful noises in funerals. The children in those days, as to-day, loved to imitate older ones, so that they would sometimes in their play get up a wedding march, and at other times a funeral procession. They used to divide themselves, like the grown-up people on such occasions, into two bands. One band were instrumentalists. They played on the flute or the pipe, or on something that was supposed to answer the same purpose. The others would shout and dance in case of a wedding, or sigh and weep in case of funerals. But children in those days disagreed sometimes in the very middle of the game;—I have known some who have done this in our day.

346 *Jesus Watching the Children Play.*

One party thought they had better play at funeral, while the other party, who were not in exactly the same mood, thought that game far too dull, and thus insisted on having a good wedding. So both companies would sit down on the opposite sides of the market-place and sulk, and, looking dreadfully black, accuse each other of being disagreeable things.

Sometimes the fault was all on one side. The instrumentalists would be playing as best they could on their pipes at a supposed wedding, when suddenly the other band would stop the dance and say, "No, we won't have that; we have got tired of weddings—we want funerals." Then the pipers would change the game, and play a very doleful tune, in order that the funeral procession might pass. But some of the opposite party would soon say, "No, we won't play any more; we have got quite tired of that dreadful tune." So they would go on objecting, until at last the pipers would sit down in utter despair and say, "We can *never* please you. 'We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.'" Now, Jesus noticed all this, and thought it *very silly and selfish*.

He also noticed *that little children were not the only ones who sulked and acted unreasonably*, for He compares here some grown-up people to those silly children. There were some people who had not ceased to sulk when they ceased to be children. Now, those who are most likely to sulk when they are men and women are those who begin sulking when they are boys and girls. Do not begin that silly trick, and then there will be no danger of your getting into the habit, which is despised by all sensible people. We are placed in this world not to insist upon having our little way always. We must give other people the credit of being sensible and good even when they sometimes differ from us. We should think of other people's feelings as well as our own. Those who do not *insist* upon having their own way are generally those who have it most. Jesus tells us that "The meek . . . shall inherit the earth." Gentle and unassuming men and women, too, are those who are most like Jesus Himself. There is no power so mighty as that of gentleness and patience, and we must learn how to possess that power at the feet of Jesus, who Himself is "meek and lowly in heart." Seek to be like Him—gentle, loving and patient—in all you do, so that all may know that you have been at the feet of Jesus and have learnt of Him.

LXXXVI.

SERMON TO THE YOUNG—A LION IN THE WAY.

“The sluggard saith, There is a lion without, I shall be murdered in the streets.”—PROV. xxii. 13.

“The sluggard saith, There is a lion in the way, a ‘lion in the streets.’”—PROV. xxvi. 13.

THE sluggard said this repeatedly in and before the time of Solomon, and he has not yet got tired of saying it. The figure is Oriental, but the sentiment is as universal as indolence. The saying in this form must have been uttered in the first place in a country where beasts of prey abounded, in thicket and forest, and where they might occasionally be found lurking in the vicinity of villages and towns; but as a ready-made and convenient reply to every appeal to self-denial and noble effort, our text has become the heritage of sluggards in all ages and all lands. Like that of the sun, there is no speech nor language where its voice is not heard. The first sluggard who uttered it possessed an amount of originality which no one of his numerous successors has been able to approach.

Observe that

1. Indolence gives to the sluggard *a morbid sense of the presence of danger and difficulty*. “There is a lion without, I shall be slain,” etc. In the context of the second verse there is a suggestion that he said this upon his bed—not a very favourable vantage-ground for estimating the difficulties of the situation. In any case he seems to have uttered these words in a safe shelter, where a chronic indisposition to stir, and a vivid imagination, would be very conducive to a tragic conception of the horrors without. Observe that this worthy can picture nothing less terrible without than a lion. It would be beneath the dignity of the man and of the occasion to conceive of any difficulty or danger less imposing or alarming. A sluggard’s difficulties are always of a very exceptional character. Nothing less terrible than a lion ever stands in his way. He does not take note of anything less. But he has a keen consciousness that all the lions ever created seem to have been specially reserved to block his path. Every devouring beast of prey seems to have taken a special fancy to him. Hear him as he meditates upon his bed and expatiates upon his difficulties. Did the heavens ever look down upon another man so beset! The universe is joined in unholy conspiracy

against him, and his only resource is to be quiet and to suspect.

But be it observed that what he lacks in energy he gains in vision. Now, in the great majority of instances his vision is delusive. His disinclination to stir in the first place suggests the idea of danger, an idea which the sluggard gladly adopts, whether true or false—indeed, even when he has every reason for knowing that it is false. By-and-by he begins to believe himself, and he becomes the victim of his own insincerity.

We therefore consider that

2. Indolence *makes a man insincere, and in turn deceives him.* One of its degenerating influences is that it encourages deceit in the statement of motive and fact. Wilful in the first place, and then unconscious, so that at length we have the strange but frequent anomaly of the liar believing his own lie and being thus imposed upon by it. The whole excuse is an exaggeration and deceit, and the sluggard in the long run is the last to find that out. It is this that reveals to us one of the most terrible, yea, penal influences of indolence. God sends to such a man a strong delusion, or “a working of error” (R.V.), that he should believe a lie. It is difficult to tell how soon and how far a man deceives himself in the habitual effort to deceive others, how his manhood becomes dwarfed, his moral vision distorted, his nobler sensibilities blunted, and his aspirations thwarted, so that he cannot rise above the level of a lie, but conceives his own falsehood or exaggeration to be the truth.

3. Indolence makes the sluggard *cowardly.* You never yet saw a sluggard heroic or brave. A lazy man is always a coward. He will not say “no,” but will hide himself behind excuses, and then he becomes the victim of a terror which his own insincerity has produced. He has lost his manliness; dull indifference is his nearest approach to heroism.

4. It makes a man *selfish.* “A lion in the street.” Therefore he will lurk in his bed or his corner. It matters not who else may become a victim, he takes care of his own precious life. *He* is not his brother’s keeper. His life is too precious to be risked for the sake of the community. Ah! selfishness is the soul of all indolence. Hence the most worthless lives

are those upon which their owners place the highest value. An apostle may exclaim, "Bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xx. 23-24). Yes, an apostle may say that, but a sluggard never. He *does* count his life dear—*very dear*. To an apostle there are considerations dearer than life; to an indolent man none: *self* is the sum total of his thoughts. "I must live," said a lazy man who had deserted his wife and family once to me. I replied that it was doubtful whether that was a supreme necessity or not; but that there was a greater "must"—he *must do his duty*.

5. It makes a man *incapable of effort*. This is the old story of the unused faculty dying out of a man, of the unused talent being given away.

Thus I beseech you to learn the impoverishing and degenerating influences of indolence. It robs a man of truth, brightness, heroism, unselfishness, and energy.

What have you left? It saps a man's manhood out of him. My friends, let the picture be a warning to us. The sluggard's lions are mostly imaginary. But there are lions in every path of duty, which every one—especially the Christian man—is called upon to meet. Bunyan, with his keen insight, did not forget this in his wonderful allegory of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian is represented as, having climbed half way up the Hill of Difficulty, sleeping in the arbour, and then proceeding. When he reached the top of the hill there came to him two men running amain, Timorous and Mistrust, announcing to him that there were a couple of lions farther on; therefore, they said, they had turned and were going back. So saying, Timorous and Mistrust ran down the hill. When Christian had returned to the arbour in search of the roll,—which, alas! he had dropped in his sleep,—and had climbed again the remaining half of the hill, he proceeded amid the gathering darkness, for the day was far spent, until he saw a very stately palace called Beautiful, which stood just by the side of the highway. But looking very narrowly as he went, he espied two lions in the way. He thought of what Timorous and Mistrust had said. But the porter at the lodge, whose name was Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt, cried out, "Is thy strength so small?"

Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for the trial of faith where it is, and for the discovery of those that have none: keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come unto thee." "Then I saw," adds the dreamer—"I saw that he went on trembling for fear of the lions; but taking good heed to the directions of the porter, he heard them roar, but they did him no harm." Herein consists the whole philosophy of the matter. There are lions on the highway to the palace called Beautiful, to test the faithful and to discover the faithless; but they are chained and helpless if we but walk in the middle of the path.

In all ages God's servants have at length known this. Although for a moment, like Christian, they have halted and feared, they have not turned their backs upon the Palace, but have proceeded, and passed the lions untouched, although they have felt their hot breath and heard their hungry growl as they have gone by. The greatest and best men have at times not been free from fear, but their fear has not resulted in craven-hearted cowardice. It has only tested their faith and strengthened it.

What an example in this respect, as well as in every other, was our Lord! The roar of the lion came to Him in the path of duty. "In that very hour there came certain Pharisees, saying to Him, Get Thee out, and go hence: for Herod would fain kill Thee." He unmasked the would-be lion, and said, "Go, tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils." (Luke xiii. 31-32.)

There is another striking instance of a lion in the way in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Christiana, her children and Greatheart, had reached the middle of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, an unchained lion came on apace after them. Then remembered they what had been said some time before—"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Standing between the band of pilgrims and the lion, Greatheart addressed himself to give him battle, but when the lion saw it he drew back, and went no farther. So it never can be that the Christian or any of the pilgrim band shall be overcome in the path of duty, or on the way heavenward, by any lion that may assail them. "Behind the word 'ought,'" as Joseph Cook puts it, "is God." Brethren, what matters it what lion is before us if God is at our back? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Every man who seeks to serve his Lord and bless his race

will have to meet lions in his path. Does this surprise you? This is true in the ordinary pursuits of life. Every man who has succeeded in his calling or profession has had to meet them. Have you ever seen a man succeed who has had a special aptitude for finding lions and running away from them? Nay, he has proceeded and made them flee, or has laid them low. Think it not strange if they appear in the Christian's path.

There are many lions which present themselves. I will only mention a few:—

1. The lion of *hardship*,—of ceaseless toil and desperate struggle. How many have turned back at the sight of this!

2. The lion of *thanklessness*,—unrecognised toil. So much effort apparently lost, and so much toil of which no count is taken.

3. The lion of *disrepute*,—"They will cast you out of synagogues," and "speak all manner of evil against you." Public opinion, or that of the little community in which we move, which pronounces our conduct as unusual or unbecoming.

4. The lion of *disappointment or failure*. The mere chance of that lion lurking up the hillside is enough to terrify many.

5. The lion of *isolation*. If you could only walk the way in the company of others, it might be tolerable, but to do it alone!

What would have become of the early Christians if they had been terrified by such lions as these? Such fears are those which take the stimulus out of life, the inspiration out of every noble purpose, and the charm out of every difficult undertaking.

Every lion that terrifies us only makes us the more timid to meet the next, and the more suspicious of the existence of others even where they are not to be found. On the other hand, every lion we encounter makes our heart the braver and our hand the stronger to combat another. When we have fought a few of them we are very much less afraid of the rest. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. xviii. 37), was the exclamation of David in ancient days, and has been the exclamation ever since of every man who has been enabled to smite a lion once before. "I fought with beasts at Ephesus," said Paul, doubtless with the feeling that if need be he was prepared to do it

again. There is nothing that makes a man so heroic as a heroic deed. The history of Divine power and protection in conflicts past is our inspiring hope for conflicts to come. There has been One by our side who has never deserted us, and He is not going to begin to do that now. "I send you forth as sheep among wolves," and "Fear not, little flock," is the sublime paradox with which He kindles our enthusiasm and commands our faith.

Let us not be among those who have a greater aptitude for finding lions than for combating them; and, above all, let not the fear of any danger or difficulty be greater than the fear of the neglect of duty. Our Lord calls upon the young to follow Him to-day as in the days of His flesh. Oh, what scope for the truest heroisms in His service! Man is never so manly, and woman never so womanly, as in the service of Jesus Christ. The true Christian is not an effeminate kind of man. The love of Christ constraineth him. The sight of the Cross and Christ's infinite Sacrifice fills him with the enthusiasm and courage of boundless gratitude. "He loved me and gave Himself for me," is his first exclamation. That is followed by another, "We love Him because He first loved us"; and another, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me"; and another, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me"; and yet another, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Then there comes from the open heavens the gracious response to the heart that has learnt to trust in the Saviour, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." God grant that yours may be that unspeakable privilege and joy!

LXXXVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE BROKEN PITCHER.

“The pitcher broken at the fountain.”—ECCLESIASTES xii. 6.

It is very difficult to know the exact meaning of these words. They are supposed to refer to the heart failing to do its work in pumping or circulating the blood through the veins in extreme old age. But I want just now to refer to the illustration itself—namely, of people in ancient days going to the well for water and sometimes breaking their pitchers there. Of course this refers to a time when there were no pipes to bring water into people's houses, so that they had only to turn on the tap in order to have as much as they wished, but when people had to carry their pitchers to the well and back again. You will easily understand that many accidents would occur on the way. I am afraid to ask those who have ever broken a pitcher or jug to hold up their hand: the little uplifted hands would bring back the memory of such a host of broken jugs! Poor things, they are gone, and the sooner we forget them the more comfortable we shall feel. I am pretty sure, however, that every little boy and girl in this place knows what a terrible feeling comes over us when we have broken a poor innocent jug beyond all recovery.

I have occasionally seen a little girl or boy go for some milk—and, on one or two occasions, alas! for something very much less valuable than milk—and I have seen one fall on the way home, breaking the jug and of course spilling all its contents. Oh what a look of agony there was on that child's face! If there is anything that would move even a miser to give a shilling, it would be then, to help that child to buy a new jug and another pint of milk. There are but few things more pitiful than that sight.

Our text speaks of a pitcher broken at the fountain or well, into which it was let down by a rope wound round a wheel. In the East every one who went to the well fixed his own pitcher on the hook at the end of the rope and then lowered it into the well. Sometimes the jug would knock against the side of the well either in going down or coming up. This would generally be the case when one was impatient to get water quickly, and thus hurriedly turned the wheel. At other times, even when the pitcher was safely brought up, it was broken when the bearer tried to lift it on her head—for the

women in the East carry almost every burden on their heads. In each case the pitcher was broken at the fountain.

Now, I think this illustrates what often happens in life. You children have capital memories, which are intended to carry a great deal. It is wonderful how much they can take in. Well, I have seen little children bring these little pitchers of memories to the Sunday-school, and to our services ; but some soon gave up coming, before they had time to learn anything, others learnt a great deal of Jesus and His love, and of all the gracious things He said and did, and then they came no longer. We have often followed them, and found that they had bad homes or bad companions ; sometimes they suffered from crushing poverty, and were beaten about by hard circumstances, so that they forgot the good taught them, and like broken pitchers—or at least like leaky ones—they did not keep the living water of the Gospel which they had received into their memories. They soon forgot all, and were as if they had never heard the glad news. What a disappointment these broken, shattered memories and lives bring with them to all who have known them in better days ! The disappointment of having a pitcher broken at the well just when it was filled with water was nothing compared with this. It is terrible to see even children, just when their memories should be full of good things, let all go, just as a broken pitcher lets go all that it contained. As the result of this how many lives are poor, shattered, empty, valueless things, which might have been vessels to honour and fit for the Master's use, taking water which should quench the thirst of many a weary one, and brighten many a home ! These were once full of promise, but how soon did all vanish, and there was nothing left but a wreck !

I wonder whether there are any broken pitchers here to-day ; whether there is some young man who once knelt and prayed by his mother's side, and who once went to the Sunday-school, but who has since forgotten all, and, like a broken jug, retains nothing of the good teaching he then received ! Although the figure of a pitcher broken at the well is one which well-nigh represents hopelessness of recovery, yet I rejoice to tell you that there is One—the great Saviour—who can heal even that young man's backslidings, and mend the broken pitcher of memory, so that the mind which has been false and forgetful shall yet remember the Saviour's words with love and gladness. But above all I plead with you children whose memories are

fresh and strong. Do not let slip any good thing you hear, but watch and pray much, lest by wilful neglect or by evil companionships you should become like a broken pitcher, incapable of receiving and keeping the good things which are taught you concerning Jesus Christ and His great love.

LXXXVIII.

SERMON—TWO STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JOB.

I. *JOB'S PERPLEXITY.*

“Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?”—JOB iii. 23.

THESE are among the harsh words which Job uttered when he opened his mouth against God and sinned with his lips. The difficulties which Job experienced were pre-eminently human. The problems which presented themselves to him are those which have perplexed every man more or less in his trying hours.

The Books of Job and Ecclesiastes present to us two different phases of life having much in common, as it appears from two different standpoints: the one from that of almost unparalleled loss, bereavement, suffering, and humiliation, when he who suffers fails to trace the good that underlies the sorrow; the other from the standpoint of an indulged child of nature who fails to trace any lasting good even in all his earthly possessions and joys.

The first desire expressed by Job in his keen anguish is that he might cease to be. He longs for annihilation. He would have his birth, and all that pertained to him, blotted out. The mystery of existence, under such conditions as his appeared to be placed, pressed very heavily upon him. He asked why consciousness was given to those to whom that very consciousness was only a source of pain—“Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? *Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?*”

It will help to answer this question in part to remember that even in the *physical realm* God gives darkness as well as light as a blessing. The alternations of light and shade, of day and night, are among the greatest gifts of God to us. It is the

same hand that draws the curtains of the night as that which opens the gates of morning. It is the same mercy that gives us darkness, in which to close our eyes and receive its soothing restfulness, as that which gives us light in which to open them and receive its awakening inspiration. Darkness in this physical world is the complement of light, without which its ministry, not only to man but to lower creatures and to plants and flowers, would be of no purpose. It is the alternating shade and gloom that make bearable the heat and burden of the day.

Again, in *the realm of human knowledge* dark is the necessary counterpart of light. This is the condition of our finite existence. Beyond all the light there is a hidden way in every scientific or philosophical pursuit. The light given only emphasizes what a little we know compared with what is still unknown. We have just sufficient light given us in every pursuit to learn that beyond a certain point our "way is hid," and that on every side there is a hedge erected as much in compassion as wisdom, lest we should lose ourselves in aimless wandering. There are regions of thought and research where as yet, at least, man has no footing, spheres in which he vainly asks questions, many things concerning which for the present he must be profoundly ignorant, and mysteries for which science has no key, and to which human invention can supply no clue. In all paths of inquiry there is a point at which the certain shades off into the mysterious, and where, if we look to the left or to the right for escape, we find a divine hedge, and on it written, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." Foolish would he be who in the pursuit of knowledge would become then impatient, and, because the light from heaven did not reveal all, overlooked the fact that it revealed much, and querulously exclaimed "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?"

Is it strange if the same truth *applies to Providence?* In harmony with what we have said, we find the blending of light and darkness here. We enter largely into the realisations of the present hour, but who knows what the morrow may bring forth, or what bearing one part of life may yet have upon another! How often are we led by a way we knew not, but *led none the less* for that—shall I not say *led all the more?* If we impatiently seek to pry into our own future, or that of our fellows, we hear a voice exclaiming, "What is that to thee?"

follow thou Me." It is not for us "to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." Why should we think it strange that here, as elsewhere, God is hedging us in by the necessary conditions of our finite existence?

Look where we will, we know only in part, and can therefore prophesy only in part. Our life is wisely and graciously encompassed by limitations. The Divine hand erects hedges lest we wander too far, and our own way is hid from us lest, in the pride of our own heart and self-sufficiency, we rush on heedlessly.

"Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" For many reasons. To teach him (*a*) That though it is hidden from him it is nevertheless known by God; (*b*) That it is hidden in order to supply him with an opportunity of committing it to God, and of showing his trust in His wisdom and faithfulness; (*c*) That it is hid because, if it had been all known beforehand, it would discourage and confound the traveller.

Some of you have been in Switzerland, and possibly have followed a guide in a dangerous ascent. The condition upon which the guide undertakes to conduct you to the summit is that you shall implicitly trust in and follow him. There is one narrow shelf overhanging an awful precipice in one well-known ascent, where the guide insists upon blindfolding every traveller. That is the only condition upon which he will take them over. Hundreds of travellers have submitted to that blindfolding. But notice, what does that mean? *Progress is thus conditioned by having your way hid.* The guide has hedged in your liberty and your vision in order that he may with unquivering nerve lead you over a precipice that would have fatally bewildered you could you but see it as you passed over, or prevented you at first sight for ever from going farther. Are you prepared to conform to these conditions of a human guide, and all the while complain if God requires this of you? Depend upon it that the one condition of progress in the spiritual life is to allow ourselves to be led. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." It does not matter much how far or how little the light we need pierces into circumstances, solves mysteries of providence and of grace: all that is necessary is that we should have the light within us of implicit trust and clinging confidence in our Guide. If that light but shows

moment by moment the next step we have to take, we have no right to ask for more,—“one step enough for me.” The uncertainties which may appear sometimes to block our progress, and to hedge in our liberty, are but mercies in disguise sent to teach us to live, yea, to *endure* if need be, “as seeing Him who is invisible.” Half the fear that prompts impatient questionings and untimely murmurings arises from our intense selfishness, and the desire to have our own way at any cost. If we thought more of Him who guides us in love, and more of those who share with us our pilgrimage, our doubts would vanish in faith, and our bondage give way to perfect liberty.

This leads me to read another passage in the record of Job’s life, showing how at the close he found deliverance :—

2. *JOB’S DELIVERANCE.*

“And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.”—JOB xlii. 10.

THIS represents one of the great transitions of experience which form a new epoch in a life. Job was a long time before he arrived at this. The bulk of the book is taken up with the story of captivity. Already we have dwelt upon one utterance which came like the hopeless sigh of a slave in fear and in bondage. Why do the inspired Scriptures dwell so long and so fully upon captivities? For one reason, because captivities have played so important a part in the history of the training of God’s people.

The story of Job’s success, before and after his trial, is *briefly told*. As a prosperous man Job was one of many thousands, while he is exceptional as a great sufferer, although his experience at some point or other touches most lives. The part of our life which God loves to record most is that of conflict ending in victory.

Our text dwells upon the moment of deliverance in Job’s life, and the manner in which it was brought about.

1. It came *when he prayed*. He had already argued a great deal, but he did not succeed in arguing himself out of his captivity. He had complained much, but that did him no service. Strange that amid so much arguing and murmuring it did not occur before now to Job and his friends to pray, and thus take the problem to the One who alone could solve it!

2. It came when he prayed *for his friends*. Job had previously

prayed *for himself*, but the deliverance did not come then. It came when he prayed for his friends: for the kind of friends for whom he would find it hardest to pray; those who had tried him more than any enemy could; those who had complacently presumed upon their exceeding sanctity and his supposed exceeding sinfulness. Job now prayed *for them* at their request, and "the Lord accepted Job" and "turned his captivity."

Now, by this prayer on behalf of his friends,

(a) Job is *made conscious of their sorrow and needs*. His thoughts hitherto had centred in his own calamities. The besetting sin of suffering is selfishness, and a prayer only inspired by selfishness is not likely to be answered. How often is it that a man prays for the removal of his own burden, and the answer does not come; but the moment he thinks of some one else's burden, and prays for him, the burden rolls off his own shoulder! A prayer to be answered must have something of the spirit of the Cross in it. The heart that is selfish in its petitions is not mighty in prayer. To pray aright we must share the sorrows of others.

(b) He is enabled to *place himself in the position of his friends, and thus to understand them better, and to forgive them*. Fresh from the confession of his own sins and from being himself forgiven, he is called to become intercessor for his friends. Intercessory prayer is the highest type of prayer. Job had already exclaimed in his anguish, "Oh that man might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!" This was a typical cry of the human heart for an intercessor. He little thought that he himself would be the first answer to that petition. God put Job to pray for his friends in order to make it impossible for Job himself not to forgive them. Those friends had cost him untold agony; but there was something to be said for them, as Job found out when he began to pray for them. They had done what Satan could not do to Job—that is, make him sin with his lips—yet he now pleads for them and urges condoning circumstances. Have you ever thought of this use of prayer,—God encouraging us to pray for others in order that we may be brought into greater sympathy with them?

(c) He is *reuniting broken friendships*. His affliction and the consequent debates had estranged them from him. The story cannot be finished with Job's confession to God. If

sacred friendships have been shattered by this affliction, Satan has had some cause for satisfaction. After all Job would have been bereft of his friends, and sometimes the loss of a friend is more pathetic than the loss of empire. The restoration of a fortune could not compensate Job for this; nor would any acquisition of new friends. What could better unite him to them than to pray for them? Brought thus nearer to God and to each other, how paltry and despicable the disputes and angry words must have appeared now!

(*d*) *He is in part vindicated.* He has had to suffer for his own rash words, but he is also vindicated against the false charges of his friends by being now asked by them to pray on their behalf.

(*e*) *His own nature is enriched and enlightened.* The moment when he earnestly pleaded for his censurers is that in which the current of his life assumed a new direction. Affliction has done its work. Job appears as a tried and perfected man, and is a living illustration of how much a man may pass through, and how much better he may be for all. This was the hour of the flowering of his character. A man whose heart beats with such high considerations and tender patient sympathy as his must be free. When God touches a man's heart and makes it move in grander fashion, makes it to forget its complaints and to pulsate with unselfish desire and to beat with something of the tenderness of His own heart, that man's captivity is over. This is the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. When our Lord Himself exclaimed on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," He was no longer nailed to the tree, but He had nailed "the handwriting . . . that was against us" to that Cross instead. Already He had begun to lead captivity captive. Even so patience had now done its perfect work in Job. The bondage of doubt and fear which was impregnable against argument and complaint alike gave way to liberty the moment that he felt for others and prayed for those who had despitefully used him and persecuted him. Brethren, let us solve our problems on our knees, and find by the intensity of our devotions that the Lord's way, which we had thought was "in the sea" and past finding out, is also "in the sanctuary," and is daily trodden by His ransomed ones. Would that we all had learnt this secret! Oh, trust Him, those of you who have never trusted Him before. Trust Him still more, those of you who have already trusted Him much.

LXXXIX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—THE UNTURNED CAKE.

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.”—HOSEA vii. 8.

I DO not often give you an object-lesson, but I am going to do so this morning. You all see this cake, do you not? I want you to look at it carefully. It is not one which I should like to give you to eat. Yet it was properly made in the first place. The flour was good, the dough was carefully kneaded, and the cake was made round and of equal thickness all over. But the fault has been in not paying due attention to it while it was baking. You will therefore see that all the care that was taken in the preparation of the cake has been practically lost for want of just a little attention at the close. It is all burnt on one side while it is all dough on the other. It has not been properly turned. Ah! I remember how, when a little boy in Wales, I used to enjoy these “bake-stone cakes” which my mother made; but she never let them burn like this.

There were many ways of baking bread in olden times in Palestine. In villages and towns there were ovens in those days not unlike our present ovens. But in hamlets and out-of-the-way districts people used to dig holes in the ground and fill them with burning embers which they covered over with sand. Upon the hot sand they placed their cakes, on which they again put burning charcoal. This made it necessary that the cakes should be often turned, as the coals above were hotter than the sand beneath. There was another method adopted. The good housewife used to put fire in a stone vessel, and when it was sufficiently heated she would put dough upon the outside of it; at other times she turned the fire out and put the dough inside. In both cases the cake had to be often turned. Another way adopted was to put the dough on heated stones or on burning embers of charcoal. This required very frequent turning, or the cake would soon be spoiled.

Now, even in our own land in ancient times bread was baked in one or other of these simple ways. You remember reading about Alfred the Great having to hide himself at one time from the Danes. He disguised himself and stayed in the house of a poor peasant. The good woman of the house did not know who the stranger was. Her husband had kept the secret to himself. It is very rarely that a husband can keep a secret from his wife, and it is very wrong as a rule if he tries to do so. But perhaps it was justifiable in this instance: perhaps the poor man had a suspicion that if he told his wife the secret,

she would tell it in sacred confidence to her neighbour, and that neighbour would whisper it as a great secret to *her* neighbour, until at last the Danes would hear of it. Be that as it may, the poor woman as she left the house to go on an errand bade the stranger watch the cakes until she returned. But good King Alfred had other cakes to bake, so while he was planning his future movements against his country's enemies, and was sharpening his arrows and tightening his bow, he forgot all about the poor woman's cakes. The result was that they were very much like this one when she returned. She was very angry and told him what she thought of him—that he was great at *eating* cakes, but good for nothing at *baking* them. What wonder that she was so grieved!—the cakes had not been turned, and thus they had all been spoiled.

Now, the Lord said that Ephraim was “a cake not turned.” There was a great deal that was good in him. Ephraim was the name which the ten tribes bore. They were very religious. In one sense they were, like the Athenians whom Paul knew, too religious—that is, too superstitious. They worshipped Baal and the calf as well as Jehovah the God of Israel. They made very little difference between the true God and the false gods. All they seemed to care about was that they should worship *some* god. They had come to this by mixing up with the surrounding heathen peoples. The prophet, therefore, in the verse from which I have taken our text, says, “Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people.” Now, very often when a cake was baked in the way which I have described, namely, on the ground, unless great care was taken the dough would catch up little stones and some cinders, so that they became embedded in it and it became unfit to eat. Ephraim had, like such a cake, mixed up with heathen nations. In addition to that, Ephraim as a people was like “a cake *not turned*,”—they were too superstitious, and yet they were not religious enough in a true sense. They had many religious services and observances, but they did not live pure and godly lives. They were not affected through and through by deep reverence and loving service to the true God.

Well, there are some little children very much like a cake burnt on one side and all dough on the other. They know a great deal about Jesus Christ and His love. They could answer questions very fairly in an examination in the Gospels and other parts of the Word of God, and yet if you watch

them in life they do not appear to be much better for all this. Some are untruthful, others are selfish, others rude, others disobedient, others indolent. They keep a good deal of their thoughts, and a great portion of their lives, away from the Lord Jesus. They go to the house of God and to the Sunday-school, and let a part of their lives be influenced by His intense love; but there are other parts of their lives and characters which have never been turned to Him, so that they may be cheered and warmed by His kindling love. If the religion of Jesus Christ is to do us any lasting good, it must take possession of our whole being, and the heat of His love must go through us, so that it shall constrain us to love Him because He first loved us. Our loving Lord is not satisfied with having a part of us and the world having the rest. Those who try to give a little of their love to Him and the rest to what He cannot approve of, are like the unturned cake, which is neither dough nor bread: they are neither the one thing nor the other. They are neither Christians nor out-and-out worldlings, and Jesus will have none of them. We must always seek to live in the light and heat of His love, and have our whole being gradually but certainly changed by living very near to Him. We must often watch and pray that no part of our nature shall be long turned away from the Saviour. Think of the unturned lives in the world which are only just a little influenced on one side, while they still indulge in some forbidden pleasure on the other, instead of being wholly changed by the Saviour's love; and take warning from them. And now, dear children, "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

XC.

SERMON—THOMAS "NOT THERE" : A LOST OPPORTUNITY.

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."—JOHN xx. 24.

OUR text supplies us with the story of *a lost opportunity* even within the circle of apostleship. This is the first recorded absence of a disciple from a Christian service at which the risen Christ was present. It was the first Sunday evening—the evening of the day upon which our Lord had risen from

364 *Thomas "not there": a Lost Opportunity.*

the dead. The disciples had met ; but there were three vacant seats. Jesus Himself was absent : would He ever be present again ? Judas, too, was no longer one of their number, and never would be. There was yet another vacant seat : " Thomas, one of the twelve, . . . was not there."

This is one of John's significant sayings in parentheses. He had already parenthetically said of Judas, " 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 " ; of Barabbas, too, he had written, " Now Barabbas was a robber." In keeping with this kind of suggestive parenthetical statement he wrote our text. It is a phrase which sheds a flood of light upon the record.

Thomas's absence was significant because he was "*one of the twelve,*" and it was all the more depressing because it came in the train of a greater incongruity—Judas, who betrayed Jesus, being also "*one of the twelve.*" Many *disciples* as well as apostles were present when Jesus came, but *one of the very apostles* was not there when Jesus came. This was an additional stain upon the character of the apostolic group. Besides, the defections appeared so great because they were from *so small a company*. Jesus had long since said " Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil ? " That " devil " had already been exposed, probably in that very room, in the person of Judas. What if Thomas's absence from the first meeting of the apostles after Christ's resurrection revealed that another of the apostles was an *unbeliever* ! In any case this third vacant seat was eloquent on this occasion. Why this absence ? The weather had probably nothing to do with this absence ; nor could it be attributed to some casual hindrance. *Thomas had no heart to go.* This would make his absence painfully significant to the other apostles. Most ministers know how the absence of friends from services depresses those present, even when it cannot be traced to such a reason as this. There is a chilling influence felt whenever the minister's eye rests upon timber instead of worshippers, and every empty pew opens its mouth wide in discouraging eloquence, which makes it necessary for the preacher to open his wider than usual, or the vacant seat will have it all its own way. How much more depressing were the empty seats in that small community on that memorable Sunday evening upon which the infant Church met for the first time without the Master in the midst !

Thomas "not there" : a Lost Opportunity. 365

Thomas, like Philip, Matthew, and Nathanael or Bartholomew, belonged to the meditative and doubting section of the apostles. Philip's doubts came through his love of mathematics. To him everything had to be reduced to a sum in proportion, or to be arranged in its proper form and sequence like a problem in Euclid. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little," and "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us," are the two utterances which reveal the nature of Philip's doubts. They could only be set right by the rule of three, or by the "*Quid erat demonstrandum*" ("which remained to be proved") of a mathematical solution. Thomas's doubts, on the contrary, came through his despondency. One man's doubts arise from his brain, another man's from his liver. You may as well try to ignore the one as the other. Thomas's liver had a great deal to answer for in his gloomy doubts. Depend upon it, God does not ignore the physical, any more than He does the mental, infirmities which sometimes becloud our faith. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust." The sooner the better, too, we admit that the spiritual vision is sometimes bedimmed by physical infirmity and natural disposition. The spirit is often willing, amid the shades of our Gethsemanes, when the flesh is weak. Thomas was naturally a moody man, of melancholy turn. On that occasion when our Lord insisted upon going to Bethany to restore Lazarus to life, Thomas, having protested vigorously against the proposal, and having suggested the dangers which beset that journey, at length yielded as he morbidly exclaimed, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." There was intense love to his Master in that utterance, but yet a love whose lustre was sadly bedimmed by fear and misgiving. On the other occasion Jesus foretold His departure from His disciples, and added "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" In harmony with this prominent characteristic of Thomas, as given in both instances by John, it would appear that his absence on this occasion was due to the depressing influence of sorrow and unbelief.

Notice that here, and side by side, we find *two operations of sorrow*. First we find the combining power of mutual grief in bringing the disciples together; while, in the case of Thomas, we find the isolating power of sorrow in keeping a man apart from

366 *Thomas "not there" : a Lost Opportunity.*

his fellows. Unbelieving sorrow makes a man close the door upon himself. He does not want to be brought into contact with old companionships or associations, but becomes isolated from all, and in loneliness broods over his grief. This was the case with Thomas, not because he *loved* Jesus less, but because he *hoped* less concerning Him than the others did.

Now, what was the result of all this in the experience of Thomas? He, by his absence, missed a great opportunity, and in one sense missed it irreparably. He "was not there *when Jesus came.*" It is the fact of Christ's presence at that meeting that *intensifies* the loss which Thomas sustained by his absence. If Jesus had not been there his loss would have been great enough. He would at least have missed the comfort which would have come from fellowship with those who knew by personal experience something of the keenness of his grief and the depth of his sorrow. We know what it is to be unburdened, or at least to have our burdens lightened, by being brought into contact with others who are bearing similar burdens to our own. It is a spiritual fact, which has no counterpart in physics, that two men who bear their own burdens, when brought shoulder to shoulder, find that by that touch the burden of each is lessened. Thus Thomas would have missed much from forfeiting the communion of other sorrowful ones, even if Christ Himself had not come.

But the loss seems to be multiplied a thousandfold when we read that Jesus came when "Thomas was not there." Now, Thomas was the last man who could afford this loss. No one of the eleven—for Peter had already seen the Master—needed the consolation, which came with the Master's presence, as much as Thomas did, and yet he was the only one who was absent. I have often noticed that since then those who can least afford such a loss are those who are oftenest absent when Jesus comes to cheer and bless His own.

Thomas by his absence *missed the sight, for the time being, of his risen Lord.* Thus he was the last of the apostles to whom that was granted. The crucifixion and death of Christ were terrible realities to him. The words "Except I shall see in His hands," etc., were not flippantly uttered, but came from a bleeding and despairing heart, which could only be healed by the unmistakable assurance that Christ had risen from the dead; and yet, owing to his absence, this assurance was painfully delayed, and, so far as he then knew, forfeited for ever.

Thomas "not there" : a Lost Opportunity. 367

Thomas, too, by this absence *missed the first discourse of the risen Christ*. Turn to Luke xxiv. 44—49. There we have a brief outline of the Master's sermon at that service from which Thomas was absent. What a loss was that! He forfeited his Lord's exposition of the Old Testament in relation to Himself. I have never read these verses without yearning for a fuller account. I have long since learnt that the silences of Scripture are as eloquent as the utterances, and I have learnt not to be impatient when I find an apparent blank where I had expected a revelation. But there is scarcely any part of the Scriptures where I find it so hard to be satisfied with a mysterious reserve in the record as here, when I read that the risen Christ in this discourse referred to the things which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Himself, and opened the understanding of those present that they might understand the Scriptures. Oh that I had that commentary! I would most gladly give up every book but my Bible for the exposition which the Master Himself gave of the Messianic tone—the Christology—of the Old Testament in all its symbolisms and teachings from the beginning to its close. *Thomas missed that!*

I believe that the Gospel according to Matthew derives its main feature from that discourse. Matthew, the meditative man, who, because of similarity of character, is placed in the same section as Thomas, Philip, and Bartholomew or Nathanael, in all lists of the apostles, is the one who, throughout his Gospel, showed how, at every turn in that great life, some prophecy was fulfilled. Again, how much poorer Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and his epistles, especially the *first*, would have been, in regard to the bearing of prophecy upon the central facts of Christ's life and death, as well as of the dispensation thus ushered in, apart from that sermon, the brief outline of which Luke supplies, but which *Thomas never heard* because he "was not there when Jesus came!"

Again, Thomas by this absence missed *all that is contained in the words preceding our text*—"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost," etc. (vers. 21—23). There are some who would have us believe that here we have merely the promise of the Holy Ghost; others that the Spirit was now given in all His fulness, and

368 *Thomas "not there" : a Lost Opportunity.*

that the Day of Pentecost only announced and confirmed a fact which had already existed. I believe neither. I believe this was a real gift, and an earnest of the still fuller blessing which was afterwards bestowed on the Day of Pentecost. This was the gift of *the Risen Lord*, as the gift of the Day of Pentecost was that of *the Ascended Lord*. *This Thomas missed.* Whether this preliminary but important gift was ever granted after this to him we cannot tell, but even supposing that it was given him when he next saw Jesus, it was a deprivation sufficiently terrible to be without this gift even for a week, when his brethren rejoiced in the possession of it. They had received Christ's inspiring breath, and His first commission, "Ye are witnesses of these things," as well as the promise of the yet fuller endowment and power (Luke xxiv. 48, 49), while Thomas was without the inspiration and commission of His risen Lord, because "*he was not there* when Jesus came."

We find two references after this to Thomas (John xxi. 2 and Acts i. 13), and then we hear no more of him. He must have felt ever after this event that he could never be quite the same as if he had been present when the Master came on the first Sunday night of the Christian Dispensation.

Are there not lessons here for us? Observe, first of all, that it was easier for the inspired writer to record the names of those absent from, than those present at, this service. Would it were so in our day when meetings are held for prayer! Again, how much sooner some of us would solve our problems if we took them to the sanctuary, and not, like Thomas, nursed them in solitude! Is it possible that still those who need Christ's blessing most are those who are generally absent when He comes? How many of us have been impoverished for ever by such culpable absence? The disciples told Thomas what he had lost: have we not a mission with regard to the absent Thomases? This made Thomas impatient for the moment; he said hard things in the bitter disappointment that came upon his melancholy grief; but all mercifully only prepared the way for a vision of his risen Master and the receiving of those tender words which combined gracious assurance with loving rebuke. Oh that all Thomases might find themselves near the pierced side of the risen Lord, and, like the doubter of old, cast all misgivings aside, and rise to the height of his reverent and adoring utterance, "My Lord and my God!"

XCI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—"WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?"

"What is your occupation?"—GEN. xlvii. 3.

I KNOW some children who went to deposit a little money in the Post Office Savings Bank. They were asked to write their names, and then their "occupation," and one wrote "school-boy." That was quite right, for that was his occupation. Now, the law of England expects that every one should have some occupation. We read sometimes of some who put in an appearance in police courts whose names are followed by the words "No occupation," but they cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered respectable members of society. In every well-governed community in all ages every one has been expected to have some occupation. At first when Adam was created he was placed in the Garden of Eden "*to dress it and to keep it.*" If he had been asked to describe himself he would have probably said, "Adam, gardener." When man fell by sin, and was driven out of Eden, that did not make work unnecessary; on the contrary, Adam had then to work harder than ever in subduing thorns and thistles.

Ever since then hard work has been the lot of those who have lived the best lives. Thus, when Joseph's brethren came down to Egypt, Joseph prepared his brethren for the question which Pharaoh was sure to ask them—"What is your occupation?" No sooner had they appeared before Pharaoh than he asked them this question. They answered, "Thy servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers." Notice that Joseph, the prime minister of Egypt, was not ashamed to be the son of a shepherd and the brother of shepherds. He had nothing of the ridiculous conceit and pride which we notice so often to-day—a contempt of trade and of any calling humbler than what is called "a profession." He well knew that without these humbler callings the world would soon be done for—a bankrupt with nothing to pay.

Now, the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, were all taught to learn a trade. It did not matter whether they were born in a palace or in a cot, whether they belonged to the highest families of the land or the humblest, every boy had to learn a trade so as to be able to earn his own living at it. Even our Lord Jesus Christ did this; so did the apostle Paul: the One was a carpenter, the other a tent-maker. A trade was considered the only sign of respectability in the good old times. You remember when Jonah was on board the ship on the way

to Tarshish, and the storm came on, that the captain became suspicious of him and woke him out of his sleep, and when lots were cast the lot fell upon Jonah. Then the first question which those on board asked him was, "What is thy occupation?" They wanted some guarantee of his respectability. There are some people who would have found it difficult to answer that question, and would have been tossed overboard at once. Again, in the olden times in this country it was considered a sign of respectability to have a trade or distinct occupation. People therefore added it to their names as a kind of distinction. That is the reason why so many respectable people bear the names of the trades of some of their ancestors. Just listen to a few English surnames which I collected in a few minutes,—there are, of course, many more,—Baker, Barber, Butcher, Butler, Carter, Carpenter, Chandler, Clothier, Draper, Fuller (or Bleacher), Miller, Naylor, Shearer, Smith, Taylor, Thatcher, Weaver. When a man's name was John, and his trade was that of a tailor, he was known as "John Tailor" (or Taylor), and so on. You who bear these names may well be proud of them. They go to show that your ancestors at least earned their own living, and that is the first condition of respectability. When a man is a "gentleman" the word does not mean that he has not done hard and noble work in his day,—quite the contrary,—but that withal he is gentle and polite in manner and disposition. He was only a caricature of a gentleman of whom we read in the Gospel by Luke—"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." The Bible would call him a "fool," as it did another like him. He was a dandy and a glutton, but not a "gentleman." You cannot sum up a gentleman by talking about his wardrobe and his diet, his waistcoats and his dinners, although there are many people of whom little more can be said. The most *useful and unselfish* life is the most honourable one.

But some child may say, "I cannot have any occupation yet." I think otherwise. I consider that the first eight or ten years are about the busiest years of life. Just think of little baby at home. What a great deal he has to learn! He has to learn how to measure distances with his eye, for at first he reaches for things yards off, thinking that his little arm is long enough. He has also to learn from which direction sound comes; how to stand, and to balance himself in walking; how to say "Mother" and "Father," and gradually to learn a language.

The Announcement of a Great Resolve. 371

Now, I think you will agree with me that a little child has a great deal to do. Then what a great deal he has to do in his school-days ; and again in learning his trade or profession ! So that children have an occupation as well as older ones, and it is very important that they should learn to be active and useful.

Paul was very impatient toward people who would do nothing. He said that "if any one would not work, neither should he eat." He would starve all idlers out of the world. He would make no room for them. So in the service of Jesus Christ there is no room for idlers. Our Lord's idea of His servants is that they should all be doing their duty. The earlier we begin the better. Of course we are to do our every-day work, but we can and ought to do all as if for Him. We ought to be better workers in every sense for being servants of the Lord Jesus. Above all, those who are His should be specially anxious not to miss an opportunity of doing good to others for His sake. Begin at once to ask what Jesus would have you to do, and when you learn your duty look to Him for strength to do it. He will then honour you by giving you very much to do for Him, and at last, when your life on earth is over, and your work done, He will say to you "Well done !"

XCII.

SERMON—THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A GREAT RESOLVE.

"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, etc."—MATT. xvi. 21-3.

My text includes three things :—

- I. A great resolve struggling for utterance.
- II. A great resolve challenged.
- III. A great resolve vindicated.

I. *A great resolve struggling for utterance*—or beginning to assert itself. This marks a distinct transition in the life of our Lord. The whole incident is significant. Our Lord and His disciples were at Cæsarea Philippi. At this juncture of the Jewish and Gentile world the question was asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and was followed by another, "But who say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered, and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was the first clear and emphatic confession of the Christian Church. The reserve of the disciples was now broken. We immediately read, "From that time forth began

372 *The Announcement of a Great Resolve.*

Jesus to show, etc." In this response, the reserve of *His* life was broken. When the confession of the disciples became pronounced our Lord established a new relationship with them. Henceforth He called them "friends," not "servants" as hitherto. Thus this event marks a growth of intimacy between Jesus and His disciples, that intimacy being based upon their growth of knowledge concerning Him and their clear enunciation of the estimate they had formed of Him. Hitherto our Lord's purpose had been cherished in silence, far down beneath the surface, but now Jesus "began to show" it. The seed had been germinating a long season,—now the blade began to appear above the soil.

We observe the *firmness of this resolve*—"how that He *must* go." It was a resoluteness that came from a sense of supreme necessity. We may learn what a man is by what he recognises as the highest necessities of his being—his "musts." In our Lord's life we read early "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business (or 'in My Father's house')?" This was the key-note of His life given at the age of thirteen. After this we read, "I must preach the kingdom of God," "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." Contrast with these "musts" Luke xiv. 18—"I have bought a piece of ground, and I *must* needs go and see it, etc."

Now, as a life rises in excellence it touches new requirements. New obligations come, with their irresistible "must." Thus great natures have necessities laid upon them of which smaller natures are profoundly ignorant. Paul felt that "necessity" was laid upon him to preach the gospel, and *he* made no mistake when he thought so. The greatest necessity is that of duty. There are some who have never felt this. How great was our Lord in this direction, as in every other! The zeal of God and of His house *consumed* Him. In Him the great "must" of life came up from eternity. What resistless momentum it gathered in its course! Who could measure it?

Now, what did this "must" embrace?—

1. That He "*must go up to Jerusalem.*" So far there is nothing exceptional in this resolve. It was required of every Jew to attend the great feasts, and it was feast time now. This, therefore, was an ordinary experience in the life of every devout son of Abraham. Yet there was something special about His going up: they went up to worship, but—

The Announcement of a Great Resolve. 373

2. He went "to suffer many things of the elders, etc." This was a novel purpose in going up to Jerusalem. This suffering, too, was to come from a significant quarter—"elders and chief priests and scribes." Who shall save from their hands? It is a terrible thing when any one has to suffer at the hands of the religious authorities of the day; when all that is powerful in the existing sacred institutions and callings of an ancient and divinely authorised religion is arrayed against one who claims the belief and confidence of men, especially to the extent that Jesus did as the Messiah. *All* the authorities were not only opposed, but bitterly hostile.

3. "*And be killed.*" The hostility would be unto blood, even unto death. The tragedy would be complete. The surprising part was not so much that the best and holiest One should be killed, and even by the hands of elders, chief priests and scribes, but that He should deliberately accept this as a part of life's programme, and should go up to Jerusalem to meet His death at the hands of His foes. Thus this resolve embraced a willing submission to suffering and death in their most intense form and their most humiliating aspect. Our Lord looked at all, and, as in the case of His greatest apostle in view of dire persecutions in later days, none of them moved Him, neither counted He His life dear. He announced all with the calmness of a resolute purpose which was but beginning to disclose its energy and steadfastness. The prospect was not a hazy one. His vision was perfectly clear. He expressed all in plain stern prose. Yet the "must" denotes *effort*, although it be determined and irresistible.

4. "*And rise again.*" This was the most startling announcement of all. Many prophets and holy men had been sent to their graves by chief priests and scribes, but who of them all had risen the third day? Death had without exception silenced the most persistent speakers, whose words of rebuke had been like burning fire to proud ecclesiasts. Strange, surpassing strange, therefore, is this "must"! The great resolve of Christ does not end in the tragic and sad, but in the rapturous and triumphant. In John xx. 9 we read, "As yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." Observe that even Peter and John did not know this, for they are the disciples of whom these words are written by John himself. As yet they had only caught the "must" of the suffering and dying—not of *rising again*.

374 *The Announcement of a Great Resolve.*

Jesus "*began to show unto His disciples how. . .*" What a tale He had to tell! He could never finish it in words—no, not even the story of His sufferings; He must supplement it in tears and in blood. "*Began*"—yes, He *began*, but how He did it is not revealed to us. The delicate touches in breaking the news, the gradual growth of detail, the blending of the tact which was born of wisdom and sympathy with the fidelity which was begotten of truth, are all lost to us. There was nothing said now about delivering Him to the Gentiles,—that we find later on (Mark x. 33). The word used now, too, concerning the great tragedy itself is simply "killed"; by-and-by they will be strong enough to bear the announcement that death meant crucifixion. Then, even with reference to rising again—that was incomplete. As yet He did not tell them what would follow resurrection. But enough: the disciples are not prepared even for this, as the sequel will show.

II. *A great resolve challenged.* There was nothing new about this. While unuttered, the purposes and inspirations of the greatest lives are as a rule totally overlooked, and when first uttered they are challenged. There never has been yet an exceptional plan which has not been condemned, an original idea which has not been pooh-poohed; and no new path has ever been opened without some one to deny the right of way. It would indeed be unprecedented if the announcement of such a purpose as this on the part of our Lord did not receive a prompt challenge.

Now, this was—

1. *An impulsive reproof.* It was just what we might expect from a man of so impetuous a nature as Peter. He was a man of striking spontaneity and instantaneousness. Conviction to him was not a steady growth. It came to him with a rush, and thus soon made him vehement in asserting it. Hence the dogmatism and assumption of his ready reply on this occasion. There is scarcely a subject upon which men of Peter's temperament are not prepared to express themselves instantly and fully. The purpose which Christ had in His heart from all eternity, and which had gradually been developed throughout millenniums, was adversely disposed of by Peter in a moment. The approval of his Master which he had just received may have added to his confidence. Ah me! is it so that even our Master's commendation makes some of us vain and self-assertive!

Again, this was

2. *A mistaken rebuke.* It was uttered from a loving heart, but in the utterance Peter fell far below the level of the inspiration by which he had a little before uttered his confession. His rebuke was largely the result of his incapacity to appreciate the passive side of a noble character as well as the active. There is an air of patronage about it, therefore, which perplexes us. Peter, for the moment, looked upon Jesus—as we are sometimes disposed to look upon greater and better men than ourselves—as being the victim of an amiable weakness, whose convictions of duty leaned far too much on the side of self-sacrifice. Thus Peter had immediate recourse to the power of the keys of which he had just heard, and reproved his Master, forgetting that, as he had received that authority by virtue of the inspiration which gave him a right estimate of his Lord, so he could maintain that authority only so far and so long as he could give proof of being still the possessor of that inspiration.

We notice

III. *A great resolve vindicated*—“Get thee behind me,” etc. This was not only a vindication by our Lord of His own great purpose, but also a prompt rebuke of His presumptuous servant. But a short while before he had been partaker of the Divine impulse; now he became the mouthpiece of a Satanic suggestion. The holder of the keys is bidden to stand aside and not block the way. The “rock” has become “a rock of offence.”

Peter is called here by two names :—

1. “*Satan*,” or Hinderer, a word not exclusively applied to Satan, but keenly suggestive of the diabolic in this context, as it is used in a repetition of the old reply given in the wilderness to the tempter. How awfully great were the alternations of Peter’s experience at this hour! Now he was the inspired of God, and the next moment the mouthpiece of the Devil!

2. “*An offence*”—or literally “a stumbling-block.” It is the word from which our word “scandal” comes. Peter—a “rock” by name and a rock by nature, who was spoken of so approvingly in preceding verses—has now become *a stumbling-block*. In the light of this incident it behoves us to remember the general truth that every hindrance in the path of progress, every rebuke hurled in the teeth of heroic men, every

XCIII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—“WHAT IS THY NAME?”

“What is thy name?”—GEN. xxxii. 27.

I SUPPOSE this is a question which every one of us has been often asked ; but I am not at all sure that any one here has fully realised what an important thing it is to bear a name. We all have two names, and some of you rejoice in half a dozen or more. But all of us have a *Christian name* and a *surname*.

The first is our own *Christian name* as distinct from those of our brothers and sisters. We are known by this in our own families. Now, our name is so closely related to us that it is in our power to bring honour or dishonour upon it. It is a fearful thing to ruin an innocent name. The name of Cain was a very good one till he spoiled it for ever, so that, now, no one would think of calling his son Cain, because of that wicked man who once bore it. Judas, too, was an honourable name, until Judas Iscariot bore it and brought everlasting dishonour upon it. Herod was once a great name : many monarchs were called by it ; but no one who has read about the family of Herods would think of calling his little boy by that name. These are only a few striking instances of the way in which we can ruin the name we bear. On the other hand, it is in our power to add greatly to the worth of a name. Just think of the name John. Think of the glory given to it by a few noble men who bore it—John the Baptist, John the beloved disciple, John Knox, and John Bunyan. Any little boy who bears that name ought to feel that at least he ought to keep up the true dignity of it, and if possible make it still more honourable by living a pure, loving, and noble life. Some of you may think that David is a common name, but I rejoice in it, and often love to think of the great and good man who made it illustrious.

Then, again, you have a *surname*. That is the one you bear in common with your father and mother, brothers and sisters. Now, we have to do our part to maintain the true dignity of that name. I remember well when as a lad I left the home of my childhood. I was then a Christian boy. Among many things which my mother said to me were, “David, now that you are going away from home, pray that you may never bring dishonour upon the name of Christ,

which you bear ; and, next to that, pray that you may never dishonour your father's name !” I never forgot those words, although the dear loving one who uttered them is no longer here. As a Christian I felt that I must on no account disgrace the name of Christ my Saviour ; and, in addition to that, I felt that as a son I must be guilty of nothing which would bring my own father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Both my Christian profession and my surname have been more sacred to me ever since my mother uttered those words.

Ah ! there is a great deal of importance connected with bearing a name. In the good old days people used to know the meaning of their names. I do not suppose that there are many of us who know the meaning of ours. The great thing to-day is to have a pretty name, rather than one that has any special meaning. On the occasion to which our text refers Jacob was asked, “What is thy name?” and he answered, “Jacob.” The angel said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” “Jacob” meant “supplanter,” or one who undermined another ; but on this occasion he proved better than his name, and so the angel called him “Israel,” or “a prince with God.” So with reference to Simon Peter. “Simon” was the name which his parents gave him ; but Jesus, when He saw him, felt he was worthy of a better name,—although that was a good one, because it meant “one who heard or obeyed.” He therefore called him “Peter,” or “a rock !” Simon had strength of character about him ; and our Lord expressed that in the new name He gave him.

In our days, unfortunately, as I have already said, we do not think very much about the meanings of our names. We look upon them merely as so many badges by which we are known from others, and the prettier the badge the better we are pleased. It ought not to be so. If there is a little girl here whose name is Daisy, she ought to try to be as bright and as pure as that beautiful and sweet flower which bears the same name ; or if there be one present called May, her life ought to be as full of brightness and of song, and as genial and as full of promise, as the charming month of May itself. There are other names to which I could refer. If you do not know the meanings of your names, find them out ; and if there be anything noble in

them see that you bear them worthily. Indeed, pray that you may be better than your names, if possible.

Now, I want you to remember that Jesus desires us all to love Him and to bear His name worthily in the world. What a privilege this is! How gladly we ought to accept it! and at the same time how careful we should be that we always maintain the honour of that glorious name! How many so-called Christians there are who dishonour the name they bear, and of whom the worldling asks "Are *they* your Christians?" I should not like to be the man who does nothing better than sneer at inconsistent Christians. That is a miserable task. On the other hand, nothing can excuse our bringing disgrace upon the name of the Saviour whom we profess to love and obey. Oh to be worthy followers of the Lord Jesus, and to be so much like Him that men shall know us as His! By-and-by, if we are found faithful, He will give each of us a "*new* name," which shall be *our very own*, and which shall be a proof of His loving approval and blessing; for has He not said, "To him that overcometh will I give . . . a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it"? Oh to have that name, and rejoice in it for ever!

XCIV.

*SERMON—THE TEMPLE: THE FRUSTRATED
PURPOSE, AND THE FULFILLED DESIGN.*

"And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord, etc."—I KINGS viii. 17-20.

THESE were among the words which Solomon uttered at the dedication of the Temple. This was the hour of completion, when the Temple appeared before the people in all its stately and imposing grandeur, and when nothing remained but for God to enter, and take possession of the house which was now being dedicated to Him.

Our text begins with words of retrospection. They form the becoming acknowledgment on the part of a son, amid the joys and congratulations of an accomplished task, of the important, although preliminary, part which his father had taken in bringing about this happy consummation.

We observe—

I. *The origination of the idea*, which had now found adequate

expression. As the people looked at the Temple it was well that they should remember with whom the thought had begun. "It was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord," exclaimed Solomon. It is also well for us to remember now how much David did to inaugurate a new era in the history of the Jewish people. In the *first* place he was the founder of the Jewish monarchy, and in the *second* place he was the author of the Psalter. He was the first to find a place for the sacred songs of the nation in the public worship of God. He cultivated assiduously his own great gift, and presented an incentive to a people who were specially gifted in poetry and song to stir up into a flame the gift that was smouldering in them, so that the offerings which they presented on the altar might be supplemented by the "calves of their lips," or the songs that leaped from lip and harp-string and trembled in thrilling symphonies on the air. This inaugurated a new era in the history of Divine revelation, and originated a new kind of literature which was to outlive the dispensation which gave it birth, and to be a permanent power in the world while man sought fellowship with his God.

But this was not all. When David conquered Jebus, he determined to make Jerusalem *the religious*, as well as the political, *capital of his kingdom*. The ark was first removed there; and then the great yearning of his heart was to find out "a place for the LORD, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." This seemed to David to be the only consummation of his threefold purpose. The new capital was the fitting abode of God's sanctuary, and of such a sanctuary as would be a becoming symbol of God's presence among men. The old tabernacle was no longer a worthy dwelling-place for God. The nation lived no longer in tents: why should the Lord? David himself dwelt in a palace, while God's Shechinah was shrouded in a tent! There was a shocking incongruity in all this. The people had made all kinds of improvements in their own houses, but not in God's. They had a city for their capital, had introduced song and thanksgiving into God's service; then it behoved them to build a sanctuary that should better express their devotions than the old tattered tent of the wilderness. That tent was the best that could be constructed during their sojournings, but not the best that could be erected now; and God claimed the best. Those men are of unspeakable value who, like David, catch the Divine demand of the hour, and

spur men on to new responsibilities and privileges in the service of God.

We notice—

II. *The partial frustration of that purpose.* David gives the reason in 1 Chron. xxii. 8 why he was not permitted to carry out his heart's desire. It was a reason which at once appealed to his sense of congruity. There is a decency about such things upon which God insists. It is not to every one that He would give permission to build a house for Him. The things which unfit us for His service need not always be glaring inconsistencies. Man forfeits a privilege often according to the law of the fitness of things. A certain type of life, even when it has been rendered necessary by circumstances, may disqualify us for special tasks. David had been unfitted for the high privilege of building a house of God. The stones of the Lord's sanctuary must not be laid by hands stained by human blood—even though those hands be stained in a righteous conflict. Let Solomon "*the peaceful*" build that Temple.

There is here also an illustration of a more general fact. It is a law of the best lives on earth that a great man's plans and schemes are in advance of his attainments. Noble men die with tasks unfinished. It is one of the mysteries of life that men who originate great ideas have to bequeath the completion of them, and the joy of final accomplishment, to others. What an enigma it would be—were this the only life—that he who can purpose so much can do so little! Apart from our belief in immortality, the hurrying of a man from the scene of his long-cherished but unaccomplished tasks would be exceedingly perplexing.

Add to this limitation of the fulfilment of a welcome task, by which David was beset, the discouragement arising from the silent indifference, or sullen opposition, of some by whom he was surrounded. David had overcome this with regard to the Psalter. He had to contend with a similar difficulty now. Some were greatly impressed with the sacredness of the old tabernacle, others were influenced by considerations of economy. They were people who would never be struck with the incongruity of a settled and prosperous nation having a tattered tabernacle amid the palaces of Jerusalem for a dwelling-place for God. Such people are not sensitive in those matters. These thought that the tabernacle, which

was good enough for their fathers, was good enough for them; and no doubt they complacently called that *humility*. It never occurred to them to ask whether or not the old clouted shoes and garments which their fathers wore in the wilderness would do for them. Their thoughts did not take that secular turn. Well, such people have a calling in life. God uses them as He uses biting east winds in early spring, to prevent the rapid growth and premature budding of an over-abundant life. This impeding power in life is, after all, a blessing. Men of David's enthusiastic disposition and burning zeal would work reformations with too great a rush apart from them.

We observe—

III. *God's approval of the purpose*, although its accomplishment for the time being was frustrated. God attaches great value to high motives. When a man's desires go far in advance of his best performances God does not mock them. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart" were the gentle and soothing words which formed the prelude to His denial to David. How largely would the former enable David to bear the latter! God's denials do not come with harshness to those who sincerely offer to Him even a mistaken service. He traces good in the motive often, even while He prohibits the deed. Oh, how mercifully does He view our imperfect services!

IV. *The final realisation of David's purpose*. Here we have a further modification of his disappointment. The man who is intensely in earnest *loses sight of self* in his attachment to his project. It is enough if at length it is accomplished. It matters little what becomes of him if his purpose is realised. Further, in David's case *his own son* was permitted to accomplish the task. As life advances, we who are parents learn to live for and in our children. Our ambitions and affections get largely severed from ourselves, and are more and more centred in them. We live our life over again in them. It is very interesting to watch this process, and to see how it applies with special force to grandparents.

To David—next, at least, to the joy of being permitted to accomplish this task himself—nothing could give him so much joy as to know that Solomon would have that privilege. This assurance proved an inspiration to him. He therefore gladly threw all his energies into the preliminary work. How extensive

that was we may gather from the First Book of Chronicles, which ascribes to David the whole plan of the Temple, even to its minutest details (1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12, 19),—the arrangement of the courses of the priests and Levites, the order of the choral portions of the service, and the disposition of even the porters. Over and above all this was the accumulation of materials, and especially the gold and silver left to Solomon for the Temple, variously computed at the present value of from 120 to 1029 millions sterling—a fabulous amount—leaving, indeed, little for Solomon to do but to dispose worthily of the abundant materials thus provided for him.

There are but few scenes, if any, more graphically described in Scripture than that in which David at the close of life started once more to his feet, and in the presence of “all the princes of Israel, etc.,” narrated the whole circumstance connected with his desire to build God’s house; and having given the reason—which his son in our text, from the delicacy of filial love, omits—repeated the Divine promise, and finally, in the presence of all, gave to his son the solemn charge—“And thou, Solomon, my son, etc.” (1 Chron. xxviii. 1-10).

Thus David comes before us as one who gladly entered into the preparatory work, leaving his son to enter into his labours, and into the joy of final accomplishment. What mattered it if his own work, like the first course of the huge stones which formed the foundations of that Temple, was buried out of sight, so that upon it Solomon’s colossal structure might be raised!—it was enough. But Solomon, true to the instincts of a son and of a noble man, would not, when all had been done, allow his father to be forgotten—“And it was in the heart of David my father, etc.”

The fact that no life or age is in itself complete is a wonderful link uniting the ages together. One age bequeaths great purposes and inspiring conceptions to another. Ages often differ in character. Some are distinguished for the formation of great ideas, others for the practical embodiment of them. There is one age of dreamers, and another of doers; one of architects, another of builders; one of inventors, another of manufacturers. This applies to the history of Divine revelation. There is one age of promises, another of fulfilments. One age takes up the story where the other has left it, and thus becomes another link in the chain of history. This is also true of individual lives. Every good man’s greatest thoughts

are in advance of his power of performance. Hence, in the last day, he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together. All true work will be represented in the grand result. No man's work shall stand isolated, but will be intertwined with that of others. To whom were the Jews indebted for the Temple,—to David or Solomon? To neither, and yet to both. David was nothing, and Solomon nothing; but God, who blended the efforts of both, gave the success.

There are many of us who never get disappointments of the same nature as David; but that is because we have never cherished a high and self-denying purpose. They have conceived no high ideal of service to God. They save the disappointment; but, then, they never have a great son who, when they have passed away, will stand in the presence of God and men in the hour of a great achievement, and will vindicate the apparent failure of their life in the glowing words, "It was in the heart of my father!"

My friends, even broken purposes and unfulfilled intentions have their value. There is a wonderful perfecting of character even in God's denials, if we know how to take them. Would that this assurance came as a gospel to some doubting and depressed one now! Unfulfilled purposes in the lives of God's children keep faith vigorous and hope on tiptoe.

God grant that when we are called thither we may be found planning some new campaign or forward movement in the interest of the Saviour who has redeemed us and called us into His service, as well as with the records of talents well used and lives nobly spent for His glory and the extension of His kingdom among men! When He comes may He find us watching! To how many of us would these words be true if He came now? Yet what right have we to presume that this shall not be the hour of His coming?

XCV.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—A LAD IN THE CROWD.

1. HOW THE LAD WAS FOUND.

“There is a lad here, etc.”—JOHN vi. 9.

A VERY large multitude, consisting of “five thousand men beside women and children” (Matt. xiv. 21), had followed Jesus to the desert region on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee; and yet there was one lad in that vast throng, and among the women and children who were *not so much as reckoned*, who was specially referred to by Philip. Now, if there was a boy there who was lost in the crowd, it would appear to be this lad. He seems to have had no friend or relative near, while doubtless most of the lads there were with their parents. Yet this boy was brought into special request. When Jesus had said to His disciples, to prove them, as He looked at the multitude, “Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? . . . Philip answered Him, Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.” Then “one of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”

Now, you see that this lad was discovered *because he had what no one else in that vast crowd possessed*, and yet what every one there to some extent needed.

Now, it is very creditable to Andrew that he was the first of the disciples to find out this lad. Andrew was great at *finding*. We read in the first chapter of this Gospel, and the fortieth and forty-first verses, “One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him (Jesus), was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first *findeth* his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah.” We also read in the twelfth chapter, from the twentieth verse to the twenty-second: “And there were certain Greeks among them; . . . the same came therefore to Philip, . . . and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh *and telleth Andrew*.” You see, if there was any one who could *find* Jesus and tell Him about it, Andrew was the man. We are not surprised, therefore, to read that Andrew was the one who knew the whereabouts of this lad in the crowd. He practically said, “There is a boy here who has more of what we want than all of us, though he has but a very little.” I think

very highly of the man who first finds out how much a boy possesses. When a man singles out a lad in a crowd and says, "There's a great deal in that boy," I begin to think there is a great deal in the man himself, or he would, like so many others, have let him pass unnoticed. What a blessing it is to some good and clever lads, that there are such men as Andrew in the world, who will immediately see if they have anything in them, and tell others about it!

Of all the boys in that multitude, only this boy had *just what was wanted* on this occasion. Now, this lad never till now realised how valuable his little store was. He had left his poor home in the morning, and his mother had wished him God-speed, and expressed the fervent wish that he would soon sell the little he had in his basket. He had been vending his goods all day, but without much success. The right opportunity did not seem to come, and the day was almost over. It seemed to the poor boy that his chances were very few now, and were getting fewer every moment. And yet, who knew?—perhaps as evening drew on there would be a new demand for his loaves? So he probably hoped on. But, at last, the great opportunity came for the boy to bring into the front everything he had in his basket.

What a lesson there is here for little boys and girls to be patient, and try to add to their little store, although for the present they seem to be quite lost among bigger people than themselves, and elbowed often on one side, as I have no doubt this little fellow was! As sure as the hour came to him, it will come to you, when, if you have any gift or blessing in your possession which the world needs, men and women will not ignore you, but eagerly call for you: yea, and Jesus, if you look to Him, will use your little gifts in His own wonderful and miraculous way, so that you may be an unspeakable blessing to those who never knew of your existence till then. Now is the time to learn of the Saviour much concerning His love and truth, and to receive such blessings from the hand of your heavenly Father, as will in some time to come, perhaps not far distant, fit you to be of great service to those who are dying for the want of the Bread of Life. Believe me, out of your little store, if blessed by the gracious Saviour, their hunger may be satisfied. Oh to be the lad who will have the high honour of carrying the Bread of Life to those who are dying for the want of it! Who shall say that here this morning there are

not two or three, or even more, who will yet go forth even into distant lands, and in the name and under the blessing of Jesus Christ help to rescue the perishing thousands who as yet know nothing of Him and His great love? Pray earnestly that you may be fitted for this glorious task.

XCVI.

CRIES FROM THE CROSS—THE CRY OF INTERCESSION.

“Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.”—LUKE xxiii. 34.

THE seven “Sayings” with which Christ ushered in His public ministry in the Sermon on the Mount find their counterpart in the seven “Sayings” with which He closed that ministry on the Cross.

This is the first of the seven “Words” from the Cross. Nothing could reveal His spirit more fully than His utterances from that instrument of torture. The Evangelist graphically connects this first utterance that escaped our Lord’s lips with the agony and humiliation of the crucifixion. “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. *Then* said Jesus, Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.”

Thus this saying is brought vividly before us as Christ’s immediate response to the worst that men could do to Him. His first words upon the Cross, following the lamb-like silence which had preceded, came upon men with all the force and surprise of a revelation. The question of the hour was, Will this silent Sufferer, who, when oppressed and afflicted, opened not His mouth, now that the supreme hour of agony has come, break upon that silence? If He speak, what will He say? Will He who, when He “opened His mouth” for the first time in public ministry, uttered Beatitudes, now that His voice is about to be silenced in a cruel death, “open His mouth” to utter words that shall breathe the same gracious tenderness and sympathy even though men deserve them not? Has the ingratitude of man proved stronger than the meekness and the gentleness of the Christ? How will Jesus break upon the reserve of His own patient soul, the discordant sounds of the seething multitude, the angry shout of His foes, and the

sullen thud with which those who have already driven the nails remorselessly through His hands and feet now drop the Cross with its living, quivering, heaving Burden into the place hewn for it in the solid rock beyond the gate?

Now comes the supreme test of our Lord's life. Will the harmony be maintained, or shall one sharp, bitter, discordant cry mar alike His preceding teaching and example? In His Sermon on the Mount, at the outset of His public ministry, He had given utterance to a new doctrine that had startled men: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." This sounded well upon the lip; but could men embody it in life? Men smiled incredulously and shook their heads. This Teacher had spoken of others who "say and do not": will He fall under the same category? Will He remember the sublimities of His own teaching now, and in His own Person, amid the most trying surroundings, and under the pressure of the most cruel wrong, illustrate His own lesson? Will He call as a child to His Father, and pray for those who despitefully use Him and persecute Him? Harken! we hear the filial accents and the forgiving tones, which are made all the more tender because of the thrill that agony gives to them—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Christ enunciated the Law of Forgiveness on the Mount; He now fulfils it on His Cross. In the Sermon it was a precept; in the prayer it is an example. Do men ask how they can fulfil the Law of the Sermon on the Mount?—let them listen to the first prayer on the Cross. The one is the counterpart of the other.

I accept this cry as an emphasis of His claim to be—I. The Son of God; II. The Saviour of men.

This petition is—

I. *An emphasis of His claim to be the Son of God.* In this supreme hour and article of death He calls God by the same tender name as that by which He called Him in his first recorded utterance at the age of twelve—the same, too, as that by which He called Him in His first recorded sermon, and throughout His public ministry to its very close. As the darkness of a great sorrow settled down upon Him, He had already maintained His hold of that name in the upper room, alike in His discourse to His disciples and His prayer to His God.

So in Gethsemane, when His soul was "sorrowful even unto death," and He prayed more and more earnestly, the first word in the thrice-repeated prayer was "Father." Amid the darkest shades of that garden, and in the agony of soul that came with the sense of awful loneliness, He never dropped, but the more tenaciously clung to, that name, for He knew that the Father was with Him there. Now that the last hour has come, the first word He utters from His Cross is "Father"—He speaks as a son still. As yet, at least—and I do not forget the piercing cry of momentary desertion that followed—His words are words of filial tenderness and trust. The agony through which He passes only makes His filial spirit speak forth in its native accents. His escape to communion with His Father, in Gethsemane, from the treachery of a disciple, and on the Cross from the hatred and cruelty of men, is one of the most pathetic phases of the story of the Passion. From the Cross and in the hour and power of darkness He still speaks as the *Son of God*.

But does He also speak as the Saviour of men? He claimed to be both. The words may be accepted as—

II. *A vindication of His claim to be the Saviour of men.*

Observe—

1. His prayer for His murderers that they may be forgiven. This prayer comes to us with all the greater force, because it is not an after-thought. It was offered while they were engaged in the act of crucifying Him. "They know not what they do"—or, literally, *are doing*. We know with what different feelings we look upon an act of cruelty after the event as compared with the moment we are smarting under it. There is a wonderful toning power in distance in such cases. We can be more charitable and forgiving when the wrong is a thing of memory, than when we are writhing under the sting of an unkind act. Our experience at best can but point to the direction of the difficulty of praying for those who despitefully use us while as yet they are engaged in the very act. What a striking example is presented to us here by the Master Himself!—the response to the cruelty of His murderers is immediate and complete. The agonies and cruel indignities of the Cross cannot blot out the memory of His precepts, or rob Him of the infinite charity that breathed in all His life. His answer to the curses of His foes was a prayer,—to their hatred was a love that thinketh no evil.

2. The plea upon which He bases His prayer. Christ has the sympathy which enables Him to see the extenuating circumstance. Any one looking at that tragic deed might have traced the passion and the cruelty; but how difficult, especially for the Victim of all, to trace the pitiable ignorance that underlay these, and thus to utter no word of anger or reproach, but words of infinite pity, and instead of condemning the murderers in tones of righteous indignation, plead for them with all the pathetic earnestness of a compassionate Advocate and Intercessor! This appears all the more striking, if we believe that this prayer not only embraces the Roman soldiers, who were the unconscious instruments of higher authorities, but also the very chief priests and scribes who had conspired against His life, and now revelled over the cruelties of His death. Jerusalem at this time presented a strange anomaly. The people had come to the Feast from all parts of the land. Within the gates were sung festive songs, and imposing preparations were going on, only partly suspended by this strange transaction without the gate. They had come to Jerusalem to praise, and lo! they cursed their Messiah and put Him to death—but *they knew it not*. It is this fact that the Christ remembers. Hence He forgets the cruelty of the deed in the ignorance of the doers. He places the construction of infinite charity upon the whole transaction, and teaches us to do the same. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it," said Peter (Acts iii. 17). There is a touch of pathos about this construction which Peter, following his Lord's example, puts upon the deed of blood. He who had himself denied his Lord had learnt charity toward those who crucified Him, and called them brethren still; but He had learnt to do this of the Crucified One. His words are only the echo of the Saviour's own plea. Paul, too, exclaimed, "Which (wisdom) none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8). Neither Peter nor Paul had heard this prayer of the Saviour; but they had heard of it, and they never forgot its spirit. There was another, who, though he probably never heard this prayer, heard of it, and so deeply drank of its spirit that when he sank beneath a shower of stones which were so ruthlessly hurled upon him, he fell down upon his knees and cried with "a loud voice" that exhausted his last breath, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." He offered

this petition to Him who had once uttered a similar one Himself, and Stephen knew that He would answer it. It was but the echo of His own great petition. Further, this prayer has given a tone, as no other utterance even of our Lord has done, to the Christian estimate of human wrong-doing ; hence what wonder that it is reckoned as among the most precious of His legacies !

It is a saying which adds unutterable glory to His Cross. What would the Cross be if the word of forgiveness had never been uttered from it ? It is sublimely significant that the first word uttered on that Cross next to "Father" was "*Forgive.*" What could a Saviour utter better ?

It is a saying that links the earthly ministry to the heavenly. It consummates the one ; it predicts the other. "He maketh intercession for the transgressors,"—so said the prophet. Harken—He makes it on His Cross. In this hour self is forgotten, and only the transgressors remembered, the remembrance of them being transfigured with the glow of the Saviour's love. It is one of the essential attributes of an intercessor that he should forget self. In this supreme hour this great Intercessor has triumphed. The bitterest hatred has but blotted out all thought of Himself, and kindled His heart into the intensest solicitude for those who hated ; and so intercession reaches its crowning glory.

What effect this prayer may have had on those who heard it, and how far it was answered in their experience, we know not. We only know that such words could not die out of the memory of those who heard them, or out of the ear of God. The centurion said, "Truly this is the Son of God." How much this petition must have contributed to that conclusion ! Men could not forget One who could pray like that from such a place and in such an hour.

And yet in all this sin is not ignored. Ignorance extenuates, but does not atone for, sin. The ignorance of the great bulk of those who took part in the crucifixion was itself a sin. They need not have been ignorant ; yet the great charity of Christ finds a plea in this. Paul again learnt a lesson from the Cross : "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief,"—and yet, observe, with all the ignorance there was *need* of mercy.

Here, too, sin is traced back to its ultimate issue. Christ ignores all personal considerations. The sin is a sin *against*

God—against the Father. No one can trifle with sin in sight of the Cross. Sin is a wrong done to our Father.

Finally, this is a prophecy of the kind of intercession that He offers for men to-day. We have everything to hope from such an Intercessor as this.

“Who is he that condemneth? 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” (Rom. viii. 34). “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John ii. 1, 2). “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. vii. 25). “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. ix. 24). “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. iv. 14-16).

XCVII.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—A LAD IN THE CROWD.

2. WHAT THE LAD HAD.

“There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”—JOHN vi. 9.

I HAVE already spoken to you about “A LAD IN THE CROWD—HOW THE LAD WAS FOUND.” I now want to call your attention to, WHAT THE LAD HAD.

But first of all notice that everything about this lad was diminutive. The verse may be literally translated, “There is a solitary little lad here, who hath five barley loaves and two small fishes.” Observe that he was not only *a lad*, but also *a little* lad—yea, more, *a solitary* (or *one*) little lad. Everything so far only impresses us with his utter insignificance. We might have expected something from him if he had not been *so little*, and if he had not been *alone*.

Then, again, when we read of *what he had*, everything seems to be very insignificant. It is not merely that he had only *five* loaves, but they were *barley* loaves. Barley bread was the coarsest and cheapest bread eaten by the poor peasants of Palestine. Horses and asses were as a rule fed with barley, and the Romans inflicted the eating of barley bread as part penalty upon a soldier who deserted. Now, this lad had only *barley* loaves, and only *five* of them. We read next that he had only *two* fishes. But that is not all, for even they were *small*. Moreover, the word translated *fishes* here, meant a kind of *relish* which the fishermen of Galilee and other very poor people ate with their bread. As that relish in this region generally consisted of dried fish, the apostle John, being the only fisherman among the Evangelists, uses the word by which these were known on the shores of the Galilean lake. These were exceedingly cheap, and therefore largely eaten by the poor. Now, five barley loaves and two small dried fishes were all that this boy had! What a little, you say, about which to make a fuss! Yes. What poor, uninviting food! Yes; but the hungry multitude were glad of it, and Jesus and His disciples did not consider it beneath their dignity to satisfy their hunger with this humble fare.

I intend dwelling next time upon the use which our Lord made of this humble store. What I want to impress specially upon you now is that all that the lad had was in itself of very little value, and could have been purchased for a very small amount. But the lad was not therefore despised. Jesus said about the loaves and fishes which this little fellow carried, "Bring them hither to Me." Even Andrew said, "What are these among so many?" He half apologised for having referred to the contents of the lad's basket. He certainly did not expect much result from them. But Jesus did not ignore them. They were worth much in the circumstances. He called for them, and by His mighty power made them more than enough for the hungry multitude who had gathered in that desert place and were now hungry.

Ah! no one can tell what use could be made of our little talents and our very limited powers if we only took them to Jesus. No one can calculate what the Saviour can do with *just as much as a child can carry*. It may be some lesson that the child has learnt at his mother's knee, or in the Sunday-school, or in the children's service; but if he only treasures it and carries it with him, the Saviour will, sooner or later, call for it and make it a blessing to those who are much older than the child himself. It is wonderful how powerful He sometimes makes the humble message of a little boy or girl. Indeed, I have known the simple singing of a hymn by a child made the means of the salvation of a parent. Do not think that children have no opportunities of doing good because their gifts are so small. Take all you have and lay them at the feet of Jesus, and only He can tell what use He can make of them.

What joy must have filled this lad's heart when he learnt that he had not carried his load all day in vain, as he had sometimes feared, but that even when he was most discouraged, then the Saviour was reserving a great privilege for him! If the boy could have got rid of his burden sooner, he would have missed this great privilege. You too have your little burdens, and they appear heavy to you. You have lessons to learn, duties to perform, and, above all, much patience to exercise. Remember that Jesus is watching you with loving interest every step of the way. He knows that even little children have their trials and difficulties, and if you trust Him He will turn them all to the best account by-and-by, and you

will find that you have been carrying them for that glorious end.

“Hast thou assumed a load,
Which few will share with thee—
And art thou carrying it for God,
And shall He fail to see?”

Never! No, never!!

XCVIII.

CRIES FROM THE CROSS—THE CRY OF DESOLATION.

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—MARK xv. 34.

THIS was one of the most mysterious cries that ever rent the air; we cannot hope to fathom its significance, and yet if we but reverently touch the fringe of the great mystery virtue will come out of it.

We would observe that—

1. This was a cry *in the dark*. It is the only recorded utterance of the three hours of darkness. The heavens had darkened. The gloom had thickened and descended. We all know what it is to yearn for the light. The infant and the dying veteran alike cry for it. Our Saviour was human as well as divine. This painful mystery became all the more painful to Him for the physical darkness which accompanied it. This was a darkness which science has not been able to explain, and which the heart of the Christ could not for the moment solve. At midday and for three weary hours it hid from Him the surrounding country, the angry, furious mob, the arching heavens, and the very face of God! The untimeliness of the darkness added to its gloom. Was it the darkening of vision in the hour of death, or the withdrawal of the Father's face?

2. It was the cry *of a new and startling experience*. Throughout our Lord's life there was a constant and reiterated assertion of His oneness with His Father. This supplies the key-note to all His claims. On the contrary, this cry expresses His sense of forsakenness as no other words that escaped from the lips of the Saviour ever did.

We stand in awe in the presence of this mystery. Why should His pure, trustful, filial spirit feel desolate even for a moment, save that if He is to be touched with a feeling of our

infirmities, He must fathom this lowest depth of human experience, and in bearing our sins in His own body on the Cross He must feel His isolation in the hour and power of darkness? In saving us from everlasting alienation from the Father, He Himself must taste the bitterness of that alienation—a bitterness which, although only for a moment of time, had in it the intensity of an eternity.

3. It was a cry *in which an ancient utterance found its full significance*. David had ages since uttered these words. In one sense they were the expressions of the misgivings of his own heart in the agony of desolation. (Ps. xxii. 1.) But they were also predictive of our Lord's upon the Cross. The Psalmist's words found their full meaning upon the lips of the Saviour. He used the words of David, and made them His as they never had been the Psalmist's.

4. It was a cry *which found expression in His native Syriac*. This is all the more significant because, when on other occasions He repeated words of ancient Scripture, He quoted from the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Old Testament. What a beautiful touch of nature in this hour of supreme tension! There are some of us who can catch the pathetic significance of this fact better than others. I rejoice to find this delicate touch of true humanity in the narrative. I preach to you to-night in what is to me, after all, a *strange* tongue; but there are moments of spiritual ecstasy or high pressure of thought or feeling when my Welsh nature asserts itself, and I have to speak in my mother-tongue, and if at the last hour a glimpse of the glories of another world and of the Saviour Himself be granted me, it will not be surprising if then I shall greet Him whom I love by the name which my mother taught me as a child to lisp—*Iesu Grist*, and not Jesus Christ. In such moments men fall back upon the language of infancy, and even our Lord was not an exception to the rule. In this unique experience He falls back upon His mother-tongue. Oh the tender pathos of this fact!

These words are repeated to us by Mark, partly, no doubt, in order to account for the mistake of the Greek-speaking Jews in thinking He called for Elias; but chiefly that the very words He uttered might be handed down to us as those which trembled upon the lips of the dying Christ as the expression of the painful mystery that had for three dark hours weighed so heavily upon His orphaned heart,

5. It was a cry *that came in the order of a wise and loving providence.* Our Lord's last words preceding these had been those in which He lovingly commended His mother to John. "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home," wrote the beloved disciple to whom this rich legacy was bequeathed. Thus Mary, the mother of our Lord, had left before the darkness came and this mysterious cry pierced the gloom. Her soul was pierced enough already; she could not have heard this cry and lived.

6. It was a cry *that was misunderstood and complacently misinterpreted.* The Greek-speaking Jews caught a sound that suggested the name of Elias, and at once they interpreted the meaning of a cry that will take all eternity fully to understand. It was an interpretation in harmony with their ignorant and preconceived notions. They represent a class of men to whom no cry has the sacredness of mystery about it, even though it comes out of the darkness and from the depths of Christ's heart—those to whom no utterance rises above the prosaic level of ordinary experience, who shut God out of every scene and put some Elias in His stead, and who mistake the Saviour of the world even in the travail of redemption for a helpless victim crying feebly for the aid of an idolised prophet.

7. It was a cry *that was mocked in the effort to silence or to satisfy it.* He called after God, and they said, "Behold, He calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take Him down." He thirsted after God, the living God, and they gave Him vinegar!

So it is still. The deepest cries of the heart are mocked by the world's prescriptions and nostrums. The children of this world try to quench the thirst of the soul with sour wine. Are there some here who have been stung by this mockery of their deepest yearnings? Remember, the Saviour can enter into the meaning of it all, and through the memory of His own misinterpreted and mocked cry upon the Cross can sympathise with you.

8. It was the cry of *the great Sufferer as He was about to emerge out of the darkness into the light.* We read in the preceding verse, "And when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." We no sooner read these words than we feel anxious to learn what took place at the ninth hour; and we have not long to wait, for

we next read, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." We have heard that the darkest hour is that just before the dawn. In this case the blackest hour ushered in the light. This was a cry with which the darkness of the three hours which had prompted it vanished. It is significant that these words were first uttered by David in a Psalm set to "The Hind of the Morning," the leading idea probably being of one hunted, wearied, and exhausted, but whose moan of desolation ends in the gladness of the dawn. How true a representation of the great Sufferer! This cry is translated in the margin of the Revised Version—"My God, my God, why *didst Thou* forsake me?" Bengel calls attention to the fact that the forsakenness is spoken of in the *past* tense, and adds, "In that very moment the abandonment ended, as the passion itself did immediately afterwards. In the midst and at the height of the abandonment He had been silent." Thus we learn that this sad and mysterious cry was but the prelude to another and a gloriously reassuring one which followed—"Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit."

Thus—

9. This was a cry *which need never be repeated*. The Saviour has uttered it "once for all," for Himself and for all those who trust in His salvation. You and I need no longer feel desolate, great though our sinfulness be, because He became desolate for us. This cry of the Saviour, sad and mysterious as it is in itself, is a source of unspeakable consolation to those who realise that *once*.

"Yea! once Immanuel's orphaned cry
His universe hath shaken—
It went up single, echoless,
'My God, I am forsaken!'

"It went up from the Holy's lips
Amid His lost creation;
That of the lost, no son should use
Those words of desolation."

Did I not believe that the Saviour took our place and for our sake tasted of the bitterest drop which is the penalty of sin—namely, that of conscious isolation from God—the death of Jesus Christ and the hiding of God's face from Him would be to me the most perplexing and painful enigma of all time. But believing, as I do, that He "His own self bore our sins, in

His own body on the tree," I find even in that saddest and most mysterious cry, in which the darkness and the light met, the assurance which ushered in a new dawn to a darkened and sorrowing world, since it assures us that He who suffered in our stead drank our cup of anguish to its dregs, so that those who trust in the merits of His death, and who are constrained to consecrated service by His boundless and undying love, *need never despair.*

Hitherto the isolations of His Cross and Passion were counterbalanced by the assurance of His Father's presence. His words, ere He entered His Gethsemane, were, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone : and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John xvi. 32). Now, on the contrary, His sense of isolation is complete. Heaven and earth are alike silent and dark ; God and man are standing aloof ! If Jesus will conquer, it shall be in His own strength, and His only. The language of ancient prophecy concerning Him who should tread the winepress alone, while of the people there remained none with Him, finds its fulfilment in Him who, while the face of God, as well as of man, was hidden, wrought for Himself the victory.

From this cry I learn that amid the varied experiences of our mortal and sinful life we can reach no depths of sorrow which He has not already fathomed, and in which He cannot sympathise with us :—"For verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. ii. 16-18, R.V.). In Him—who, having partaken of our nature, uttered this cry of keen surprise as He emerged out of the mystery of those dark and desolate hours—we find One to whom we can look in our direst sorrow, and feel assured that His heart is infinitely tender to pity and His arm almighty to save. Apart from this cry I might be tempted at times to try to measure the extent of His soul-anguish, and wonder whether the Man of Sorrows could have touched the lowest depths which our sorrowing and lost humanity has fathomed ; but I can do so no longer, since I believe that only the solution of the awful

mystery of man's iniquity, and his consequent separation from God, can explain the counter-mystery of that cry that trembled upon the lips of man's Redeemer as "He bore our sins." Why otherwise should the sinless Son of God feel an isolation from the Father which finds no counterpart, so far as we have ever learnt, in the lives of unfallen men or angels, but only in the experience of sinful man? "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. liii. 4, 5).

Oh, learn at what infinite cost the Saviour has made salvation from sin and from its dire penalty possible for you, and do not add to the agony which His love has already suffered for you, by persistently and finally turning the deaf ear to His tender and gracious invitations, and by thus crucifying anew the Lord of glory, and treading underfoot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace. O Lord, speak Thou at this moment and in Thine own way, that these people may hear and live !

XCIX.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—A LAD IN THE CROWD

3. WHAT JESUS DID WITH THE LAD'S STORE.

“There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes,” etc.—JOHN vi. 9—14.

WE have not yet parted company with “the lad in the crowd,” but will consider to-day *What Jesus did with the lad's store*. We find that Jesus “took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to them that were set down, likewise also of the fishes as much as they would. And when they were filled, He saith unto His disciples, Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which remained over unto them that had eaten” (R.V.). Try to realise for a minute the lad's thoughts and feelings after this miracle. His first feeling must have been one of *simple wonder*, in common with all who were present. He knew well how many loaves there were, what they were worth, and for how many they were supposed to be sufficient; but now he had seen the hunger of a multitude satisfied by them, while there still remained twelve baskets full of broken pieces. His next feeling must have been one of *great pleasure*, that he should have had the privilege of selling those loaves with which Jesus had performed His great miracle so as to satisfy the hunger of thousands in that desert place. At length the pleasure would give way to a sense of *high honour*, that he was connected as no one was, except Jesus Himself, with that miracle.

Then I imagine that lad returning home, and especially greeting his mother who had made those loaves. How eagerly she would inquire of him how he had got on so well and succeeded in selling all! Then with what wonder and delight she would listen to his thrilling story! The mother had never before seen her boy so excited, and he had never seen her so surprised and pleased. I think I can see her take him aside so that she may hear all about it. Then the little fellow would begin. “Oh, mother! I never had such a day before. I wished you were there. You know I followed Jesus of Nazareth and the multitude that crowded after Him to that desert place on the other side of the sea. It was a long way to walk and for a time I thought I should have to carry my burden back again; but as the afternoon wore on, and the people stayed to listen to the Great Teacher, they began to get hungry, and one loaf

after another went, so did the fishes, until at last I had only five loaves and two small fishes left. Still the people remained and listened, as if the night would never come on. I listened too, mother, and almost forgot my basket: I couldn't help it. Oh, I wish you had only heard Him! Then I saw the disciples whisper to Him, and He said something to them, and then one of them came to me and bought my loaves and took them to Jesus. After that we were all told to sit down on the grass: they say there were about five thousand present. He then looked up to heaven and said 'Father,' and thanked God for the loaves. When He had broken the loaves and fishes they were brought round, and all ate as much as they wanted,—I too had as much as I liked,—and at the close there were twelve basketsful of broken pieces! Oh, mother! I cannot tell you any more about it; it was so wonderful. They say, mother, that the disciples wanted Jesus to send the multitude away just when they were so hungry, but that Jesus was too kind to send them then, and so fed them first."

Now, can you imagine that the lad could tell that simple story without thinking very kindly of Jesus, and that the lad's mother would not be the better for hearing it? Perhaps, after that, when she had but a very little meal in the barrel or bread in the cupboard, she too would lift up her eyes to heaven and thank God, as she had heard her little boy say Jesus did; and although she knew she could not work a miracle, yet she believed that there was One above who would then bless her little store and make it go farther for that prayer. How differently she would feel, too, in the future, when she made other loaves for her lad to sell! Who knew? perhaps some other miracle might be wrought on them! Thus her work would never appear so tedious, or her poverty as pressing, as it did before that wonderful event when Jesus took *the very loaves that she had made*, thanked God for them, and with them fed five thousand people. Her boy, too, would go out with stronger heart than ever before. He had hitherto, doubtless, thought that his lot was a hard one, which had in it no possibility of honour and high privilege; but when he had found that Jesus had made use of even his little store for such a glorious purpose, he began to think that his calling was not the poor and hard thing he had supposed it to be. All this made him happier at his work than he had ever been before.

Again, if that boy lived to be a man, I can imagine his children

gathering round him sometimes and asking him to tell them the story of the loaves. Then he would tell them—what they never grew weary of hearing—how Jesus had taken the loaves which his mother had made, and which he as a boy had carried so far with the hope of selling them, and fed a multitude with them. How carefully the children would ask him about the size of the loaves and fishes! Then he would show them the very basket in which they had been carried—for you may rest confident that it was kept long in the family, and was shown for many years as a wonderful relic. Why, I expect that even his *grandchildren* would sometimes like to show the basket, and tell the story, and finish up with the significant words—“And that lad was our grandfather.”

Now, I cannot think it possible for that lad, even if he lived to be a hundred years old, to forget that miracle; and I do not believe that he could ever think of Jesus without much reverence, or indeed love. Perhaps he became a faithful follower of Christ. We cannot tell. In any case he never could be the same as if that miracle had not been performed. We do not know this lad's name, but the event teaches us how the youngest and poorest were often brought into contact with Jesus Christ. So to-day there is no life so poor and humble that Jesus is not willing to bless it; and there is no one so insignificant that Jesus will overlook him. He makes the poorest life beautiful by connecting it with Himself. No child is overlooked or despised by Him. He wants us all to have a part with Him in making others better and happier. Even little children who may be as poor and as unknown as the little lad of whom we have spoken may yet be greatly honoured if they will but draw near to the Saviour and let Him use them for His own glory and the well-being of those whom He longs to bless! Now that Christmas is near, let us see whether we have not something which Jesus can take and with it bless the multitudes around who need and suffer so much.

C.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE MAGI.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,” etc.—MATT. ii. 1, 2.

It is strange that Matthew, who wrote his Gospel to the Jews, should suddenly strike off at a tangent from the brief narrative

of our Lord's birth in order to record the pilgrimage of the wise men from the East to Jerusalem, unless it be to contrast the earnest quest and the loyal homage of these Magi with the wilful blindness and bitter hatred of the Jewish scribes and Herod.

The Magi at this time were a religious caste of high culture and devout aspiration, and are to be distinguished in many respects from the Median tribe bearing that name, whose history extends to remote antiquity. These were the followers of Zoroaster, the astrologers of the East, who held a great deal that was true blended with much that was erroneous. They seem to have accepted light as the highest symbol of deity, believing in their crude fashion that God was light and that in Him was no darkness at all. They believed that somehow there was a very close relationship between man and the skies. They thought that his destiny was written in large letters there, that the heavens exerted a mighty influence over the earth, and held such a sympathetic relationship with it that stars came forth in honour of the birth of the greatest sons of men. In addition to this it is possible that some glimmerings of Balaam's prophecy—that "a star" should come forth out of Jacob—had reached them, and it is highly probable that they shared the expectation, predominant at that time throughout the East, that a very great personage was about to be born. It was with such convictions and presentiments that the Magi saw the star which God had sent for their guidance. Acting promptly upon these convictions, they undertook their journey to Jerusalem. We do not stop to discuss the various conjectures as to the nature of that light. It is enough now to note that it was a light that shone in the night, and as such was strangely symbolic of the darkness in which they lived, and of the guidance granted by Heaven to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

1. Their pilgrimage was *one of search*. Their whole life was pre-eminently one of quest. The study of the heavens exerts, naturally, an ever-widening influence over human thought, and awakens constant inquiry. Depths beyond depths reveal themselves. These arouse wonder and ever-recurring questionings. Add to this the fact that the Magi had now seen a star concerning the significance of which they entertained no doubt. The star was to them the announcement of a great birth, and a summons to pay their homage at the feet of the new-born King. Thus they went in search of Him.

2. *It was prompted by a noble impulse.*—It was not undertaken in consideration of gain. The Magi *had* rich treasures, but were prepared to lay them at the feet of One greater than themselves. The fact that they had seen His star in the East was enough. He was greater than His star, therefore the star but led to His feet. Would that astronomers learnt that! Nor was their search narrowed down by the restrictions of nationality, for although *Persian* Magi, as they probably were, they went to pay homage to Him that was born *King of the Jews*. We find in them none of the national exclusiveness of the Jews of their day. These Gentile pilgrims rose alike above the greed of gold and the exclusiveness of nationality, and directed their search after the child of royal nature whose birth the heavens had proclaimed, and at whose feet they longed to pay their homage. It was a search prompted by true reverence for greatness. It may have assumed much of the nature of hero-worship. But God could turn this to something higher. Superstition is after all better than atheism. It is reverence sadly misdirected, but yet going out of itself. Better “to live in the love that floweth forth” than the love that cometh in, still more than the love that stays within and by sheer stagnancy becomes selfishness. The man who has reverence in his nature has something of hero-worship about him, but the man who has no reverence in him is the most hopeless of improvement, for irreverence is the worship of self. Our earliest experiences are closely related to a kind of hero-worship. This is well, for he who has not learnt to honour his father and mother will on that account find it all the more difficult to honour his God. Reverence for goodness in man is closely allied to reverence for God, who is the perfect embodiment of all goodness. The reverence which prompted the Magi to start on their journey was that which, under God’s guidance, made them capable of higher worship than they had ever known before.

3. *It was persistently pursued.*—That star might have been seen by others had they but looked for it. It was not the lack of a star, but the lack of eyes to see it, from which the people of Judæa suffered. We are often asking for stars when we ought to be opening our eyes: that is, we are praying when we ought to *watch*. These pilgrims were sustained by a powerful conviction—an unwavering belief. The key of the persistency was, “We have come to worship Him.” What journey will a

man not take to satisfy this yearning *to worship*? The creed of the Magi was far less accurate and complete than the creed of the high priests and scribes, but it was more alive. In this respect it contrasted favourably with the creed of the Jewish dignitaries. The old prophecies still formed so many text-books for the schools of the prophets, but to the scribes they had become as dry and as fusty as the old parchments upon which they were written. The glowing words of the prophets, which, when uttered, were in a state of fusion, had passed through the cold medium of a faithless age, and had become frozen into frigid technicalities. The scribes knew where Christ was to be born, according to an ancient prophecy; but to them *it was ancient*, and they had not sufficient faith in the possibility of its fulfilment to leave their parchments and look for the Messiah. On the other hand, the Magi, though they knew nothing of the prophecy, knew of its fulfilment. They were not well versed in the prediction, but they were certain of the fact. The question they asked Herod was, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Of His birth they had not the shadow of a doubt; the question was, *Where?* Their creed, imperfect as it was, had in it the irresistible force of conviction, and "a living dog is better than a dead lion."

4. *It was a successful pilgrimage.*—Few of the pilgrimages of the world have been truly successful. They have generally been the outcome of a mistaken conception of religious consecration, and have ended in disappointment. But these men were led by a heavenly light. The end of their journey was where the star ceased to move. They sought no rest until the guiding light rested. The star "stood over where the young Child was"; and when they were come into the house they "saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him." *Him*, not Mary. It was *His* star that they had seen, and it was He whom they had come to worship. They had expected to see a palace: they saw a humble dwelling, probably the manger where He had been born,—but still, unaffected by the lowly surroundings of that birth proclaimed by the heavens, they worshipped the new-born King. Who shall define the exact meaning of that word "worship"? Who shall tell how far their eyes were opened to behold in this Child more than they had ever expected to see? The word "worship" is ever a relative term, largely

dependent upon the worshipper for its significance. There were at least sincerity, reverence, and strong confidence in the worship of the Magi. Has ours always as much? It had, moreover, another quality—the spirit of sacrifice. They opened their treasures. They realised that their privilege was to give. Some have never conceived that worship means much more than asking. However defective the conceptions of the Magi concerning the Christ were—perhaps as defective as our own children’s conceptions of Him—who shall say that in their worship, as in our children’s worship, there was not much that was allied to true worship? Not the least was the large liberality of their offerings. Are they not an example to most of us in this respect? In the presence of no one have men opened their treasures, and revealed such a prodigality of offering, as in the presence of Jesus Christ. All avarice dies when we come into close contact with the Son of God, “who, though rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich.” It cannot live at the feet of Jesus. The miser ceases to clutch his gold, and relaxes his greedy grip of it there. Yet there are some of us who call ourselves Christians who grip it as tightly as ever; but then we are not so near Him as those wise men were. The Magi received their reward in the joy of homage and of costly offering. But they received yet more. God spoke to them in a dream, and thus brought them into relationship with the grand succession of men to whom He had spoken in dreams in all ages. It is significant that in Jerusalem the successors of the prophets knew nothing of visions of the night, and of the Divine whispers which, in ancient time, had come in dreams to the ears of God’s holy ones; while the visions of these later days came to lowly shepherds, and the dreams to Joseph the carpenter and devout pilgrims from the distant East. It is a fearful thing when, as at this time, the successors of the prophets have lost the seeing eye and the hearing ear; when seers have degenerated into scribes, and prophets subsided into Rabbis, and when God has to begin anew with men—yea, and with new orders of men.

Contrasting sadly, too, with the sincerity and devoutness of these Magi were the lying hypocrisy and murderous plots of Herod. He who steeped his hand in the blood of his own kindred shrank not from glibly uttering pious phrases, when all the while the red hand of the murderer was concealed

beneath his pious garb. Strange and tragic was the fate of the Herods of the New Testament. What grand possibilities were presented to them of being identified with Christ and His kingdom!—but all were missed. As the result, what unenviable prominence they occupy in the story of the life of our Lord and of the infant Church!

While the Magi asked Herod questions we read nothing about the star. Even they no longer saw it. They asked Herod when they should have looked to the star. How unreasonable to expect Herod to answer a question in prophecy! How often we go too far into the counsels of men to see the star! The pageantry of courts blinds us often to the glory of the sky and the guidance of its light. In this instance, when the wise men gave up questioning Herod, and not before, they again saw the star.

While these Magi present a striking contrast to Herod and the chief priests and scribes of Jerusalem, do they not also, for earnestness of purpose, strength of conviction, purity of motive and liberality of offering, contrast favourably with us? Have we come up to the level of our Christian creed as faithfully as they did to the level of their poor Persian creed? Or have we remained, with the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem, charmed with the formalities, or busied with the learned technicalities, of our religion, while simple-hearted shepherds and still less privileged pilgrims from a distant country are led by God to the feet of the Saviour of the world? At this season, when the hearts of men throb with a tender emotion, of whose secret they are in most instances profoundly ignorant, it behoves us to ask how far we rise to the responsibilities of our high privileges, how far we trust, and with what fidelity we serve, Him whose birth we commemorate as the Divine answer to the world's cry, "Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth?" May God help us, in the light of that glorious revelation of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, which the birth at Bethlehem but ushered in, to accept the Saviour as our Lord and Master, and in His service to avail ourselves at all cost of every opportunity to bless those for whom Christ came to die, and for whom He now intercedes at God's right hand!

CI.

A TALK WITH CHILDREN—“THE CRYING STONE AND THE ANSWERING BEAM.”

“For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer.”—HABAK. ii. 11.

THIS is a very extraordinary text, is it not? Have you ever heard a stone cry? You have thought so sometimes, when the echoes of crying voices have come back from the walls of a building or from a rock opposite. But that has been the nearest approach to a stone crying out that you have known. Yet the prophet speaks in our text of the stone crying out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answering it. He, no doubt, speaks here about Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar and other kings of Babylon were very proud of their city and of their palace. But both had been built by plunder; and the prophet says that the very stones and timbers would by-and-by protest against such a wrong. By “beam” we are to understand the cross-beam which joined together the timber in the wall on both sides. That beam, he says, shall answer the stone in the wall, and conduct its cry right across the palace, so that all shall hear. This was very marvellously fulfilled, when the words of burning brightness were seen on the walls of that palace by Belshazzar—“Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” The very stones in the wall gave the message to the proud and wicked king, and the cross-beams reflected the glittering words of his awful doom.

This morning, however, I want to show you that our text is true in many senses. I remember living once in a house which let in damp through the wall into one room, although we took every pains to prevent it. At last it was found that there was one small stone placed in the outside of the wall which was soft and drew the water like a sponge, and the water worked its way right through into the house. The stone in that wall cried out in a sense, and made us take notice of it. Again, we have sometimes seen a house badly built: it soon tells it out; and the longer it stands the more loudly does every stone in its own way, and every chink in the building, tell each passer-by how shamefully the wall has been put together.

Sometimes a stone has a story to tell, because something has been cut into it. The other day I passed a house where Sir

Isaac Newton once lived, and there was a stone placed in the wall to tell the fact. Why, in the deserts of Arabia there are rocks which tell us what people thought, and wrote upon them, thousands of years ago! So you see that stones are not so silent as we are apt to think; very often there are "sermons in stones," if we have but the ear and patience to hear them.

I have often been where some great preacher who has passed away used to preach, and have wished that the stones in the wall could tell me all that was spoken there. Well, in some strange instances we are able to learn from stones what happened long ago. We have before now seen stones which once lay down deep in the earth, and have found sunk in them the footprints of some creature that trod upon them thousands of years ago, when what is now stone was soft clay. Little could that creature have imagined that so long afterwards its footprints would be seen by us!—yet the stone tells us clearly what happened then. Ah! we little know what lasting impressions we may after all leave behind us.

Oh, how I should like to stand by the well of Sychar, especially if I felt sure that the stones which are now at the mouth of that well—and which have been so much worn by the ropes in drawing water out of the well—are the very stones upon which our Lord, when weary, sat at sultry noon when He talked so gloriously with the woman of Samaria who had come to draw water! I think the sight of those stones would help me to understand the story better. They would be sure to tell me something, although it were with the eloquence of silence.

Again, how I should like to stand on that spot on the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, just where the road turns round the shoulder of Olivet, and where Jerusalem all at once bursts into view,—the spot where our Lord wept over Jerusalem, and uttered some of the tenderest words which even He ever spoke! How much better should I understand those words by standing on the very spot where He then stood! I will tell you another strong wish I have had of the same kind. I wish I could stand amid the ruins of the ancient synagogue in Capernaum, and see the stone which is still over the main entrance, upon which is graven the pot of manna, and upon which the eyes of the Saviour must have rested when, speaking of Himself, He said, "Not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this

bread shall live for ever." I think that a sight of that stone would help me to understand the wonderful things which Jesus then spoke. Do not underestimate anything that God has made—even the stones around us. What if in some way or other the very stones which have witnessed so many of our misdeeds and heard the words we have uttered could ever tell all!—how should we feel? In any case we should so live that even if the stones and timbers of our dwellings could speak out we need not fear; for we should remember that *there is One who knows and remembers all*. Oh that we may walk in His ways, and look to Him for guidance and blessing, so that the words of our lips, the meditations of our hearts, and the deeds of our everyday life may be acceptable in His sight! If He be for us, who can be against us? Let us pray that we may close the year 1889 very near to Him; and that if our lives are spared during 1890 that year may find us with our hands placed in His every step of the way.

CII.

SERMON—GOD REQUIRING THAT WHICH IS PAST.

“And God seeketh again that which is passed away.”—ECCLES. iii. 15 (R.V.)

THE writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes affirmed that in all history there had been not only a superficial uniformity in all the changes of time, but also a striking unity and permanence beneath the surface—“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it. . . . That which is hath been already; and that which is to be hath already been; and God seeketh again that which is passed away.” There are many senses in which this is true. It is true generally of nature, and particularly of the earth upon which we live, and of the experiences through which we pass. The rich foliage which in spring and summer clothed the trees with beauty has now fallen and been trodden under foot, yet we know that it has a ministry still to fulfil in fertilising the earth and thus enabling it to produce in the coming spring a foliage as verdant and luxurious as ever. We know further, that though one generation of leaves passes away after another

in regular succession, the pattern is in the main permanent. There is a unity and continuity of design underlying all the change. This poor earth would soon be bankrupt were it not that what has passed away comes again to its help. The next spring will draw upon the resources of the past autumn in falling leaves and decaying vegetation which have done their part to enrich the soil. In the falling leaf God practically says to the earth, "I know thy limited resources, therefore I will allow nothing that is thine to be annihilated; even the decaying leaf and the drooping plant shall return to thee, that thou mayest use them again and deck thyself with new glory." In all this, God requireth that which is past. Other illustrations of the same fact abound.

Again, in the distant past there were primeval forests of almost incredible growth and luxuriance. At length they were flooded and swamped, and were buried in their own ruin. What seeming waste of beauty and life! The sun would appear to have shone upon those prairies in vain, since all had now passed away. Nay, but God would yet require them. God had a glorious purpose even in burying those grand old forests. He was laying up treasures of light and heat for our age, when mankind having multiplied so wondrously and having developed so gloriously its arts, would need the coal into which the consolidating energies of ages had converted the buried forests of that distant past. Hence the light and heat treasured for millenniums in the dark and cold earth are to-day released and made to glow upon numberless hearths and to set throbbing untold machineries.

Motion, too, like matter, is constant. No force or energy, so far as we know, is lost in God's creation. These are facts demonstrated by scientists. Nothing is lost in the material world. Hence nothing has passed away in the sense of being annihilated. There is no such thing as annihilation within our ken.

The same applies generally to language. The English of to-day is what the English of the past has made it. Every age of literature has left its mark upon, and thus helped to determine the character of, the literature of our day. In the study of words and phrases the story of the past ever "comes up before our view." If a man were clever enough he could well-nigh write our history from a study of our language. The same truth is illustrated in our national life and institutions. What history

could be deduced from a proper study of the present! We can see the scars of conflict and the tokens of final triumph on many an existing institution. In all history we find the past refusing to accept extinction. Old materials are ever being turned to new uses, and thus through every process of change asserting a permanence which is deeper than all change. Why do we teach history to our children? Simply because we know that the past explains the present, since the present is but the outcome of the past. In every department our children's education is reared upon the results of the past. They thus occupy a vantage ground at the outset which was denied children long ago. That which is simple in the teaching of to-day has been made simple by the successive labours of past ages, all of which live in present results.

Again, as your child advances in his lessons the condition of all progress is remembering the past. He must not proceed to read before he has learnt the alphabet, and has mastered each lesson in spelling, step by step. The same applies to arithmetic. The child must remember his rule of subtraction while engaged in his long division sum. By-and-by he must remember his multiplication table in his trigonometry and conic sections. All teachers and the exigencies of all learning are ever requiring that which is past. Hence a child must have *memory* before he can *advance*. He must carry the past into his present and project the present into his future.

Indeed, scientists are only beginning to learn the possibilities of permanence in what appeared to be lost impressions. The *phonograph* is but the human illustration of a truth which God has been teaching throughout the ages: that the utterance of the moment has a lasting effect; that the use of human speech and the sound of a human voice are not transient, as men suppose, but permanent; that in reality there is no such thing as a "lost chord" that will not be heard again; and that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned. Believe me, God's telephone has always registered human utterances, and can repeat them at His bidding! Again, think of instantaneous photography. A man carries a detective camera attached to his coat, touches a spring as he passes you, and he has secured your likeness on that sensitive plate within. Photography is an art which stamps with permanence a passing event, and thus supplies

another illustration of the truth which I have sought to emphasize. Think of *man* thus retaining a passing look or gesture,—and what of God!

God indeed requires the past of us. The present is always becoming past. While it is present it is ours to use, but as each moment slips by it passes from us and returns to God with its account of its stewardship. Every moment which we receive from God is so much capital placed in our hands; and as it leaves us it represents the full use to which we have turned that capital in earnest thought and noble deed or otherwise. Thus it behoves us to remember that the true economy of living consists in the proper employment of the ever-recurring *now*. Our Lord says, "Be not anxious concerning the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (R.V.). Here He does not for a moment repudiate the responsibility which devolves upon us as beings who can anticipate and plan with reference to the future; but He seeks to guard us against allowing our energies to be absorbed by anxiety concerning the future, to the neglect of the duties of the present hour.

It is paradoxical, yet true, to say that our present is the sum total of our past, and that our past is the sum total of that which has been our present. The point which I would now emphasize is that we cannot separate ourselves from the past; it lives in us still in its successes and failures. Our present experience is what the past has largely made it. Further, the responsibility of each moment does not pass away with what is transient of that moment, but remains in the influence which it has left upon our character by its use or misuse. The year 1889, as also those which have preceded it, will in that sense live in the year 1890. Thus God ever "requires that which is past." It has only glided away from us as a privilege,—it will never pass away as a responsibility. Thus with advancing life there is a cumulative responsibility. Have we realised this as *opportunities* pass by and we ourselves grow older? "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Our sufficiency is from God." Without Him we cannot live, and without Him we dare not die. The twofold assurance that Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps, and that His grace is sufficient for us, can alone sustain us beneath the growing weight of responsibility. But with that

assurance every duty becomes a privilege, every yoke is easy and every burden light. Moreover, while time cannot lessen the weight of our responsibility, He who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and whose grace is sufficient for us in every time of need, is near at hand to heal all our backslidings, and to strengthen us for new responsibilities and weightier duties. As our day so our strength shall be. "God is faithful who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able."

With this assurance neither the change of scene, nor the onslaught of evil, nor the increasing weight of responsibilities and cares, need terrify us. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. We will accept increasing responsibilities as so many new opportunities of higher service, and as tokens of the greater confidence which our Lord places in us. He who has done well will have the opportunity of doing more, and so in ever increasing ratio, until at length the earthly service will merge into the heavenly, and the voice of the Master shall be alike the crowning approval of the one and the inspiring summon to the other—"Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Dear friends, what importance this view of life as a continuous whole, taking its results with it into eternity, imparts to human action! John, in apocalyptic vision, heard a voice from heaven saying unto him, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." But what will be "blessed" to the good will be "woe" to the evil. When the rich man in the parable lifted up his eyes in hell, the reply that came to his vain petition was, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." If these words mean anything, they affirm that memory is the powerful link that will bind the lost man in his future remorse to the opportunities which he neglected in this life. The bitterness of perdition will consist in the keen memory of a wasted and an irreparable past, as

416 *God Requiring that which is Past.*

the bliss of heaven will spring from the grateful memory of forgiving love, sustaining grace, and accepted service. The Lord help us so to live that the review of life shall be one of unmixed joy and boundless gratitude !

“ Count not the days that have idly flown,
The years that were vainly spent ;
Nor speak of the hours thou must blush to own,
When thy spirit stands before the throne,
To account for the talents lent.

“ But number the hours redeemed from sin,
The moments employed for heaven ;
Oh ! few and evil thy days have been,
Thy life, a toilsome but worthless scene,
For a nobler purpose given.

“ Will the shade go back on thy dial-plate ?
Will thy sun stand still on his way ?
Both hasten on ; and thy spirit's fate
Rests on the point of life's little date ;
Then live while 'tis called to-day.

“ Life's waning hours, like the Sibyl's page,
As they lessen in value, rise ;
Oh ! rouse thee and live ! nor deem man's age
Stands in the length of his pilgrimage,
But in days that are truly wise.”

9

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