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"According to my Gospel,"

“ ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL ”

By HUGH BLACK, M.A.

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Montclair Sermons

“According to My Gospel”

BY
HUGH BLACK

Professor of Practical Theology, Union Theological
Seminary, New York



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To
The First Congregational Church of Montclair
and to
The Beloved Memory of
Amory Howe Bradford

PREFACE

THE sermons in this volume were preached in the First Congregational Church of Montclair, New Jersey. After the death of their late minister, Dr. Bradford, I took charge of the pulpit for a year and a half. It was a service of great happiness to myself, and I received so much kindness at the hands of the people that I desire to associate their name with this book.

The selection was limited by the fact that comparatively few of the sermons were written. During the whole period, at the Vesper Service I preached on the Teaching of Jesus, but kept no record of the sermons. This explains the frequency of texts from the Old Testament in this volume. The particular contents were chosen from the point of view of variety, and I notice now that, though single sermons, they are all expository in character.

It still remains true, as I believe it must always be true, that the Christian preacher must go to the Bible for his material. There we have the classic literature of our religion, and the history of faith, and the record of the great experiences of the soul

of man. One of the chief tasks of the pulpit still is to explain, and interpret, and illustrate the teaching of the Bible. The roots of all our Christian ideas and ideals are found in that soil. It makes also for sanity to bring everything to the test of the normal religious experience, whose history we find in the Bible.

H. B.

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I

“ ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL ”

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.—ROMANS ii. 16.

THE English word Gospel is the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Greek word, *Evangel*, good tidings, the good news of the Kingdom to all people. As Christ was the first great Evangelist of the Evangel, the great Gospeller of the Gospel, as He preached it and declared it; and as the whole idea of it is bound up in His earthly ministry, it came about quite naturally that the word was used to express the story of Christ. Thus the word Gospel was applied to a book in which that story is related. It is used in this technical sense when we speak of the four Gospels of the New Testament, the canonical written narratives of the life of Jesus. St. Matthew's Gospel, or the Gospel according to St. Matthew, is the story as set forth by him.

But the word is used in the New Testament in a wider sense still for the whole Christian teaching generally, the essential message of which the books

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are the record, and all that the message implies. It includes therefore the Christian morality, and the Christian beliefs, as well as the facts of Christ's life; as for example when St. Paul writing to the Thessalonians, speaks of those who "obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this sense it means everything that is contained in Christianity. It is not only good news to be accepted and welcomed and believed, it is also a life to be lived. It is more than a display of love and a free gift of grace; it is a vocation to which we are called, a teaching which we have ever to obey.

It is in this comprehensive sense of the whole Christian teaching that the word is here used; for the statement which Paul says is part of his gospel is that God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. He says in effect: "This is part of my interpretation of the gospel, a conclusion which I draw from it. This is part of my teaching regarding Jesus." It is not our intention at this time to consider this particular item of Paul's creed; nor to give a statement of Paul's gospel as a whole; but exclusively to consider the very striking phrase in which he calls it *my gospel*.

We might dispose of this unthinkingly by saying, what is on the surface and is of course true, that it is

merely a question of the particular standpoint from which it is viewed at the time. From one point of view, the point of view of the Bestower, it is called, as St. Paul puts it in this same letter, the Gospel of God, and Christ's Gospel. From the point of view of the contents of the message and its purpose, it is called the Gospel of the grace of God, and the Gospel of salvation. So from the point of view of participation, it is Paul's gospel, your gospel, my gospel. This is of course evident and true. But if we left the matter there as a sufficient explanation, we would miss some lessons from this little phrase. To some perhaps it may be a lesson in charity, to others a lesson in humility, to all a lesson that the gospel requires personal and spiritual appropriation.

The point I wish to notice is that though the gospel is the same, the one message to the world, yet it takes a colour from the mind and soul of the man who declares it. The gospel of all the Apostles and all the Church is one and the same, yet Paul's presentation of it is not identical with any other man's, with St. John's, for example. It is identical in spirit: for it is the same Spirit that quickened both into life; but it is not identical in form. St. Paul took the same facts as the other Apostles

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and indeed all the Church had. It was the one Gospel of the grace of God; yet there is a sense in which he could say, My Gospel, different from the gospel of any other man. If we grasped this, if we had a deeper and more spiritual conception of religion, we would not be so concerned about harmonising the different testimonies and experiences of the writers of the New Testament.

Let us work up to this same point from another side. In the written records of the story of Jesus we have differences and discrepancies that are insurmountable difficulties on any theory which leaves out of account the personal equation of the writers; as similarly the Epistles of Paul and James and John have characteristics so distinct that one could not be mistaken for another. According to Paul's gospel the truth took shape individual, not after the pattern of James. Each picture, because it was a true picture and not a copy, had its own perspective. We note at once the difference between St. John's Gospel and that of any other. It is the same as St. Mark's and yet not the same. It is the same incomparable Master, the same adorable Saviour; but the one narrative is unmistakably different from the other. The same is true of the first three gospels, the Synoptic gospels. They worked over the same ground to a

large extent, with much material in common; but each is individual, with special characteristics, according to the writer's bent of mind, and according to the special audience he designed it for. In their gospels we have the evangel as it appealed to each writer, according to the colour of his own mind, and so exhibited after his particular manner of narration. We note, for example, the differences between the first gospel, and the third; the one written for Jews, with special emphasis on the fulfilment of the Mosaic law by Christ as Messiah; the other written for Greeks, with special emphasis on Jesus as the Good Physician and the pitiful Saviour of sinners. Noting also how appropriate it is to speak of St. Matthew's Gospel and St. Luke's Gospel, we are helped to see in what sense St. Paul could speak of "my gospel."

The great heresy of the Church of all ages, as it has been the great temptation of the Church, is literalism, the worship of the letter in some form or other. It is this prosaic and unspiritual tendency of the human mind which is in the last resort responsible for all the stupidities of ritualism, which lays stress on the mere order and detail and method of worship. It is responsible for all kinds of formalism in the region of morals as well as of worship,

the ethical formalism against which our Lord protested in the Sermon on the Mount, which interpreted the commandments by the keeping of the letter of the law. In interpretation of Scripture also it is difficult to purge our minds of verbalism, juggling with words and texts, and never taking count of the great spiritual realities, the thought of which the words are but the garment. In some interpreter's work an ounce of poetry and sympathy is worth a bushel of exegetical ingenuity. Everywhere in religion this danger of literalism menaces us. We are such precisionists, putting the emphasis on the external form and letting slip the inspiring and enlightening spirit.

The same unthinking literalism dogs our footsteps even in the inner court of the Temple, at the very heart of our faith, the revelation of God in Christ which is the gospel. Men speak with censorious judgment of some as not preaching the gospel, because their ears have not heard the particular phrases which they are accustomed to associate with the great message of the love of God. They seem to think that the gospel means a set of formal propositions; whereas it is a question whether you can speak of the gospel at all apart from the gospeller. A man may have all the facts right, and all the deductions

from the facts, may state all the great Christian verities, may formally explain the way of salvation, and make use of all the usual phrases; and yet not preach Christ, not commend the gospel, never touch the hearts of men by the pity of God and the passion of the cross.

Truth is not a question merely of verbal accuracy, but of essential spirit. A statement, as we know in ordinary life, may be true in form, without a single lie upon which you can put your finger, and yet be false in the general impression it conveys and false in the intention at the bottom of it. Christian truth is eternal, unchangeable, but it is also relative and personal. It may of course be put down formally in a set of propositions; but here also the letter may kill, and only the spirit giveth life. The propositions may contain everything of importance, from the being of God to the scheme of redemption, all the things most surely believed, the things that cannot be shaken—and so these propositions may be fairly called the gospel; and yet it may be dead. Everything depends on the interpretation, the spiritual insight with which the heart of the mystery is seized and revealed. Christian truth is not formal but vital; a spiritual thing, and therefore personal. So, Paul was able to say “my gospel,” a distinct thing,

different from any other man's presentation of Christ, his own soul's apprehension of the Saviour.

Thus, preaching is not simply the statement of truth, formal truth. If it were it would be an easier thing than it is; and could be without travail of soul and sweat of brain. Its function might then be served by repeating the necessary propositions. It might best be done by a phonograph. But preaching is truth *plus* something else; truth *plus* personality. The general message has to be made individual: the gospel has to be made my gospel. The truth has to enter into the being of a man and make the circuit of his veins, and come out coloured by the red blood of his heart. He has to take the things of the spirit, the things of Christ, and show them as he has learned them from his Master, no more and no less. •

Unless, therefore, we are so left to ourselves as to imagine that our knowledge and experience should be the standard and measure of all other religious experience, we will give up our attitude of censorious judgment. We will judge all things by Christ, by what is worthy of Him; as St. Paul declared that according to his gospel God would judge even the secret thoughts of men by Christ. Said I not truly that from this little phrase we might well learn

lessons of charity and humility? We need more faith in the working of the Spirit of God in His Church and in us, leading us into all truth, bringing into subjection even every thought to the obedience of Christ. If men are brought out of darkness into light, out of the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of sons of God; if the Kingdom be extended, the Kingdom of righteousness and peace and love and joy; if Christ be preached, therein we do rejoice, yea and will rejoice. Ought we not to be able to say this in the noble great-souled charity of St. Paul?

But above all, the lesson of most moment to us is that we should ask how we have received the great message, and what it means to us. The all-absorbing and ultimate question for us is the personal response we have made to Christ—not what the gospel signifies to others, but for what it stands to us. In the final issue religion is personal—how the deep of God’s love calls to the deep of the human soul. The gospel may be put down, as we have seen, as doctrine in a system of theology, to which may be given mental assent. Or it may be stated as a morality, a code of precepts, a teaching to be obeyed and carried into life. It may be expressed as literature, the story of Christ with the wondrous beauty of the ideal life, entrancing the heart and captivating the imagination.

But essentially the gospel means the personal appropriation of the truth. It must be made your own. It must be a principle of life to you, the centre of your world, that by which you live. Paul's gospel will not save you, nor John's gospel, nor mine, nor any man's.

When you speak of the gospel, the question is—what gospel? It is the one thing, the same thing, to whomever comes the vision of it, the revelation of the burning heart of God, the story of redemption, a message of love and reconciliation. But how do you accept it? What is it to you? In what sense is it your gospel? Is it to you as a tale that is told, a far-away echo of an olden story? Christ is the gospel, and your gospel will be exactly the relationship in which you stand to Him.

What think ye of Christ? Your answer to that question will also determine the other. To ask, What think ye of Christ? is more than, What have you to say to the historic personality of Jesus? Rather, it means, What is your response to His claims over your heart and life? What answer do you make to His appeal? The life that you now live in the flesh, how do you live it? Is it an earthly superstructure on an earthly foundation that must crumble away at the touch of time? Have you simply left the

higher life out of account, neglecting all spiritual interests, cutting your life off from any future, and even from any reasonable purpose, living without God and without hope in the world? Your gospel is that by which you live; and if you have no other principle of vitality but animal existence, what a death in life it is! There is for you no good news, no glad tidings of great joy to strike upon the ear and uplift the fainting heart.

To be out of this high hope for men is what it means to be out of Christ. Out of Christ, what is life but a beggarly gathering of husks to stay the heart-hunger? Out of Christ, we walk upon a sodden earth and under a grey sky, with never a sign from out the gloom that we are regarded and that life has any meaning. Out of Christ there is no gospel; for the last chance is lost that God should have been mindful of man and have visited him.

To be in this hope is to be in Christ. In Christ the whole horizon widens and life grows richer, and the world becomes an arena which claims and receives the interest of heaven. To touch the hem of His garment is to be in touch with God. In Christ new hope inspires the nerveless arm and lights the wistful eye; for it means God with us. To be able to say, “the life which I now live in the flesh I

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live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" is to be able also to say, "my gospel"; for it is to be able to say in spite of all weakness and sin, "my Lord and my God."

II

PAST AND FUTURE

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people.—EZRA iii. 12, 13.

THIS book begins with an account of the release of the Jews from captivity in Babylon, and their return to Palestine. When the great Babylonian empire fell, Cyrus the conqueror, with wise statecraft, sought to conciliate many sections of his subjects by allowing the deported populations to return to their native land. The Jews were allowed to restore the ruined sanctuary of Jehovah. Permission to return to Jerusalem would have been nothing to the Jews, unless they were permitted to make the holy city once more the centre of their religion. So the object of the return is expressly stated as “to go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build . . . the house of the Lord God of Israel, which is in Jerusalem.”

The enterprise called forth the energies and the latent patriotism and religious enthusiasm of the best of the people. Those whose hearts had been sore for God and country, those who kept believing and hoping through the darkest days, took it as an omen that the light had arisen at last. The worthiest of the race set themselves to the task, and the flickering hope of the nation was fanned into a bright flame. There was enthusiasm, the enthusiasm called forth by a heroic enterprise. Spirits mounted high, and hopes mounted higher. Nothing seemed impossible to them in this state; no sacrifice seemed too great to be called on to make. Their liberality kept pace with their enthusiasm. "They offered freely for the house of God, to set it up in its place." Difficulties about ways and means are never unsurmountable when the people are heartily in earnest about any good work.

These Jews with their old-world problem before them, to rebuild a temple worthy of their God in a ruined and impoverished land, made thus a good beginning. Without Solomon's opportunity, they had to rival Solomon's achievement. In the first case the great king of a prosperous nation set himself to build a beautiful temple. All that wealth and care and influence could produce was lavished on the task.

No workman's axe, no ponderous hammer rang;
Like some tall palm the graceful fabric sprang.

How great the contrast here! With excessive poverty, and few resources, permitted only on sufferance to revisit their native land and rebuild the temple amid the ruins of a city, and with the neighbouring peoples jealously hostile, how could they hope to emulate the work of Solomon in all his glory? Ultimately the builders laid the foundations of the temple. This was made a great occasion, a religious act with impressive ceremonial. At the moment when the ceremony was completed, the people rent the air with a mighty shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

How like that crowd to the many crowds which have gathered since for similar purposes! What a humanly natural mixture of thoughts and feelings was there displayed! Notice the chief constituents of that crowd. They were broadly two—the young and the old. That classification, of course, may be made elsewhere, but here it has a special significance. Years ago the captivity had taken place. A new generation had grown up, to whom the old country

and the old institutions were traditions. They heard of them as in a dream. This section, the greater part of the crowd, looked upon the proceedings as eminently satisfactory. They were rejoiced at the good beginning, and were full of hopeful eagerness.

But some of the priests and Levites and people were ancient men, and had known and loved the old temple. Strangers in a strange land they had been for long. They had grown old, but had not forgotten. They had fed their faith on memories of the old house of the Lord, beautiful for situation, the joy of every heart. Recollections crowded in on them. Their eyes looked, and saw not the present scene, but far back into other years. The thoughts and associations of these days surged into their minds, till a mist rose over the present. Oh those glorious days, hallowed and consecrated by blest memory! What had been since then in the lot of each of them? Joy and sorrow, hope and despair, life and death. The tears were in their eyes, eyes which had been tearless, since "by the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept when they remembered Zion." And when now they were startled from dreamland by the great shout of joy, because the foundations were laid, it seemed a mockery, and they wept with a loud voice.

“The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of weeping.”

Is it not a pathetic scene the writer calls before us here? And it is such a natural human trait, that we find no difficulty in entering into the incident and almost seeing it occur before our eyes. The difference between the two classes in that company is a radical one. It can be seen in the difference of attitude between an old man and a young man. Not that there is a distinct and abrupt line of demarcation, cutting up a man's life into youth and age. It is a subtle distinction, which creeps gradually into a man's way of looking at things. It does not mean that it is the gift of youth to be joyful, and only the privilege of age to be sad. We have all to live in the present, but we have another life which is not bound by time and space. The young lives this life largely on the future; the old tends to live it in the past. Picture an old man with a boy standing at his knee. The light of the eastern sun is in the boy's eyes; the shadow of the western sun is drawn over the old man's face; the formula on his lips is, “When I was a boy”; on the boy's it is, “When I become a man.” The one looks back and within; the other looks out over the hills and up over the clouds. It is not, or ought not to be, the older

the sadder; and certainly the Christian temper is not sadness at any time. But time mellows, and experience has a steadying, sobering effect. There is a pathos of the past. The very sorrows of the past are gilded, touched with sanctifying feelings. Even the dark things of the past may be thus glorified when the soft light of memory plays round them.

Almost as soon as we reach the stage when we can look back, the past takes on one colour. It seems to be woven together, and becomes all of a piece. We localise the past in one or two characteristic scenes, as we do with the scenery of a country. Our memory is selective. Scotland to the American tourist means Edinburgh and the Trossachs; Switzerland means the Matterhorn and one or two selected scenes. On looking back also, we see the past stationary by an illusion, so that it has an aspect different from the present, which is ever fleeting, moving. A waterfall seems solid when viewed from afar: "frozen by distance" is Wordsworth's fine phrase. The individual particles have no concern to us; we do not see them; it is the effect of the whole we notice. It seems motionless before us, to be studied at leisure; but it is instinct with living motion. So, distance solidifies the past to us. The individual minutes and hours and days do not count; it is the artistic effect of

the whole we see. Frozen, motionless by distance it seems, but not so did it once appear to us. How different the impression when we were in the stream of life, hurrying with it, tossed by its ceaseless flow, dashing over the waterfall in it; on to the plain, and on to the ocean. But now from the plain, creeping lazily to the sea, look at that waterfall of life, over which it sped so breathlessly, gleaming radiantly fair in the sunshine. The past is beautiful, if you do not pry too deeply and minutely into the sections that compose it, if you let the imagination play on it, and view it as a whole.

1. THE POWER OF THE PAST: Thus, men are often softened by thoughts of the past, like these priests and Levites and fathers, who were ancient men. They were melted to tears by a memory. And so would many of us be, if we did not stifle our memory, if we dared to look back. In most childhoods, as in the childhood of the race, there is an early paradise, a lost Eden, with sweet memories, and innocent affections. It is an appeal to that which often in after years can alone affect the heart. The echoes of that paradise of innocence and purity have never quite died out of the soul. If listened to, they can make a man respond still to the angel voices. Too often our life is but a sleep and a forgetting. We

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forget the glories we have known. We forget all the way by which we have been led. We forget the love of the past, the high instincts, and noble aspiration, the prayer that brought God into our life, the early blessedness, the early faith, the early rapture.

And customs lie upon us with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

Great spiritual good may thus come from a backward look. The very pathos of the past has a value. The tone and temper of these ancient men, which is the attitude of many at all times, especially the old, are natural in the presence of changes, and have a lesson for all of us, a lesson of tenderness and sympathy.

2. THE DANGER OF THE PAST: We can see how there emerges also what we may call the danger of the past. It is well that the boisterous, uncritical hopefulness of youth should be modified and toned down by the temperament of the ancient men. But perhaps more damage is wrought by the other extreme. There is a distinct danger that the past may be unduly magnified at the expense of the present and to the lasting detriment of the future. These ancient men, who wept with a loud voice, did not

believe that the new house could ever be anything like the first, and their temptation was to think it hardly worth while building at all. If it had been left to them, if there had not been a great crowd who shouted aloud for joy, the attempt might not have been made. An exclusive view of the past paralyses effort. We never can have a temple like the first, therefore we need not try. Nothing can be done like what has been done, therefore we need do nothing. That is fatal doctrine.

Yet it is doctrine often in our hearts, if not on our lips. We are always tempted to think the golden age somewhere behind us. But our Christian faith, the ever-young, the ever-green religion, makes it lie before us. It is not a worn-out ideal burnt to nothing like a fallen star. It is a yet unrealised ideal, shining clear and true, the master-light of all our seeing. We have a continual tendency to refer the Kingdom of heaven to some past date, the days of the apostolic church, or the days of the early fathers, or the days of the Reformation, or some signal time of blessing that lies back of us. It is a mistake. All the past history of the Church teaches us that God has purposes for His faithful people, purposes of gracious growth and of large service to be unfolded with the changing years. We cannot stand still. We must

move forward in hopeful trust, or turn back faithless. We may be forgiven the touch of pathos with which we look back. But never think that God has brought us thus far, to leave us guideless in the wilderness. Never dream but that He has larger purposes for us as a Church and for the land we love. Never doubt that He will lead His living Church on and ever on. We want in this our generation—and this is the lesson of the past—the spirit of our fathers, the faith in God, the strong sense of right, the love, the self-sacrifice, the loyalty to duty, which they displayed when they laid the foundations of the commonwealth and of the Church. Weeping for the first house could not build a new one for these Jews. Weeping for the past will not save us as individuals or as a Church. Nay rather, forgetting the things that are behind we must press on toward the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

The other day in this church there was quietly unveiled, without any ceremony, the memorial bust of your pastor and our dear friend, Dr. Bradford. It stands at the entrance, an eloquent reminder of one who built his life into this church, one associated with every stage of its history. The inscription under the bust, written by one of the members, sums up what he was to the community.

AMORY HOWE BRADFORD

*A Memorial**by the**First Congregational Church,**Montclair, N. J.**His first and only charge,**September 28, 1870, to February 18, 1911.**Inspiring preacher, sympathetic pastor,**Wise leader, public-spirited citizen,**Founder of institutions,**Apostle of the divine Fatherhood,**Prophet of the human Brotherhood.**His memory will abide**An inspiration and a joy.*

The beautiful inscription ought to be a constant sermon reminding you of the gracious past. But you do not understand the manner of man he was, and you do not appreciate the nature of his faith, if you think that he would be content for you to rest satisfied with the past. He was more concerned about the future than about the past, and looked for new visions of truth and new opportunities of service. He was ever among those who shouted for joy over the new, rather than among those who wept over the old.

We cannot live on yesterday. We have to-day because we had a yesterday, it is true; but we have to-day for the sake of to-morrow. We look back and see a track of light, for God is there, and we look forward and see a track of light; for God is there also. The past is an argument for faith. Only faith in God and His loving purpose will enable us to keep faith in ourselves and in our future. Christ is to us both the pledge and the promise of that purpose. He leads us out into a large place of faith and of service. If we to-day refuse to weep over a vanished past, but are ready to rejoice over a new future, it is because we believe this.

III

THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea.—EXODUS xiii. 17.

A LATER Israelite reflecting on the traditional history of his race must often have wondered at the unexpectedness of some of the events, the way in which legitimate hope was constantly disappointed and what promised to be instant triumph turned out to be a long-drawn struggle. For example, at the very dawn of the national life, if, as he firmly believed, God had led his forefathers out of Egypt with a strong hand, to give them secure possession of the land promised to Abraham, why the weary disheartening years in the desert? Why not have brought them in the full flood of enthusiasm to strike the great blow? Why the blighting of so much hope, and the frustration of so much eager faith? The same sort of question could also be asked of all the

great periods of Israel's history. It seems to have always been the long way round that was chosen for them. And this is only typical of all history sacred and secular, an illustration of what has happened in every chapter of the story of the Church, and which also finds its counterpart in individual experience. It is thus a fact which the spiritual mind must interpret in terms of faith, must accept as part of God's providence in human life.

The situation suggested in our text is a very dramatic one. The children of Israel have come out of Egypt, first of all tempted out by the promise of the land promised to their fathers, and then carried out with signal triumph. If at any time they might have courage and faith and high hope, it was surely then when difficulties faded before them, when they felt themselves called and protected and guided by God. Feeling must have run deep and strong, and confidence must have burnt in every heart and lighted every eye. They would only ask to be taken straight by the shortest way to the destined goal. They would fear no dangers and no difficulties. It was the fit and proper thing also to complete the work so gloriously begun. The triumph of the deliverance from Egypt was partial and meaningless by itself. Its natural conclusion was the further triumph of

the conquest. The children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt, but it turned out to be harnessed not for war but for wandering. They carried the bones of Joseph to be buried in the Promised Land, but the bones might well have turned to dust before an opportunity occurred to bury them in Palestine. As the crow flies it was no long journey to the confines of the Promised Land. A short and rapid march, a brief and fierce struggle, and they might accomplish the conquest. That would be the thought in the mind of all in the flush of the early enthusiasm. It was certainly not to die in the wilderness that any of them had left Egypt.

From the Delta of the Nile a few days' march through the sands will bring an army of invaders right into the heart of Palestine. This short and direct course would naturally be the one chosen by an ordinary military expert. There must always have been trade routes, almost as well marked as a modern road, between Egypt and Gaza. In all invasions from the south, Gaza was invariably the first point struck on the way to Syria, just as in any invasion of Egypt from the north, Gaza was the key of the position. With his usual military instinct Napoleon after his conquest of Egypt made straight for it as the natural approach to Asia Minor; and similarly

Alexander the Great saw it to be an indispensable strategic point in his advance on Egypt from the north. It was the near way and the natural way, judging from geography. It seemed the only possible way from a military standpoint, judging from such illustrious examples in history as Alexander and Napoleon. With Palestine as an objective a general would seem shut up to the one course, and a leader like Moses must have known that in giving up this course he was, humanly speaking, giving up the chance of achieving their great design, or postponing it indefinitely—as indeed they actually did. Why this strange *détour* through the untracked desert? Why this turning away from the straight and plain path? "It came to pass that when Pharaoh had let the people go that God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines though that was near, but round about by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."

Besides throwing away the one golden opportunity, such a course seemed also to court other dangers, and especially the great danger of the waning of enthusiasm and the breaking-down of courage. Every officer knows how long waiting, and purposeless marching, and hardships endured without any apparent object, destroy the morale and sap the spirit

of the best disciplined troops. Give them but a definite thing, take them straight to their task, show them their work when the heart is in them and the blood is hot, and they are as lions in the fight. But weary them out with marching and countermarching, with purposeless wandering, with never a definite thing to do or place to aim at, and they become like sheep. They will murmur and rebel and desert. Human nature being what it is, Moses had to lay his account for this; and this was the spirit of repining and murmuring that broke out once and again and yet again before the long sojourn in the wilderness was finished.

(1) Yet we see two evident reasons why in the good providence of God the near way was not chosen, and why the discipline of the desert was needed, however hard it must have been even for the most faithful. The first is plainly mentioned in our text, namely that the escaped slaves could not bear the sudden danger and fierce struggle inevitable in the near way. They were turned aside to the long way round through the *forethought of love*. "God led them not by the way of the Philistines though that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to

Egypt." The disappointment was the truest kindness. The short cut is often a mistake, as we know from sad experience in many things. The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home. The short cut will sometimes land us in difficulties and dangers that make us regret that we ever chose it; and more than once we have had to turn back to the place where we ventured forth; and if too tired and too disheartened we have given up the journey altogether. In the forethought of love the people of Israel were saved from the danger of a worse disillusionment than even the desert brought them. They were not an army, only a mob. They had the instincts and habits of the slave, not of the soldier.

That short and near way was the way of certain danger and fierce struggle. Both Alexander and Napoleon had to fight their best at Gaza. That near way to Syria was the great battle-field of the ancient world, because it was the key of the position between Egypt and the great Asiatic Empires. One intelligent look at the map will show why it was so. Given Empires in Egypt and in the Euphrates valley or Syria, there in the way of the Philistines was always the shut door that had to be opened from whatever side the invasion came. To take the released slaves of Egypt there would be to take sheep

to the slaughter. It would take the heart out of them quicker than the desert could. The near way would be the short way to the end of the great design. The discipline of disappointment by the way round about was the providence of love, "lest peradventure the people repent when they see war and they return to Egypt" and the latter end be worse than ever before. The enlightened reflection of pious hearts in Israel afterwards saw this to be so, and knew that the desert came to their forefathers from the loving providence of God. In the childhood of the nation it was tenderly dealt with and guarded from danger too hard for it. "When Israel was a child then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms, though they knew not that I healed them." Spiritual insight like that of Hosea saw the loving-kindness of God in the very things that must have been hard at the time.

Do we not see the same forethought of love in some of the disappointments of our life? We can see now that we were not fit for the danger, or temptation, of the near way to the things on which our hearts were set. You were brought out till the Promised Land seemed almost in sight, and ruthlessly you were led away round about, not by the near way, but by

the long way through the desert. You were not permitted to go on the way you had chosen. You had your dream of happiness by a short cut, and you never had it realised. You had your hopes of distinction or power, but you were ever frustrated as you turned towards the goal. You had your high ambitions; you knew they were not to be had merely for the asking; you knew you would have to fight and you were willing, but you have never had the chance. You have been edged away from that straight course to your designs. You have been led by circumstances over which you had no control through the wilderness. Put your own personal interpretation into this general statement of disappointment—whatever it was that lies back in your life, something in your business or professional career, or in your home life, some blight in your ambition or your affections, some failure or loss—that disappointment that was so hard to bear, which it may be you thought you could never survive—the thing that turned you off from the near way and took you about by the way of the wilderness. Can you now see love in it, a tender mercy to yourself, though at the time that thought would have been a mockery? Faith is not made perfect till it can *justify the past* to us, as well as give hope for the future. Cannot many a grateful and humble

heart here say, Hitherto hath the Lord led me, though it has been by the longest road and not the near way of my early dream?

(2) The second and deeper reason for the choice of the long road for the people of Israel was not only because they could not bear the sudden danger and struggle, but also even if they could, even if by the first zeal of freedom and the first flush of enthusiasm they might have overcome the obstacles in the way, they could not bear the sudden promotion, they could not bear the inner dangers of the conquest, more insidious than the outward dangers of Philistines. They *needed the discipline* of the desert to make a nation of them. They had to learn law, and order, and capacity to govern themselves. They had not only to be trained as soldiers, but also to be trained as citizens. There is no near way to turn a mob into an army; still less is there a near way to turn it into a nation. Preparation, training, discipline were needed; and the way of the wilderness was the only way that could make them fit to inherit the land of the promise. We can see some meaning in, if not necessity for, the discipline of disappointment from this point of view. If the purpose is not to give the Promised Land but to make them worthy to possess it, not to give us happiness but to make us *fit*

to be happy, not to grant us our desire but to breed in us noble desires, not the mere favour of possession but the virtue which merits possession, then we can see how the long road may be shorter in the long run than the near way.

There are no short cuts to anything in the world worth arriving at. The unsanctified heart of youth longs for the magic carpet of the Arabian Nights that could carry its fortunate possessor anywhere at will, or the magic ring or lamp that will satisfy every wish. But the world is not built on these lines. There is no short and royal road to learning, however much you may covet the reputation of learning. It can only be attained by labour and trouble and the pain of thought and toil of research, by the way of the wilderness, and not by the land of the Philistines though that is near. There is no short cut to mastery of art by the way of the land of the Philistines. There is no short and royal road to character. It is the fruit of discipline, and its crowning quality is the endurance that is built up by faith and patience and love and hope. Strength is produced through the strain. Character is formed through the discipline. The long road is needed to create the virtues of true manhood. "Let not disappointment cause despondency nor difficulty despair," says Sir

Thomas Browne in his unfinished *Christian Morals*. "Think not that you are sailing from Lima to Manilla, when you may fasten up the rudder and sleep before the wind; but expect rough seas, flaws, and contrary blasts; and 'tis well if by many cross tacks and veerings you arrive at the port; for we sleep in lions' skins in our progress unto virtue, and we slide not but climb unto it."

The long road is the near way after all. The short cut that looks so easy may land you in a morass. You must pay for the best possessions by the sweat of brow or of brain, and sometimes even by blood. You must be willing to go round about by the way of the wilderness, and turn your back on the near way by the land of the Philistines. We cannot leave out of account the discipline of the desert, the discipline of disappointment; and when we see into the true values of life we are willing to accept the discipline, and to admit that this too is of the loving providence of God, who set us to the long road.

There is no short cut also to spiritual power or communion, any more than to wisdom or to character. Take prayer, for example, the great instrument of spiritual progress. It is not a talisman that can get us even spiritual good as by magic. It is

the long road by the way of the wilderness. We must tread it with courage and hope and endurance. "Pray without ceasing," said the Master, stating a law of the spiritual world—till we turn to God as naturally as the flowers turn to the light. The strength of religion is not in the glow and the rapture and the ecstasy, not in the rare moment of the transfiguration, or the seventh heaven. It is got by the long road, when God leads a man about through the way of the wilderness, when we join ourselves to the journey of the Son of Man, whose way led by the desert and the cross.

If we walk in the way of God, the longest road round is the shortest way home. If God be with us, then the way of the wilderness is the way of peace; "yea though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil."

IV

ART AND RELIGION

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.—EXODUS XX. 4.

THE essential thought underlying the Decalogue is the spirituality of God. This is why to all who grasp this fact idolatry is abhorrent, why the prophets with sarcasm and with indignation denounce it. That men should make stocks and stones and worship them as divine seemed to them brutish ignorance and besotted superstition. Isaiah's pitiless irony in describing the manufacture of an idol is easily understood by us, when we remember that Jehovah was to him not only one God, but by nature spiritual. It is because of this that Jehovah claims from His people exclusive worship, because nothing could adequately represent Him. It took long before Israel assimilated all that is contained in this master-thought of God as a spiritual being. Witness the long and desperate struggle between the pure worship of Jehovah and the lower practices of heathen idol-

atries. All subsequent religion indeed has been the drawing out of the contents of that great thought. Men's religious ideas to-day have not yet been purified from the taint of idolatry; for idolatry consists in imposing limitations on the divine, such as locality, and consecrated places. We can see how the Decalogue, starting from such a spiritual source, should prohibit sternly all forms of idolatry.

But the prohibition "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" has been a difficulty with many to whom art appears as the glory of life. They are accustomed to look to art for the perfection of human powers, and they have the uneasy suspicion that it is essentially opposed to religion. Indeed the enemies of the Christian faith use this sometimes as one of the sharpest arrows in their quiver. They point to Greece which has given the world beauty, and ask what sort of place this earth would be if it were built on the Hebrew plan. In the New Testament there is no commendation of what we call art, no provision made for it. Our Lord is absolutely silent about it, as if the world of art did not exist.

Now about this it must be said at once that the argument from silence is always a dangerous one, and one easily overstated. Christ came to do a definite piece of work, and did not go out of His way

to give deliverances on outside subjects. He even refused to interfere in questions that seemed within the scope of His special mission, such as when asked to pronounce upon a question of inheritance. His religion also is not one of precepts in any case, but of principles. The essential laws of His Kingdom are stated, and His disciples are left to adjust all difficulties according to these principles. Before accepting the judgment that art is outside the sphere of religion, it would need to be proved that it was opposed in essence to the spirit of His faith.

And this is what is sometimes asserted both by friends of religion and by foes. The argument is that Christianity is the culmination of the Hebrew faith, the fulfilment of the Old Testament conception of life, and the Old Testament is throughout consistent with this second Commandment which prohibits the making of images; and in consequence of this the Hebrew race has never shown any facility in, or love of, the plastic arts. Now this latter statement is true. As compared with the Greek, the Jew is and has always been inartistic. But the same can be said of almost any other people. The fine arts all came to Western Europe from the Greeks, and in some departments they have never been surpassed or even equalled since through all these centuries.

Something must be left for temperament, and historical conditions, and the genius of race. It is true that the Hebrew genius ran in different lines to the Greek, and it is well for the world that this is so. Human life needed the foundations deeply laid on a more permanent basis even than love of the beautiful. Greek art became foul, when Greek morals became depraved. When the world stood most in need of regeneration, when society was falling to pieces at the decay of the early, simple, natural faith, there was no virtue from Greece which could sweep civilisation with a fresh breath of life. That came from Israel, which had been prepared by God to know His will and accept the laws of life. It is no argument therefore to say that, because the Jews were not artists, religion which is of the Jews is opposed to art.

As for this second Commandment, it is to mistake it, or to wilfully misread it, to see in it a prohibition of the creative and plastic arts. The prohibition of images and pictures in the Old Testament was for a specific purpose. This second Commandment refers only to worship. "Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them." The making of images for art and adornment is not prohibited. Even in the imageless Temple there were artistic

representations of animals, e.g., the brazen bull that held up the brazen laver, and the architectural ornamentation of the building. The brazen serpent was only destroyed, when the superstitious began to *worship* it. There is no implication even that the use of art is necessarily hurtful in worship. As a matter of fact there was art in Old Testament worship, a high development of it in some of its branches, in ritual, in music. Hebrew religion used art, as it was bound to do; for art is natural to man. Take the art of poetry, which is spontaneous in every people however rude. Poetry in its simplest definition is speech brought under rules of symmetry as inevitable as architecture. The delight which the human mind took in rhythm and measured cadence is similar to the delight in the lovely façade of a Greek temple. And where will you get in all literature such rhythm and cadence and such artistry of words as in the Psalms? Hebrew religion, therefore, which used architecture, poetry, music, cannot be said to have refused the use of art to express itself. We have to consider the specific purpose of the particular condemnation of the second Commandment; and that finds sufficient justification in the loathly idolatries and degraded nature-worship of the surrounding Canaanite nations.

It is probably quite true that this prohibition did do something in retarding the progress of sculpture and painting among the Jews, though it must be remembered that the Semitic race generally have not shown proficiency in these lines. Semitic art has always been shown chiefly in the skilled use of rich materials, precious stones, and not in the constructive imagination. The same is seen among the Jews right through the centuries. During the Middle Ages the decorations of their synagogues were often costly. Spanish and Italian synagogues were noted for their beauty, and even elsewhere the floors were often of stone and marble. The doors of the ark were sometimes ornamented with figures of vines or candlesticks, or stone-lions graced the steps leading to it. It was common to decorate the windows or walls of the synagogue with grotesques of birds and snakes. A Jewish writer wittily says of them that they did not represent a breach of the second commandment, for they are the likeness of nothing in heaven or earth or water.

But sometimes when the objection is stated about the opposition of religion to art, the emphasis is laid not on the Old Testament position, but on that of the early Christian Church. Quotations can be made from the early fathers which show that they looked

on art with a suspicious eye. Tertullian wrote a tract against the painter Hermogenes. But it has to be remembered that the early Church was in precisely similar situation to that of the Jews. They lived among peoples where pagan art meant idolatry, and in times of persecution, when the very life of the faith was at stake, men had sterner things to think of than carving and painting. But from the earliest days of the Church we see from casual references, and later on from what remains in the Roman catacombs, and early sarcophagi, that there was in the minds of Christians no impassable gulf fixed between their faith and art, except the same prohibition that art must not be used for idolatrous purposes. There were many cases where artists who had become Christian continued their profession even when admitted to the ministry.¹ When art came under the ban of religion it was always due to the fear, or the actual danger, of its being used for idolatry; as for example when the Synod of Elvira, at the beginning of the fourth century, prohibited the painting of pictures on the walls of churches. It would have been well if that careful temper to safeguard the purity and the spirituality of Christian worship had always characterised the Church! And when there

¹ v. Westcott, *Epistles of St. John* (3d edition, 1892), p. 340.

has been a violent divorce of religion from the fine arts, as in our own country, it is easily explained as a protest against error deadly to the faith.

As a matter of fact the very opposite of the contention with which we are dealing is true, namely that the Christian faith has been the foster-nurse of all true art. It has been a great calamity that painting should have in common speech appropriated the name of art, as if it stood in a class by itself, instead of being only one of the ways by which man expresses his conceptions of beauty and sublimity. Absolute want of art is of course impossible to a people who live in society. They must have, if nothing else, the arts by which they earn their bread, handicrafts, agriculture and some kind of architecture, and music. As a matter of fact, Christianity brought to art, as to the rest of pagan life, a new power, and gave it a fresh lease. It did not change art, and could not; for the principles of art are fixed in nature and human nature. Christian art took the old subjects, and the old methods, and treated them in a new spirit. It did not differ from pagan art in any technical way: it decorated a sarcophagus in similar fashion as before; but it was inspired by a new spirit, transfigured by a new power. Our religion must express itself in some form, and must use art, unless it wil-

fully mutilate its own life. The ministry of art must be recognised, if religion is to bring all things under the sway of Christ. Religion lays no embargo on art. All nature and all life in every aspect are open as before to the artist. It is *Christian art* when the Christian spirit inspires it.

To see how Christianity used art we only need to think of how the Church laid hold of architecture and opened up to it new possibilities. Modern music also may be said to owe its very existence to the Church. The Church preserved the art of painting through the Middle Ages and trained it for the Renaissance, as can be seen at the time when Missals and illuminated Manuscripts represented the whole art of painting in Europe. The Christian faith is designed to foster and to discipline every power and gift of human nature, and asks for these to be consecrated to the service of Christ. That does not mean to the narrow service of the Church as an ecclesiastical institution, but it does mean the service of the Church as representing the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven. We do not want Christian art to be exclusively associated with ecclesiastical buildings. Rather the opposite: there has been too much of that already for the true good of either art or religion. Anything which limits our thoughts of the presence

of God, which would confine the divine to a spot of earth where some splendid temple is reared, anything which cuts a line through human life and divides places and things into sacred and secular, is unspeakably evil. But anything which induces us to consider the heavens the work of God's hands, the stars which He has ordained, any artistic interpretation that makes human life sacred and the world the habitation of God, any architecture or music or sculpture or painting or poetry which softens and humbles us, makes us reverent and pitiful and loving, these are serving the highest religious purpose—so that we are constrained to say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbaoth, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory."

As to the actual place which art should receive from us in our public worship, that must be settled as a practical question, as to how far it serves the true purpose of worship. It is quite a legitimate position for a man, who loves both art and religion, to say that a highly developed art ornate and sensuous is too dangerous for the Church to encourage; to say, as a great historian declared, that Art stood to Religion like stained glass in a Cathedral, it dims the light while beautifying it. "The longer I live," says Ruskin, "the more I incline to severe judgment

in this matter, and the less I can trust the sentiments excited by painted glass and coloured tiles." There is always a Puritan heart to all spiritual religion, not the puritanism of ignorance and bigotry, but the puritanism of the word, "Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them."

Hearts can be elevated and chastened and prepared for devotion by art, for example, by the contemplation of beauty, but it is only by beauty which has spiritual suggestiveness. As the canopy of heaven can fill the soul with awe and reverential wonder, so some sublime church architecture can appeal to the religious sense; or a beautiful picture may move us, or music may soften us. But the very real danger is that the worshipper gives way to his artistic sensibility, and is absorbed only in the mere beauty. The religious influence of art as an aid to devotion ceases when it is considered as art, when the purpose of creating devotion is forgotten. When the art is treated by us as a proper object for criticism, for praise or blame, we are not using it religiously. The man with special artistic sensibility is not necessarily religious; he has indeed his own special temptations; but he has the temperament which can make religion a finer growth than if he had no music in his soul.

This has to be said that true artistic beauty is abso-

lutely opposed to superstition. Men make idols out of shapeless monsters, not out of works of beauty.¹ The great Italian pictures and statues, even when called into the service of religion, were never used as idols. Everybody felt they *represented* religious facts. Superstition has always made ugliness its medium. Nobody in Italy expects a miracle from a Raphael's Madonna and Child; but crowds do from the ugly Bambino in the Church of Ara-Coeli at Rome. Nobody expected Michael Angelo's Pietà in St. Peter's to move and speak, but crowds stood agape before some hideous wooden figure that winked its eyes. There is great truth and deep philosophy in Goethe's line, "Miracle-working pictures are usually rather poor paintings."² With a great religious work of art those who are capable of appreciating it are satisfied with the artistic beauty or the religious expression. Superstition works by fear, and this is best reached by the gruesome, not by the graceful.

But the true religious use of art is not for aid in worship. The second Commandment still remains true. God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. But if we are

¹ See the description of the making of an idol in *Wisdom of Solomon*, xiii. 13—manifestly inspired by Isaiah.

² Wunderthätige Bilder sind meist nur schlechte Gemälde.

Christ's, if we have given our hearts and lives to Him, if our chief desire is to know God's will and to do it, we can use every noble work of art for delight, for instruction, and praise God anew for the beauty of His world, and for the many things good and true and pure and beautiful and of good report. To the believing mind the world is essentially a beautiful world. Sin alone is the distorting chaotic element which ruins the beauty. When we know God, and love God, we see that He has made all things beautiful in His time; and we see that art can be, nay is, the sworn ally of religion in its warfare against materialism, whether it be in the speculative region, which would limit the human mind to exclusively scientific methods, or in the practical materialism, which makes the money market the test of all things. Art, not in any narrow sense, is the handmaid of religion. As Michael Angelo says, "True painting is only an image of God's perfection, a shadow of the pencil with which He paints, a melody, a striving after harmony." Yes, and if we have harmony of soul with our Heavenly Father, if we are reconciled to God in heart, all things will speak of Him, His power and wisdom and ineffable love. All things are ours, since we are Christ's and Christ is God's.

V

TRUE GREATNESS

Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth; for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord.—
ST. LUKE i. 14, 15.

PARENTS generally desire for their children at least part of the blessing promised to Zacharias concerning his son, who became in after years John the Baptist. Not many would desire to have a John the Baptist for a son. Most would hardly know what to do with him, and would feel what a hedge-sparrow may be supposed to feel about a cuckoo among its commonplace nestlings—a bird of passage from another clime, whose ways are not our ways and whose home is not here. Parents certainly desire their children to be good, but not outrageously or fanatically good: they like the goodness to flow through traditional and conventional channels. We draw the line if it means living in the wilderness, having for raiment camel's hair and a leathern girdle, and for meat locusts and wild honey. Zacharias and Elisabeth might have been pardoned if they had desired for John a little of the

lot of those who are gorgeously appavelled and live delicately and are in kings' courts. For, of course, parents also desire for their children that they should be great; and with the thought great they naturally think of the outward tangible signs of greatness, the pride of place and the pomp of position. They would have them rise in the world: they would have them take a firmer grip of the earth and lift their heads higher and play a larger part in life than themselves.

The father, whose place is fixed and who cannot have many hopes for himself, lives again in his children, desires nothing more than to see them rise, and would give them his shoulders to help them to climb. The mother, the quietest and simplest and humblest, seeking nothing for herself, is infinitely ambitious for her son. She thinks nothing is too good for him and no place too high. If he succeeds it is because his merit is evident: if not it is because his merit is not recognised. Love is blind, they say, but love is beautiful. Many a life of failure has been sweetened and ennobled by it. Even many an ambition, mean and petty in itself, has been glorified by the pathos and the faithfulness of a mother's love. So natural and so well-known are these feelings that it has become a commonplace of speech with us to desire for parents that they may have pleasure in

their children, and for the world that it may be the better for their presence—a paraphrase of this promise to John's father. How blessed it must have been for Zacharias and Elisabeth to have all that promised and ensured, "Thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth; for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord."

Yet many, if they had the wording of the blessing for themselves and theirs, would be inclined to leave out the last clause, "in the sight of the Lord." They have an uncomfortable feeling that they limit the blessing. They would ask that they themselves may have joy and gladness in their son and that many may have cause to rejoice because of him, and they would be happy at the prospect that he should be great. There they would stop with the haunting sense that "great in the sight of the Lord" carries a sting with it somewhere, and reduces the scope of all that went before.

It is true that in a sense it *does* limit it. It is the very real fear that this kind of greatness does not always mean great as the world counts greatness which would give many of us pause. Confess it. What is your highest desire for your children, fathers and mothers? Of course that they should be good, a pleasure to you and a profit to others; and

of course that they should be as great in their own line of life as possible. But think of some possible alternatives. Would you have them good at the cost of the coveted greatness? Would you prefer them to be nothing in the world, even what are called failures, provided they retained their simplicity and purity of heart? Would you have them true to right and to God, if it meant that others might have to blush for their downcome in life? It is a hard question to put, and one you would perhaps like to shake off your mind, but put it; and all of us can put it to ourselves about ourselves. Would you desire for your dearest and for yourself the better part of goodness and truth, if it meant absolutely the loss of your day-dreams of the future? Would you ask for them to be great in the sight of the Lord, if the construction of your own fears be put upon the words?

Think what the limit was in the case of John. According to the very terms of the blessing from the angel's lips, it meant that he was to be singular and to be a Nazarene—and how we shrink from anything betokening fanaticism! And his work does not read like a record of greatness, turning many of the children of Israel to the Lord, making ready the people, only preparing the way for a greater than himself.

Of his life we know something from the few vivid touches of the gospel narrative—otherwise an almost nameless life—a life of privation and solitude, living in the desert till his words took on them the rough edge of the desert wind, and his message, like Elijah's, had in it the whirlwind and the fire. A nine days' wonder, and then men forgot him or spoke of him with a shake of the head. Failure closed in on his work, and doubt gathered on his heart. Another change of the scene, and the big soul which needed the wilderness to breathe in, the son of the desert born for freedom, is caged like a wild beast, kept till his eye dimmed and his heart lost its reckoning—the Lord's greatness crushed by the world's greatness! John, heaven's messenger, in the power of Herod, the weak tool of a wicked woman! His bleeding head the plaything of a child; his headless trunk buried hastily by a faithful few. The brief outline of his story known only for another's sake—life in the desert, death in a prison—leaving nothing behind him but the memory of a name. That is what the prophetic promise meant to him. There were quite evidently limits in John's case from our view of greatness. The circumstances of his lot fall far short of our ideal; though he was to be great, and that he *was* great the testimony is borne

by lips that could not lie, "I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

Now, to be great in the sight of the Lord is to be great in the eyes of Him who vieweth the reality of things, before whom only truth can live. To be great in the sight of the Lord is, and must be, the only true greatness. Than this there is none other. The case is prejudged from the beginning. Before we look into it, before we discuss types of greatness, from the very nature of the case, there can be no other conclusion. To account for the discrepancy then we have to consider not whether God's standard is wrong, but whether our idea of greatness has not departed from that standard.

Greatness of all kinds appeals to us. The lower the type of greatness is, the sooner its appeal is felt. The attraction of mere physical strength is appreciated at once. The intellectual greatness which works by force is also soon recognised. Military genius, for example, is hailed at once, its results are so palpable and evident. Bonaparte could strike armies with sudden panic by the magic of his name. But the higher we look in the scale of greatness the less evident its signs become, and the longer it takes for a reputation to become universal—until when

we come to this highest point of "greatness in the sight of the Lord" men are able to question its very existence. To do some feat of strength, to show yourself great in some sleight of hand will make men gape at once. It takes longer to convince them of your superior faculties; and a lifetime will not always reveal the greatness of character. The higher the regions of human life you explore, the less open to exploration they are. There are some things you can say about a man as soon as you see him: there are other things you can add when you have come to know him: but not at once can you speak of his inward life, of his soul, and character: not at once, if ever, can you declare him great or small in the sight of the Lord. This explains our many mistakes in this region, why the Pharisees did not recognise it in John, and why we are not so sure of his type of greatness being the highest and the best.

What it means to be great in the sight of the Lord can be seen from a few of the contrasts between it and the world's view. For one thing—and this cuts at the very root of the matter—it is nothing on the outside, in the circumstances or condition, however favourable. It is not in rank, position, wealth, influence, words which mean so much to us. These outward gifts do not exclude it, but it is other than

they. It is not even in such feelings as ambition, which enable a man to rise in the world. The world says, If you would be great begin by apeing greatness, and by getting to yourself as many of the signs of greatness as possible. "He that would be great," says Jesus, "let him be the servant of all." We feel as if there was an impassable gulf between the two ideals.

Further, not only can circumstances not give this greatness, but circumstances cannot take it away. Wolsey when he fell from the favour of King Henry and lost his position had to say with a sigh, "A long farewell to all my greatness;" but the more you take away from a man great not in the sight of a king but of the Lord, the greater he appears. The more he loses, the more he has. John the Baptist in the dungeon stripped of everything was as great as ever before. When he awaited the headsman's vile blow he was still great in the sight of the Lord.

Another contrast is also a marked one. To this greatness all men are called. In the world there are only a few places vacant where greatness can shine, only a few niches in the temple. The Valhalla has room for only a very few heroes. Cemeteries in plenty there are, but only one Westminster Abbey. Celebrities must be rare from the nature of the case.

There are only one or two blue ribbons of each profession. Only the few can have the outward signs of greatness, and each place filled takes away one other chance from the rest of the competitors. The many are nameless that the few may be great. But here it is different, *all* may be great. The success of one does not imply a less chance for others. It is rather the reverse, as your success is an encouragement to others. There is no limit to the places, because it is not a question of place at all. There is no lack of noble titles but a lack of claimants for them. There is room for all in this Valhalla of heroes. The Calendar of saints is not nearly filled. From the worldly point of view some men are born to greatness, some attain to greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. But here all were born to be great, born to stand erect before God; and yet the greatness cannot be thrust upon us, because it is a vital thing to be wrought out in the heart and character and life between a man and God. It is not what a man has, but what he *is*. It is not his possessions, his reputation, his position—it is himself. There is a chief end for every man as well as for man in the mass. God has made it possible for every man to fulfil the end of his being, to be great, not as the world counts great but as He counts great.

When Longfellow died, Emerson, who had been his friend for at least half a century, went to his funeral. Emerson, who then was himself aged and frail, with failing powers and his memory almost entirely lost, gave utterance to a remark pathetic for the occasion but eternally true. Looking to the coffin, he said, "The gentleman who lies there was a beautiful soul, but I have forgotten his name." With the failing faculties which presaged his own death the recollection of a life-long friendship summed itself up not in his name, not in his work, not in his reputation, but in the memory of what he was himself. Happy he who has so lived that when all else is forgotten, even his name, the memory of his true life can never die. His name was reckoned among earth's great ones or it was not—I have forgotten his name—but he was a beautiful soul. That is to be great in the sight of the Lord.

We need our standards revised. If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged, but if we would judge ourselves it must be by the ultimate judgment which is as "in the sight of the Lord," which looks not to outward place but to inward life. The final judgment is of character, of heart, and soul. In the light of this standard mere cleverness must pale before goodness, and even mind cannot

contest place with character. In the light of this standard life is judged by service, and service is measured by love. If we put the emphasis on the right thing, if we see that the absolute test of life is a spiritual one, we realise that a man may never gain any sort of celebrity and yet be essentially great; he may lose the prizes of the world and yet have fulfilled his chief end. In view of that final judgment, what though life may seem to be a failure and success has eluded the grasp and the world's greatness has been denied, if our religion has been our life and if the verdict at the last is also the welcome, Come thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord; for thou hast been faithful—thou art great in the sight of the Lord?

VI

THE PROTEST OF RELIGION

So did not I, because of the fear of God.—NEHEMIAH v. 15.

THESE Memoirs of Nehemiah reveal a man with the qualities of greatness. He was a man of action, resolute, practical, able to plan a great work, and with energy to carry it out. He was also a statesman, wise and prudent in the schemes he formulated, taking all the facts of the case into account. There was an imaginative side to his nature, enabling him to look forward to the fulfilment of the dream of his life, to establish the poor, depressed, returned exiles into something approaching to a nation. And the root of every quality he possessed, the groundwork of his character, and the inspiring mainstay of his energy, was his religion, his abiding faith in the living God. The task he set before himself, for the sake of which he gave up his place as a favourite courtier of the King of Babylon, was a severe and unattractive one. The miserable remnant of the people, who had returned from captivity to a desolate country and a ruined city and jealous, spiteful neigh-

bours, were heartless and faithless. To command them, and inspire them, and lead them, and love them, meant an exhausting drain on every power of body and mind and soul. The works that he did, how he built the wall of the city in the face of languor at home and enmity abroad, how he put heart into the disorganised mass of the people, how he set himself to reform the internal conditions of the country, redressing the wrongs of the poor, abolishing the abuses of the money-lenders, purifying the city from the sins of a city, restoring the law of God as the law of the people, are they not written in this short book of the Memoirs of Nehemiah? I commend to you the reading of it as the story of how a brave and true man did his day's work in the fear of God.

One feature of his rule I desire to bring before you, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the attitude it represents. He was the official governor, appointed by the King of Babylon, and so was entitled by all the laws of custom and the ethics of the time to exact from the governed the salary and emoluments of a governor. It could have been defended by precedence, that other governors had done it. It could have been defended by the principle that the labourer was worthy of his hire. But the

people were miserably poor, and there were terrible abuses. They had to borrow money, and to pay very high rates of interest, and the wealthier classes exacted the interest cruelly, selling children for slaves when the money could not be paid. So Nehemiah kept his hands clean of even what was his legal right, that he might be able to appeal with greater force to the wealthier Jews to deal kindly with the people in their distress. He was able to make the noble boast that all the time he was governor, for twelve years, he had not eaten the bread of governor. The country was squeezed and ground down to pay the tribute money to Babylon, and he, though the Babylonian governor, was a Jew, with the heart of a Jew, and would not add to the burden. He was able to say with true pride that though other governors had taken the bread and wine and silver of their office, and let their servants lord it over the people, "so did not I."

His object was not to court popularity, to be thought well of by the people, to gain credit as a high-minded man, but from a sense of duty, from conscience, because of the higher interests of the land, because of true patriotism, and true religion, because of the fear of God. His knowledge of God's hatred of oppression made him thus considerate. His

conscience was enlightened enough to know that "he that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker." This position of his reveals his character as not even his great works and constant activities on behalf of the people do. This purely negative thing, the thing he would not do, is far more of a self-revelation of the man than even the things he actually did.

This is a true principle in life so far as it goes. Not that the final judgment of any character can be a negative one; not that a man who only refrains from evil can be even in the same sphere as the man who cleaves to good. Not that a mere protest against wrong, a dissent from what seems sinful, can be tests of the real worth of a character or a life. But at the same time such a protest or dissent is often like a rift into the unseen life, and reveals the principles on which it is lived.

A man is known by what he does *not* do, by the limit below which he will not go, by the company he does not keep, by the customs he will not conform with, by the opposition aroused in him by the things with which he will have no complicity. The righteous man described in the first Psalm and declared blessed, shows his righteousness first of all in the things he will not do; "he walketh not in the counsel

of the ungodly, standeth not in the way of sinners, sitteth not in the seat of the scornful." Righteousness has always a negative side, and must have, so long as there is evil in the world. Righteousness has always a face for the foe, so long as there is a foe to fight. One aspect of religion is the peace of faith, the comfort and strength and consolation it brings. But another aspect, and a universal one, is the fight of faith, the strife against principalities and powers of evil, the ceaseless struggle against the dominant influences of the world, the conflict which the higher wages against the lower and the lower against the higher.

In the long run, of course, it is a man's positives which count, but his negatives often give an easy and ready test of his position. The principle must not be carried too far; as the temptation arises to make religion merely a negation of wrong, instead of true fulness of life in good. Also, the principle must not be used too indiscriminately, as it is inclined to be applied to all sorts of non-essential things, and righteousness is limited to not doing this, and refraining from that, and abstaining from this other. But we can keep it within its legitimate bounds, if we never lose sight of the fact that virtue is not absence of evil but presence of good.

With these limitations then the principle can be easily applied as a rough-and-ready test. We can tell at once something of a man's honour if he for no consideration could tell a lie, if we could not imagine him, if he could not imagine himself telling a lie. Even with men of the world, there is a standard of honour, rules of morals which a self-respecting man will not break. Every man, except a reprobate, must draw the line somewhere, will say about something, I am bad enough, but not so low as that. We have all to some extent an external conscience, if we have nothing else which we can call conscience, the principles of our set, the standard of the society we move in. There is, alas, a limit, above which we rarely rise. Is there a limit below which we would not willingly fall? And what is that limit? We all draw a line somewhere; where do we draw it? Make a list of the things you draw the line at, the things you consider sin to you, the things you will not do. What in the life round about you do you dissent from? What are you ready to protest against? It will be useful to know exactly where you stand in the education of conscience.

It would be useful for you to know what are the things with which you on no account will have complicity, and why? In what are you non-conformists,

standing up against the tendencies of your world? In what are you individual, thinking for yourself, acting for yourself, deciding for yourself? In what do you show your independence of character, the back-bone of a man, with a conscience of his own, with a will of his own, saying No, everlasting no, on some subjects, No, everlasting no, to some enticements? You don't know that you live intellectually or morally, till you have learnt negation, denial, dissent, protest, non-conformity. Live fish swim against the stream, says the proverb, dead ones go with it. Do you know what it is to have earned the enmity of some for your inflexible, unyielding adherence to principle? A man is as well known by his enemies as by his friends. Do you know the joy of a good conscience, because you have been true to it in spite of temptation? Edmund Burke, when he had lost his seat in Bristol, because he had been too independent, and had voted for measures according to conscience and not according to the dictates of others, said that he found consolation and reward in the very charges brought against him, and which caused his defeat. "In every accident," said he in his magnificent language, "which may happen through life, in pain, in sorrow, in depression and distress, I will call to mind this accusation, and be comforted."

They are words worthy even of Burke, with a touch of the manly pride, and glorious self-respect, of Nehemiah, Others may have done it; I do not judge them, they have their own conscience; but so did not I, thank God! This sturdy independence and proud despisal of opposition is seen in many forms, but in some form or other is needed to give stability to a character. Heine, as different in temperament and life and principles from Burke as could well be, gives utterance to a similar thought. Speaking of something as a public duty to which he considered he had consecrated his life, adds in his keen, biting manner, "The hatred of my enemies may serve as pledge that I have fulfilled this duty truly and honourably. I will ever show myself worthy of that hatred." Some of the men who never had an enemy never deserved one. A fine, easy, affable tolerance may be only indifference to moral distinctions. The reputations whose praise is in every one's mouth may be built on lack of principle.

We are too pliant and flexible, and flabby. The world's true benefactors have always been Protesters, Protestants, recusants. Great movements of thought have ever sprung from dissent, dissent from the established and traditional and conventional. The Christian faith spread all over the world, wherever men's

consciences were awakened, so that they could no longer continue in the old faith and practice, when they said about heathen practice, So do not I. The same is true of every period of freedom of thought and extension of religion, as with Luther at the Reformation, "So help me God, I can no other." For a strong, healthy, moral nature there must be this individuality, with a life of its own, able to stand alone, sure that

Because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

'At the same time mere dissent, mere protest, mere abstinence is nothing in itself. Mere negative virtue is worthless unless it is an indication of deep-seated positive principle. Righteousness is not all negation. All protest must have a positive, an inward source. It must have its roots in a love of truth for its own sake. It must have its motive not in crankiness of mind, or love of singularity, or display of individuality. Some men's protest of what they think evil is spoiled by sourness, or self-righteousness, or crabbed singularity of temper. "So did not I," said Nehemiah, "because of the fear of God." His attitude was the fruit of principle. His

protest was religious, because of higher dictates. God's law was so present with him that he could not act contrary to it. It was because he was so consumed with the desire to please God that he never thought of pleasing himself. His heart was fixed, and so his feet took the path of God's commandments. God's law was the rule of his life and so he found it easy to deny himself. The fear of God cast out all other fear.

The only effective way of expelling evil is by inserting good. The only successful way of abhorring the evil is by cleaving to the good. The secret of strengthening the life to resist temptation is by the introduction of a new motive. The love of the higher makes the lower impossible. The lower drops off as the higher is assumed. The new affection kills the old lusts. The new affection inspires to new obedience. The love of Christ drives out the old loves. The love of Christ gives new desires, new ambitions, new pleasures. It gives the whole life a new standpoint, which alters the complete view. So that it is a precise statement of fact to say, Once I was blind, but now I see. I loved things which now I hate. I hated things which now I love. Once I pleased self, and thought of self, and pampered self, but now I turn round about, and put my feet

to another road. Once I did these things, which it is a grief to remember, once I did so in easy unconcern, but now so do I not, because of the fear of God, because of the love of Jesus, whose I am and whom I serve.

VII

THE SERPENT AND THE DOVE

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.—ST. MATTHEW X. 16.

IT seems impossible to combine these seemingly opposite qualities; and yet in the true culture of character, as in all other forms of culture, the ideal is balance of opposing elements. The complete character must be full-orbed, with no undue development on one side, poised amid the warring forces of human nature, "below the storm-mark of the sky, above the flood-mark of the deep." The difficulty of life is to live, to live truly and completely, to make the most of one's self, to become the highest character that is possible. Practically, we see the difficulty of combining the opposites in such an injunction as this of our text—of duty to self and duty to others, to be wise for self-protection and simple in our relations with men. It is easy to be one-sided, here as elsewhere. It is easy to specialise in character, to develop one side at the expense of the soul's complete life.

Our Lord was not stating a paradox when He asked His disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. For one thing He demanded it from them as a necessity for their work. As followers of the Gentle One of Nazareth and as witnesses for the Gospel of Love they would naturally be simple and guileless in heart. That was the sort of life and character they were called upon to show forth to the world. That was their business. But as reformers to overturn the world, to invade the strongholds they would have to meet the world's wisdom with wisdom as great. They were face to face with terrible odds. They were sent into the midst of wolves, and if He, the Shepherd, was Himself as a sheep led to the slaughter, what were they His feeble flock? The words were meant for a warning in the situation in which the Apostles were about to be placed, to beware of men, the hatred and malice and prejudice of men. But like most of Christ's words they have an application beyond the particular occasion. Here we have, not only a rule for the disciples' guidance in their first missionary enterprise, but also the practical ideal for character.

These two qualities of prudence and simplicity, wisdom and innocence, seem to be opposite and almost irreconcilable; and yet the practical reconcile-

ment is necessary for truly successful life. Their union is also necessary for the highest type of character. They are not often met combined in their due proportion in men. Indeed many of the mistakes of life occur through want of either of these two sides. A disciple of Jesus must, to begin with, have the harmlessness or simplicity of the dove. To present that to the world is the chief function. The Christian faith is the religion of the child-heart. The Kingdom is hid from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. Only the simple in heart and the pure in life can keep God with them. Not by might nor by power did the gospel make its way, but by weakness, by sweet innocence, and simple faith, and generous love. Still, there is another element in the Kingdom, "In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and His disciples must not remain babes except in the knowledge of sin. "I would have you," says Paul to the Romans, "wise unto that which is good and simple unto that which is evil." Christians must face the world, meet it, and overcome it. They need prudence and discretion and forethought in the great world-policy of the gospel. They need consecrated intellect, as well as consecrated life.

Now, the difficulty which the disciples had in reconciling these opposites in their missionary enterprise corresponds to the difficulty we all have in some form or other. Business men have their practical problem in these days of reconciling integrity with keen competition. We have all to arrange unflinching honesty with necessary self-interest. Even in religious work the same problem must be solved of combining prudence with absolute truthfulness. Something of the wisdom of the serpent is needed to insinuate the truth, to gain men to guilelessness by holy guile. In the culture of individual character the same problem in some shape or other emerges for us all—how to be simple in heart and pure in aim, and at the same time display the wary caution needed to walk unfalteringly and live truly; how to be generous to others and yet to be wise even in our generosity so as not to do evil instead of good; how to keep ourselves unspotted from the world and yet to use the world as not abusing it; how to be prudent without being cunning, to be wise without being selfish, to be good without being foolish, to be simple without being weak. I may not have succeeded in translating into words the particular difficulty of each in your business or your work or your study or your home life, but you can each translate

it for yourself. You feel that the difficulty of your life is to get and keep a balance, a harmony, to avoid the temptation of extremes.

We say in common language that the union of head and heart is the highest type of man. To have too little of either means unstable equilibrium and means an ultimate weakness of character. Clear intellect which is only ambitious, great force of mind which is only selfish, lead sooner or later to an unlovely character and to an ultimate failure. While on the other hand the cooing innocence of the dove and sweetness of nature and the best-intentioned purpose have often been neutralised in good work by the want of a little sense. How many soft-hearted and wooden-headed schemes for the welfare of the race have been concocted! Dove-like innocence and simplicity, for one thing, must not be allowed to shut our eyes to the existence of evil. The serpent is in the garden and has left his slimy trail on the very tree of knowledge which we must eat. No good can come of weak ignoring of facts. Both in life and work we need to remember that there are evil men in the world of whom to beware and wolves which menace the sheep.

We have seen, then, the two factors, necessary even for practical life, and we can see at once how

lop-sidedness of character arises from the want of either of the factors.

(1) One sort of lop-sidedness is the common one, to be all prudence and sagacity, without simplicity of mind and purity of heart. Men of the world too often let the serpent in them swallow up the dove. They may have great success, as the world counts success, for they have no qualms of conscience. They are not hampered by the problem of reconciling simplicity with prudence. They escape the problem by omitting one of the factors. In the affairs of life, in politics and commerce and every branch of activity, these men often have what seems like complete success. They are turned out of the rough-and-ready refining pot of public opinion as pure gold, and the time is not yet when they are seen to be base metal at heart—but the time *shall* be. Such a man would smile at the notion that a man can be too clever, can have too much of the serpent's wisdom. He would smile at the notion that he has anything to learn from the simplicity of the simple man whom he despises, from the harmlessness of the dove or the weakness of a little child. He cannot see how the foolishness of God can be wiser than men. From of old, has the world seen the quick feet of schemers stumble into the pit they

have digged. From of old has the world seen devices come to nought and the devisers overreach themselves, sometimes even by "negligence fit for a fool to fall by." Mere cleverness is a fatal gift; mere ambition brings its own nemesis. The serpent's head is crushed by the heel of a child. The omission which was at first an aid to success becomes a fatal loss, leaving a barren life, a bankrupt character, an impoverished soul. That is not success which does not enrich the soul and add strength to the spiritual nature. And we need to remember that there is nothing spiritual in itself about the wisdom of the serpent.

(2) But our Lord did not expect His disciples to make that mistake. He did not look upon them as wolves to learn from the sheep and as serpents to learn from the dove. But the opposite. His object was to warn them against the other mistake, the other form of lop-sidedness. That is, to neglect the prudence necessary both for character and for work. The danger they were warned against was that of being foolishly simple, over-confident, foolhardy, courting failure by expecting the impossible. The warning applies to us to-day in many ways. There is a danger of divorcing religion from life, the actual needs and facts of life. We can make religion a

mystical thing with no basis of reason and no outcome in practice. We may neglect the command to be ready to give good grounds for the faith that is in us. Or we may have the coward's faith and the sluggard's trust, thinking that we are not called to devise means and work our brain, but must leave all things to God. Some things pass by the name of faith which God disowns. We are called to live in the world *for* the world. We need wisdom to do God's work. We need wisdom to guard our own faith and protect our own simplicity of heart and save our own Christian character. If we have not something of the prudence of the serpent we will not keep the harmlessness of the dove very long. A well-meaning good sort of man who is foolish and blundering, can contrive to do a great deal of mischief in his time. Ignorance is no excuse for mistakes. In Browning's pregnant line, "Ignorance is not innocence but sin." For a useful life and for a strong character wisdom is needed and nothing can excuse the neglect of seeking it. No man is called to be a fool—who can help it. That may be received as an axiom. There is no virtue in stupidity.

There is a mawkish sentimentalism in some forms of literature which seems to make goodness synonymous with silliness. Even Dickens, a master in his

art, makes many of his good people border more or less on lunacy, nearly always delightfully gullible and impossibly foolish. The folly in some way is supposed to enhance the goodness. But in practical life a man does not need to have a soft head in order to avoid having a hard heart. All such conceptions are due to a false notion of the Christian life. If that life is serious to you, you will know that you must devote every power you have to attain and maintain it. If the fight of faith is to you a fight and not a parade, a real warfare, you will appreciate the value of strategy. If Christ's work is an earnest aim of your heart you will be careful and prudent and fruitful in expedients to extend it. Why, a man has to be careful of his reputation if only for the sake of his work. He has to be prudent to avoid needless offence and to witness silently to the gospel of love. If the Christ-like character is a passion with you, you will be wise as the serpent to refuse to be tempted away from your desire. Hear Paul's sane advice, the echo of his Master's words, "Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men."

Think of Paul's own life as an illustration of his words, his combination of zeal and knowledge, of

unwavering faith and great statesmanship, ingenuous in character and ingenious in plans to bring men to Christ, simple and sincere in faith, wise and prudent in life. Indeed such a man runs the risk of being misunderstood. His simplicity is treated as duplicity, his wisdom is called cunning, his innocence is deemed design. The world cannot comprehend the higher unity of his complex character.

Our Lord Himself is our great example here as elsewhere, combining both factors in harmony. What instances of His wisdom we could recall, and yet where was there such purity of purpose and innocence of heart and perfect uprightness of life? He remains for us the Perfect Man, wise and simple, strong and tender, winsome in His integrity, graceful in His strength, with depth of nature and charm of manner. The Christian, who cannot be satisfied till Christ lives in him, should "see life steadily and see it whole." He should look at life through Christ's eyes. He need not be troubled by these conflicting elements which go to the building up of character. He knows that it is Christ's purpose and desire for him to grow in grace and knowledge and Christ-like nature. He finds the unity of opposites in union with his Lord. He surrenders his will to the will of God who does not leave His work imperfect. He

learns from Christ that true simplicity is the true wisdom, and purity is the true prudence. He gives his life to goodness and therefore uses all he has and is as gifts from God and instruments for God, for the triumph of goodness in himself and in the world, for the coming of Christ's Kingdom and the culture of a Christian character.

Christ is the great Reconciler, the Prince of Peace in every domain. He reconciles man to God. He reconciles man to man. He reconciles the most opposing qualities of human nature to form Himself anew in the individual man. Life in Christ is harmony, the balance of powers which we have seen we need, the true culture of the soul. If a man give himself to Christ in full submission he finds peace, not only peace with God and peace with men, but also the rarer peace with himself. If we are true to our allegiance He can make it possible for a man to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. There at least we have our practical ideal.

VIII

A MISUNDERSTOOD PROPHET

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.—JEREMIAH i. 6.

THE Prophet Jeremiah is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the Bible characters. His very name has made a word in English, *jeremiad*, which means to us a tirade, a long and tedious complaint always suggesting that the grief is a bit of an affectation and certainly is tiresome to the hearer. I suppose there is no book of the prophets which is less read than this, and yet here we have a presentation of one of the greatest of the prophets and one who when understood, is personally the most interesting of them all. In fact, the *message* of the book is the picture it gives of the *man*. Its chief value is not that it teaches new religious truths; for practically all the doctrines peculiar to Jeremiah are to be found in the other and earlier prophets. The value of the book lies in the personality revealed to us in the author. The religious truths he teaches get their special power from the personal note.

Jeremiah took his place in Israel's spiritual succession at a most momentous time in the history of his country. The prophet he is most like is Hosea. They both lived at times when the fortunes of their country were desperate, and the morale of the people was at the lowest ebb. The one lived at the decline and fall of Israel, the other at the decline and fall of Judah. They had both a fine sensitiveness of nature, capable of the highest joys which brought them the keenest sorrows. In their books there is a cry of anguish breaking out in spite of self-mastery, a grief that cannot be comforted. Their genius was essentially lyrical. They were by nature *poets* rather than preachers, but fated not to sing songs of love and happiness and peace and beauty, but to preach doom. Gentle lovers of their fellows and lovers of their country, they were forced into loneliness and forced to endure persecution and contempt, and forced also to see the ruin that was coming. But God led them both to the deeper sources of life and to the wider vision of His great redemptive purpose. To both the key to all the pain of their own lives and to all the mystery of providence and to all the history of grace was love, a love that demanded the highest of its lovers and gave of itself in utter abandonment of sacrifice. Like all other prophets

they asserted the sacredness of law, the eternal righteousness of God, the inevitable punishment of sin, the inexorable demands of justice, the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, but in these two there is a more personal note, a tenderness which pleads tirelessly for God, an intuition of the forgiving love of God which to us has reached its climax in the great revelation of Jesus Christ. Beyond the appeal to the conscience there is the appeal to the heart. There is a melting, moving tone in all their pleading.

I have said that the historical situation explains much of Jeremiah's work. His eyes were forced to watch the gathering of doom and he had to see the fulfilment of his own doleful prophecies. His life was a long martyrdom. His message was almost a gospel of despair. He had to suffer misunderstandings, revilements, persecution, and, worst of all, his message was rejected. He was sneered at as a mar-joy and set aside as a pessimist. His book reveals a keenly susceptible and emotional man. His rôle of prophet was not of his own choosing, and all through his long life there is seen the struggle of the man against the prophet. His was a gentle soul, forced for God and truth to appear hard. A loving, affectionate nature, he had to stand without friends

and had to give up the thought even of a home of his own. The word of the Lord to him for his work's sake was, "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place." His was a tender heart fallen upon evil days and evil tongues. He seems to have been naturally a timid man of almost womanly character, and when we think of the kind of work he had to do it is not hard to understand how he is a prophet of tears.

But the common sneer at him as the weeping prophet is the fruit of ignorance, ignorance both of the man and his work. Yet there is no excuse in Jeremiah's case for not knowing something of the real man he was. No prophet reveals himself in his words as he does. None is so personal, so autobiographic, so full of little self-revelations, showing his own thoughts and desires and striving and sorrow. We can read much more of his inner history than we can of Isaiah or any other prophet. We can gather together his spiritual experiences and can learn his character. From this point of view his prophecy is almost the history of a soul, the story of his own inward life, and there is no life in the Old Testament records so full of human interest and so full of lessons for spiritual men of all times.

Jeremiah's life to us begins with his call to the

work and office of a prophet. All that we know about him when the call came to him is that he was a very young man, "a child" he calls himself, that he lived at Anathoth, a village about an hour's walk from Jerusalem, and that he was of a priestly family. This last fact is a suggestive one. It represents part of his pain, since it was part of his work to contend against the priesthood of his day. The priestly race were usually and naturally the defenders of traditionalism, and yet it is worth remembering that more than once God chose His instruments from among them to revivify religion. Ezekiel, for example, was a priest in active service when he was called to be a prophet. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." The Spirit of God selecteth men who are fit spiritually without respect of person or place, calling Elisha from the plough, Ezekiel from the altar, Amos from following the herd, Jeremiah from a priest's household, and Zephaniah of the blood royal itself. There is no barrier in position or want of it, if a man will respond to the call and be not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Not at once did Jeremiah accept the call. He felt that the impulse was divine, but questioned his own ability to sustain the great part. He knew what it meant to be a prophet. He was of a timid, shrinking

disposition, and thought himself not fit for the terrible responsibility. He fought against the impulse. "Alas, O Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." This was more than the natural diffidence of youth. It was not mock humility, nor was it a light refusal, but the sense of weakness which comes from a feeling of the importance of the work. With Jeremiah it was a complaint of real pain. He was a man of peace, and to be a prophet unto the nations, to harden his brow like flint against his brethren, to tell of woe when he would fain speak peace, was an alarming prospect. He had no desire to enter the arena, to contend with priests and false prophets and princes and people. He would rather live his life of faith in quiet. This was the grief of his life; he was a tender-hearted man who craved love and had to drive it from him. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. Every one doth curse me."

To understand the book we must have insight and sympathy with the kind of man he was; for the message of the book is the message of this man's personality. At the beginning and all through we find evidences of this struggle against his office. If he could have remained a simple priest, living in retire-

ment and serving at the altar quietly! He might have had a beautiful life in his country village, and passed calmly through a useful lot. He might have communed with nature and with nature's God. He might have written some sweet poetry with that pensive touch, the touch of lovely melancholy and sombre peace, which the world in some of its moods loves. He was a lyrical genius whose note was drowned in the loud crash of the world's passions. Nothing is more characteristic of the man than his lament, "O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men that I might leave my people and go from them." This looks like a quaint conceit worthy of a cavalier poet. He seems to be indulging in the luxury of woe and finding poetic joy in poetic pains. To think so is to misunderstand and misjudge him. It is true that Jeremiah's genius is lyrical, and that now and again, as in these words, with natural art he strikes out music from his sorrow. It is true that a prophet of a robuster and harder type would have done his work with less tears. But this is only part of the tragedy of his life. He whose inclination was elsewhere is constrained from

duty and love to take up a lifelong work which goes against the grain.

From his sensitiveness and gentleness and timidity we would think him the last man for the work. The natural man does not seem built in the prophetic mould. From our surface view of things we can hardly imagine a more unfortunate selection to the prophetic rôle than this of Jeremiah. A youth, who feels himself a child and unable to speak, sent to face a nation with words of doom! A man whose craving is for a quiet resting place in the wilderness far from the strife of tongues, who hates the clamour of the market place, forced to take part in politics and bruise his soul with every scheme of rulers and every movement of the crowd! No man felt his want of qualifications like Jeremiah himself. Again and again throughout his life he is weighted by his insufficiency and gives way to despondent thoughts. He felt like Job, stricken and deserted. "Cursed be the day wherein I was born. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee, making *him* very glad"—with a terrible emphasis of irony on his father's joy contrasted with his own sorrow. Now it was no weak whimper, this, at his unhappiness. What oppressed him all through and made him pause at the first

was his keen *sense of his unfitness* to be a prophet. He was not the kind of man, he thought, to do that kind of work, and we almost agree with him. Yet we see that God justified his ways, and that the progressive revelation was advanced by Jeremiah at a time when no other kind of man could have been so used, and that the whole church is richer from his life. We see in him the most human of all the prophets of Israel, who in his person more than any other foreshadowed Him who was more pre-eminently still the Man of sorrows, whose pure soul felt even more keenly the sin of His brethren.

There is a lesson here for all, who feel in any degree the tyranny of their outward lot. There are hard facts against which we chafe and fret. We are set to tasks which we would fain refuse, or we are placed in surroundings which we think unsuitable. We are all tempted to turn to the easy ways of escaping the burden. We can learn from Jeremiah the paramount claims of duty. Learn to give up all the undisciplined desires and unchastened dreams after self-satisfaction. Learn to submit personal inclinations to the great call to be true to God and the right. And if it be the will of God that you must tread a path that you chose not, from which the weak heart shrinks, know that the blessedness promised by

Christ is yours, and cherish the sweet thought of a closer communion with Him who also was made perfect through suffering.

We have seen enough already to know how unjust is the common idea of the weeping prophet. It is not private sorrow, but the grief of a true patriot. Other prophets had often to speak words of hope, but his message was one of doom. He looks forward to the terrible time coming and hears the wail of the exile, "the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people from a land that is very far off." But more awful to the prophet's pure soul than the thought of their future punishment is the knowledge of their present sin, and the experience that he was only a voice crying in the wilderness unregarded.

We have said that the great message of the book is the story of the man, and this is chiefly because of the way in which the sorrow of Jeremiah was used in transforming the thought of religion. The long struggle of his life drove him into a closer fellowship with God, so that he came to something which can be called in a partial sense "*the gospel before Christ.*" He is the first prophet of the new covenant, and foreshadowed the evangel. The sorrow of his life drove him deeper into a personal relation to God. If Jeremiah's contribution to revelation were

to be summed up in a phrase it would be, with a caution about the danger of phrases, that he discovered the soul, that he found the true individual. That is to say, before him religion was largely a national and social thing and he made it more individual and personal. Historically, religious development is from the social to the individual. Men had to find their souls, to comprehend their separate spiritual existence. In the history of religion we see a growth from outward conceptions of it to inward, from material forms to spiritual life; and this is done through making religion more personal. In early Jewish religion Jehovah was the God of the Jews. They were the holy nation, theirs was the Holy Land. The mass of the people looked on religion as a public thing in which they took their part as members of the nation and received their share of benefit. Jehovah had made a covenant with their fathers. Jeremiah, to whom it was given at the crisis of the nation when it was falling to pieces and when great disaster came, saw that the old promise could not be relied on as they had once interpreted it. He saw that the old covenant with Israel had failed.

In Jeremiah's mind there were two opposite beliefs. The first was belief in God's justice and holi-

ness and hatred of sin, and therefore he believed in the destruction of Israel. The nation was rotten at heart. He saw that corruption was the prelude to death. Israel must be scattered and winnowed as in a threshing machine. Yet along with that strong moral conviction there was faith in God's promise. Their history, he was assured, would not go for nothing, and therefore he believed in the future of Israel. But how? How reconcile these two beliefs? The problem to Jeremiah was not the exile but *the sin*. God could bring back Israel from exile. But what good would it do to bring back Israel if it be the same Israel? The seeds of ruin are in them and can bring forth nothing but death. How can an initiative of good in this sin-sick nation be brought? Brooding lovingly over Israel, he had revealed to him Israel's hope. He gained spiritual comprehension and saw that the Israel of the future would not be an Israel of kindred blood but of kindred souls. Israel henceforth would be a church rather than a nation. He saw that instead of the old covenant which God made with their fathers, there would be a new covenant which God would make with every soul that would meet Him.

The first step in this great revelation was the knowledge that morality is an individual concern.

God and the human soul is the watchword. "In those days they shall say no more the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity, every man that eateth, his teeth shall be set on edge." The inevitableness of sin breeding sin had formerly oppressed Jeremiah, one generation only wallowing deeper in the mire than the previous one. He had said, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spot?" But Jeremiah now sees that at each point there is a possibility of breaking away from the power and doom of sin. He sees that morality is individual and that God judges a man not for the sins of others but for his own sin.

That was but a step. It did not solve the problem, how can the possibility become fact and a sinful people become holy? Then in the despair of love he arrived at this great climax of prophecy. The old covenant was broken, but (and this thought so familiar to us was the wonderful thing that came to the prophet), "I will make a new covenant, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts and in their heart will I write it, and I will be their God and they shall be My people." And as for the problem of sin, there will be a new beginning altogether, the past shall be put away, obliterated, "for

I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more." This is the great revelation which cheered Jeremiah. It is one of the beginnings of that closer relationship between God and man which Christ brought. Here are the germs of the full salvation. Here are promised the forgiveness of sin, the reign of grace for the reign of law, God winning men by love, man serving God for love. Jeremiah's eye caught the first rays of the light, saw the foreshadows of the new covenant that was to be. He saw that religion in its essence was a personal relation between the soul and God.

The Church has well seen in Jeremiah a type of Christ in his life of sorrow and service. A little later than Jeremiah there arose in prophecy a strangely new and attractive figure, in which the royal Saviour appears as a sufferer, who by His sorrows and death fulfilled the purpose of God. It is true that through all the fabric of revelation there runs this crimson thread that God's favourite is called to suffer, seen in the stories of Abel, Joseph, Moses; but never was it so declared as in the life history of Jeremiah. It all means that the best and choicest souls of the race, who are used to save the people, do so at great cost. The suffering servant of Jehovah is seen from the very start of revelation. And the

prophets come to see that the expected Saviour must be unique in His suffering as well as in His claims. Jeremiah's life made this patent. In him one man suffered for all. His tender conscience felt sin, which the sinners never felt. The sorrow of his life was the sin of his people. Thus he in a true sense represented the punishment of sin, and represented redemption through suffering for love's sake. His example inspired future prophecy. The figure of the suffering servant of God never left the thought of Israel's saints. Some of the features of the magnificent 53rd chapter of Isaiah of the self-denying servant of God had illustration in Jeremiah's living martyrdom. That grand figure of the sin-bearer, who was bruised for the iniquities of others never left the consciousness of the nation.

We recognise Christ in the portraiture of the despised and rejected of men, the silent sufferer who was oppressed and afflicted yet opened not His mouth, brought as a lamb to the slaughter and a dumb sheep before her shearers. Jeremiah, who on one occasion said of himself, "I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter," was a historical type of that prophetic figure. He displayed the power of self-sacrifice, redemption through love. He took on him all his country's woes. For their sake he felt

the doom and bared his breast for the wound. "Truly this is *my* grief and I must bear it," he said. He took the nation's sin upon his heart, felt its guilt, and shared its punishment.

At last there dawned on the prophetic soul the strange, awesome thought, not merely that a man could suffer for the sins of his brethren, but that God took on Himself the sin of men and loaded His pure heart with their weight and was afflicted in their affliction. In Christ Israel finds its High Priest and the world finds its Saviour. In Christ sacrifice was shown to be divine, to be of the nature of God Himself. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, because He reveals what God actually is and ever was. This is Jeremiah's real place in the history of revelation and the message which his life and work bring to this day and to every day, that he had some part in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He, who was a gentle lamb led to the slaughter and grieved over the sins of his brethren, foreshadowed the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

IX

THE END THEREOF

What will ye do in the end thereof?—JEREMIAH v. 31.

PROPHECY is the interpretation of providence. Its function is to assert and to illustrate the principles of divine government. It implies prediction, not however in the small sense of foretelling future events, but in the sense of declaring the inevitable conclusions which must issue from ascertained facts. To the prophet the will of God was never a matter of caprice, arbitrarily altering its decisions, inconsistent with itself at different times. The will of God was immutable, invariable, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The will of God was the law of God, with the uniformity and precision of law. Prophecy begins with a statement of fact, and an induction from the facts in accordance with the great moral law of God which is the law of all life. If the prophet pronounces judgment, he does so in the name of the offended law of God, stating the inevitable sequence of cause and effect. An individual predic-

tion was merely an illustration of the eternal principles by which the world is governed. The manner of it was not a logical inference. It was a divine intuition, a divine revelation, an inward perception of things which elude the testimony of the senses, an illumination of heart and conscience. It is an act of faith, not an inference of reason. The law of God was the test of everything, the test even of any particular prophecy. In the moral judgment of a community the prediction which he made was the drawing out of the forces at work to their necessary conclusion.

In Jeremiah's pronouncement of woe the causes are laid bare which must produce the doom. There is a terrible picture of corruption. Selfishness is declared to be the motive power and with selfishness came its satellites of cruelty and oppression and lust. The loyalties of life are lost in such a state of society. The doom which is predicted is not calamity, but judgment. The indictment of the nation is that all classes are involved in the sin and shame. Rich and poor, rulers and people, priests and prophets, their hearts are turned away from God, and their sins cry aloud for vengeance.

It was a time of peace and prosperity; and no eye saw danger except the eye of the lonely seer,

the watchman on the watch-tower watching for God. The people thought the prophet a morose irreconcilable, who did not know when the sun shone, a hopeless croaker of evil who had not sense to let well alone. They were content with the condition of affairs. Flatterers who called themselves prophets soothed them with pleasant dreams. Everything seemed all right at the time; nothing special was happening to the casual eye: but to the prophet a terrible and horrible thing was happening in the land. This was the most hopeless and awful thing about their whole state, that these flatterers should have such power, that the prophets should prophesy falsely, and the priests accept them and the people love to have it so. The people had from their teachers what they wanted, and would not listen to anything which shocked their good opinion of themselves. The whole state was corrupt to the heart.

It was nothing to the prophet that at this moment there seemed no sign of impending doom. He knew what must be the result. Though all seems well, what, he asks, will be the ultimate issue, that towards which such a state inevitably tends? Is it conceivable that God's holy law can fail once, which has never failed since the beginning of time? Is it conceivable that this sin will be passed over, when

never sin in all the world has so been treated? It is fatuity, fearful self-delusion, to shut their eyes to the certain conclusion that must be. Look to the end, giddy revellers in the sunshine, what will ye do in the end thereof?

To look to the end is the mark of the wise man in every region of life. He is not content with present appearance; he seeks out causes, and from causes knows something of consequences. A prudent man in business is not seduced by immediate success. He calculates what will be the probable ultimate result to his business. He looks further ahead than the one particular transaction. He won't enter into a bargain until he sees what it is likely to mean in the long run. The wise statesman is never a mere opportunist, accepting what turns up and making the best of it. He has often to do this, has often to limit himself to the practicable; he has often to seize an opportunity which comes unexpectedly; but to be a true statesman he must have more than a mere makeshift policy of using whatever happens to turn up. He has to look to the great ends in view, the great purposes of government, the ultimate issues of each step. The prudent man in every branch of activity is the man who is not easily led away by any

specious attraction, but who consistently pursues an end which he has before him. To lead a shiftless, hand-to-mouth existence in any line of life is to invite ruin. The spendthrift is the man who never thinks of the future, who puts away all uncomfortable thoughts from him, and only lives in the present for the present.

Now, there is a true sense in which we should live for the present, and take no thought for the future. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and also the good, for that part. The man of faith will not be over-anxious and over-careful, but will live sweetly and humbly in the consciousness of the Father's love. But this disregard of the future is due to a higher regard. It is inspired by a larger end, seeking first the Kingdom of God, an end which relegates all other aims to their place of secondary importance. Such living for the present is removed from the worldling's sense of it as heaven is removed from earth. The man of faith is not feverishly anxious about the things of to-morrow, because he has not given his heart to the things of to-day. His future is with God. His life will end in God. The man of the world lives his life in the present, and to-morrow can only be as to-day. He has no other life, no other source of joy reaching out to the

future. The question asked of him is the question of which the conscience of man is clamant, the question suggested by all history, the very question of the prophet, "What will you do in the end thereof?"

But that is the very question to which the worldling shuts his ears. If he listened to it, if he asked himself what answer he can give, he would cease to be a worldling. The very essence of the worldly life is that it is blind to results, that it refuses to look at the end thereof. It ever prefers the present to the future, and refuses to make any sacrifice of present good for the sake of a larger future good. Self-control is one of the fruits of faith. Faith looks to the end thereof, and for the sake of that glorious end is willing, if need be, to give up, to suffer loss, to endure the cross for the joy set before it. The selfish life thinks only of the present, the satisfaction of present desire.

"The worldly man," says Bunyan, "for a bird in the hand." It is a marginal note which he appends to a scene in the Interpreter's House. "I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand and had him into a little room where sat two little children, each one in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, and the name of the other Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontented;

but Patience was very quiet. Then Christian asked, What is the reason of the discontent of Passion? The Interpreter answered, The Governor of them would have him stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year; but he will have all now; but Patience is willing to wait. Then I saw that one came to Passion, and brought him a bag of treasure, and poured it down at his feet, the which he took up and rejoiced therein, and withal laughed Patience to scorn. But I beheld but a while, and he had lavished all away and had nothing left him but rags." The end thereof! Is it necessary to ask Interpreter to expound the matter, to read the meaning of the picture? Passion a figure of the men of this world; Patience a figure of the men of that which is to come. The worldly man for a bird in the hand! What are two in the bush to such? What is anything compared to the pleasure of present possession?

It is the true prophetic method to ask men to consider their ways, to think of the result of action, to look to their end. And we are not left in the dark as to what consequences flow from particular antecedents. The great prophetic message has ever been, as St. Paul declared, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." It is the task of moralists

of all time to point to the issues of conduct, by speech as the preacher does, by tragedy as the dramatist does, by picture as Hogarth does with as much power and effect as any; the plain message of the wages of sin, with no decorous hiding of the baleful fruit; as Hogarth points the moral with plain directness and terrible incisiveness in the "Rake's Progress," so different from the *Pilgrim's Progress* from which we have just quoted. The wages of sin is not always paid, as in Hogarth's two great series of pictures, with open shame and disease, the maniac's cell or the dishonoured grave. But with the inexorableness of fate, in kind if not in degree, the pictorial sermon is true. If you do that, this follows, and this—and this. What will ye do in the end thereof? The end of these things is death.

The word "end," when spoken about human life, means more than the mere termination, the point where it ceases. It means an *end in purpose*, as well as an end in time, that towards which it inevitably tends because its direction is fixed. In this sense the end of a thing is that for which it really exists, the result designed for it, the ultimate purpose. The end in time is merely the blossoming and the fruit of the end in purpose. The end of life therefore is not death, not the stoppage of breath, but the

culmination of the kind of life. The end in time will only be the manifest declaration of what the end in purpose has been. The prophet's question therefore can be answered without needing to wait until the end in time; for the end in purpose of your life can be revealed to you any moment as in a flash. What is the trend of your life? What are the things on which you have set your heart? "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." What is your end? The end thereof will be along the line of that discovery. You only need to be true to yourself in making that discovery to know what the conclusion must be. As in Rossetti's terrible sonnet on "Lost Days,"

I do not see them here; but after death
God knows I know what faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.
"I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me?"
"And I—and I—thyself," (lo! each one saith,)
"And thou thyself to all eternity!"

The prophet appeals to experience, he speaks to conscience, he asks what we can find out without fail, when he puts the question, "What will ye do in the end thereof?" Ask yourselves,—what if the thing you have set your heart on were given you, what then? You worship wealth, you long to be

rich, you judge all things by the standard of money, suppose you attain to it, and get all that is implied in it, what then? You are bent upon finding pleasure, getting the full measure of enjoyment out of life, suppose you get the over-flowing cup and drink it to the very dregs, what then? Take any of the ordinary worldly motives which move men; take your own, your own dream by night and vision by day, suppose it comes true, what then? Take the particular seed you are assiduously sowing, suppose it has all the favour of kind fortune in sun and shower, suppose it ripen fully, and you are blessed with harvest, what then? You must look at your life steadily and look at it whole, if you would get a true judgment of it; you must see the end as well as the beginning. If you go straight on in the way where you are, what will you come to at the last?

Is the end *adequate*, the end that is the main-spring of your life? It may not be evil; but is it sufficient? sufficient now and for ever? Is it adequate as your answer to the question, What is man's chief end? Is yours a life that moves to gracious ends, because it is hid with Christ in God? Is yours a life self-controlled, because Christ-controlled? Is it a life so shepherded by God that whatever be the earthly fortune only goodness and mercy can be the

ultimate issue? Or, is it empty of any high purpose, whose root is selfishness, whose motive is passion, whose God is appetite, whose end is destruction?

Men speak indulgently of the thoughtlessness of youth; and some of the young are putting away the personal application of all this on the ground that there is time enough to think of these things, and that meanwhile it is enough to rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes. But if you are ever to be thoughtful, if you are ever to make anything of life, when is there a fitter time than now to consider? Not when habit has organised itself into life, and when tendency has hardened into habit. It is not for youth to be thoughtless—let age be if it may—but now, when destiny hangs on the decisions of these days and hours, it is the wilfulness of folly to shut the eyes and harden the heart. Rather there is infinite truth in the thought which lies at the heart of Goethe's profound couplet,

What a man desires in his youth, that he shall have in age as much as he will.

X

THE ELEMENTS OF PROPHECY

Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is? And Samuel answered Saul and said, I am the seer . . . and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.—1 SAMUEL ix. 18, 19.

IT is a very beautiful story, that of Saul, a choice young man and a goodly, going out to look for his father's lost asses, being led hither and thither seemingly by blind accident and at last led up to a great destiny. When the search for the asses seemed hopeless he thinks they should go home lest a new anxiety for himself be added to his father's first anxiety for the safety of his property. There is a fine filial touch in the reflection, "Let us return lest my father leave caring for the asses and take thought for us." The servant thinks there is one last chance of which they should avail themselves, a man of God who lived in the place to which they had wandered. There is a little consultation as to what they have to offer as a present for the service they ask. They do not like to leave the district till they have ex-

hausted all the chances. With a naïve rural simplicity they go up to the strange city to find out this famous seer who has special power to help people in distress. As they go up the hill they meet young maidens coming out to draw water, and ask if the seer is there, and are directed to go right up, since he is sure to be there, as it is a day of sacrifice and Samuel will be there to bless it. They enter the city blithely and thoughtlessly, except for the thought about the strayed asses, and casually meet Samuel in the street. He is just the same to them as any other man, only he looks like a man who will know all the affairs of the town. So Saul accosts him with, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is?" And Samuel replied in words that must have taken away this choice young man's breath, not because of the coincidence of meeting the very man he sought, but because of the hidden and mysterious meaning of the answer, "I am the seer . . . and I will tell thee all that is in thine heart." Samuel relieves his mind about the asses, but plants in it a profounder anxiety and wonder.

We do not know what had been in Saul's mind and heart as he stayed at his father's farm and had wandered in search of his father's asses. "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." He, like

others, would have his dreams of what he would be and do, his rosy visions of a future of greatness. He would have his high thoughts and noble passions. He would often be moved with desire and with indignation as he looked on his country, its needs and its enemies. He would know something of his country's history, and how God had raised up men to save them in many a time of distress. His great frame would stiffen and his head would lift high, as he dreamed of emulating the great soldiers and saviours of his race. Such a man was sorely needed now to unite all the people together and to make Israel hold her own against her many foes. As a matter of fact, as it turned out, Saul was politically the man Israel needed, and his work as a soldier-king made David's subsequent work possible, and helped to make Israel a nation. How much of all this was in Saul's heart we do not know; but as Samuel looked at him he knew that his head was not filled with thought about his father's asses. Saul was immature and with no very deep religious knowledge or experience, but he had the makings of a noble man in him, and the old prophet kissed him tenderly as afterwards he declared that the Lord had anointed him to be captain over his inheritance. He read to him all that was in his heart, and the seed at least must have been

there that found such an unlooked for harvest. The young man who ventured out after asses stumbled into a kingdom.

But our text suggests not so much Saul and his thoughts and fortunes but rather Samuel and his powers and claims. It suggests the question, made plainer in the later prophets of Israel, what the true and permanent function of a prophet is. Samuel's words suggest to us the two chief elements of the prophet, *spiritual insight* and *practical guidance*. The common unthinking definition of a prophet is one who predicts. This is the common unspiritual view of prophecy, and is held at all periods in different forms. It was the prevailing view held in Israel, a view against which the prophets themselves had to protest all their lives. Much of their work lay in combating this idea, and in trying to deepen the spiritual thought of the people about God's word. There were always crowds of professional prophets in Israel who ministered to this popular misconception, and who made the work of the great spiritual prophets hard. To the mass of the people a prophet was one who could *predict*, who could foretell whether about lost asses or about national affairs, the fortunes of a battle or the fortunes of a man.

This is the pagan view of prophecy seen in every pagan country, where diviners and soothsayers always abound, and the natural heart in Israel, as elsewhere, craved for pagan rites. I need not stop to tell you how in the great Asiatic Empires and in the Semitic countries round about Israel, and in Greece and Rome of later days such low prophetic practices were accepted, and how never a battle was fought till the augurs foretold the event and oracles pronounced their verdict. You remember how Isaiah draws the striking contrast between the divinations of Assyria and the pure word of God which should be Israel's guide. This indeed is the great struggle which all the prophets had to endure. The people were ever laying the emphasis on these external and material evidences: the prophets themselves strove to lay emphasis on the moral and spiritual truths of their message. To the people the prophet was a seer into events to come, who had command of sources of information that were exclusive. It is an unsanctified dream of the human heart, as is shown by what we have mentioned of all pagan religions, and by its prevalence in modified forms right through the ages, in the place given for centuries in Christian Europe to astrologers and wizards, and to the tricks of palmists and fortune-tellers down to this very

year of grace. It is shown also by the way we are always tempted to treat the Bible and by the kind of evidence we look for to establish God's word.

The chief and most important function of prophecy is not predictive at all, and mere prediction in the Bible never made a man a prophet. Balaam, for example, who made such a famous prediction, is not called a prophet in the Old Testament, but a *soothsayer*—"Balaam, the soothsayer," or diviner, he is called in the Book of Joshua. This low conception of the prophet's work was common enough in Israel, as if he were a diviner and trafficker in dreams and the like, and men went to them as to a fortune-teller, as the pagans went to their temples to consult the oracle. We see it in the passage of our text. Saul went to Samuel on his servant's advice with some such idea, as if the prophet's business was to answer questions like his about lost asses on payment of a sufficient fee. Saul might take Samuel's reply as a lesson in religion. "I am the seer, and I will tell thee all that is in thine heart." It is more important to know what is in our hearts than to know what is in the coming years. A true prophet never lost sight of this religious interest of all the subjects he touched. He was a seer not because, as common

opinion had it, he was a man who sees the future, but because he was a man who sees God.

This is the first and characteristic mark of a true prophet, that he has spiritual insight, that he has met with God, and learned His will, and speaks out of that knowledge. It is not an intellectual apprehension of truth, but a moral and spiritual insight. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant." A prophet was pre-eminently a man in sympathy with God, not entering into His counsels merely in any cold external fashion, but entering into His heart, realising the sweet and tender relation between God and His people, living in loving and gracious intercourse. In the homely but expressive figure taken from lowly Scottish life, he is "far ben," in the intimate personal relationship with God. The prophet is well called a seer first before he is a preacher. The beautiful verse in Isaiah gives the true and only order, inspiration first, insight first, the learner's ear before the speaker's mouth, the disciple's heart before the prophet's tongue,—“The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as them that are

taught." The man who is to speak for God must first see God, that is to say, the prophet must first be a seer. Through spiritual intercourse with God he learns the divine will, and so has a God's word to speak.

And for this vision of the Seer the first condition, as all the prophets assert, is a pure heart and pure lips. That is the meaning of the wonderful vision in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, when the coal from off the altar was laid on the prophet's mouth before he could say, Here am I, send me. "The essential grace of the prophet," says Robertson Smith, "is a heart purged of sin, and entering with boldness into the inner circle of fellowship with Jehovah. The spirit of Jehovah which rests on the prophets is not merely a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, but a spirit to know and fear the Lord. The knowledge and fear of Jehovah is the sum of all prophetic wisdom, but also of all religion; and the Old Testament spirit of prophecy is the forerunner of the New Testament spirit of sanctification." There never was a more profound and illumining commentary on prophecy than that, connecting the Old and New Testaments in the only helpful way as parts of the great progressive revelation of God, showing what was the essential thing

in Jewish prophecy reaching its full fruition in Christian sanctification. All that we can say about this condition of prophecy can only be illustrations of our Lord's beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." It was Samuel's sweet piety and purity of heart from his youth as a consecrated child which prepared him to be a seer.

The other and the practical part of the prophetic function suggested by our text follows from this. His message to men is the result of his vision. "I am the seer, and I will tell thee all that is in thine heart." His work is moral and spiritual, speaking to the heart of man concerning the truth by which alone man lives. The seer is the man who sees God, and so can tell what is in our hearts. The vision does not make a man what we call a visionary. The vision gives him insight. His predictions have all this moral and religious basis, drawing out into practice the laws of God and the will of God which he learns from his intimate spiritual intercourse. The outlook on God gives *insight into man*. The prophet sees his own heart in the light of God, not by careful introspection and acute analysis; and seeing his own heart in the light of God he can read other hearts. This reading of the heart is his business, not fortune-telling. His predictions are moral, traced back to

the laws of God which he sees by spiritual intuition. From the knowledge of his own heart and other men's hearts, he sees something of what is in man and what man can be; for he recognises him as of essential nature with God, recognises the spark of the divine in the human. He sees not only what is base in men but also what is high, the vast possibilities in human nature when it is submitted to God's will.

Thus two things may be said of prophetic preaching. You cannot put the prophet's message into prim logical formulæ, divide it and subdivide it and catalogue the contents of the message; but two things are broadly recognised in their work. First of all, he is a seer and can tell what is in the heart; and so he sees something of the meaning of sin and its inevitable door. Thus the prophets were *preachers of righteousness*. This is a universal note of all prophecy. They never wavered in their moral warfare. Their predictions could not fail in essence; for they were moral judgments with the fixity and certitude of law.

Then again the prophet saw something of the boundless love in God's heart and the response it must have from men. He saw God's eternal purpose to redeem. Thus the prophets were *preachers of*

hope as well as preachers of righteousness. They never despaired of man, because they never despaired of God. "I never despaired of the conversion of any man," said John Newton, "since the Lord converted me, a wild bull, on the coast of Africa." That was good argument, but the prophet had even better argument. The prophet's conviction was grounded deeper than even his experience, deeper than his reading either of his own or of any other man's heart. It was based on what he saw in God's heart. In the darkest day, with never a sign of light, while he preached the doom of sin, he also proclaimed salvation. How could he despair of man so long as he had knowledge of the tireless love of God?

This is not the discussion of an old-world theme, of some intellectual interest to us and no more. For the ideal of the Bible is that this prophecy, with its spiritual insight and its practical guidance, should be universal, not the unique gift of a few but the possession of all, as in Moses' prayer, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them." And in the measure of our consecration is the prayer fulfilled. In so far as we are seers, with spiritual vision, pure in heart, seeing God, in so far we can tell what is in

the heart and are in accord with the laws of life. We sometimes long for a Samuel who can give us external guidance, a seer who can tell all that is in our heart, read its unformed desires, express its unspoken prayers, light the flame of high thought, draw out all purposes of good, and repress all signs of evil. But at the best that would only be a temporary expedient, as Samuel even was to Saul. We need to have the light in ourselves. We need to have God in our own hearts.

This is Christ's claim and offer. He would bring us all into the presence of God His Father. He would give us all His Spirit, and make us all see God. When we come to Him, He tells us all that is in our heart, its sin and sorrow, its hopes and fears, its abiding need of God, need of forgiveness and of reconciliation. We cannot see Him once without feeling in our heart of hearts that we were born for the love of God, and can only truly live in that love, and are dying for want of it. Whatever else is there, whatever evil and self-deception and crooked ways are there, He the Seer tells us all that is in our heart, and that our hearts are restless till they find rest in Him.

XI

DID JESUS HAVE FAVOURITE DISCIPLES?

He suffered no man to follow Him save Peter and James and John the brother of James.—ST. MARK v. 37.

I HAVE been asked the question which makes the subject of this sermon. The most casual glance at the record shows that Jesus did have favourite disciples. As a mere question of fact it is therefore easily answered. For whatever reason, He did single out certain of His disciples for special intercourse. There are the occasions when He took the three disciples Peter and James and John, who may therefore be called favourite disciples, since they were chosen to be admitted into His confidence in a peculiar degree. The chief occasions are:

(1) When He went to cure Jairus' daughter, we read, "He suffered no man to follow Him save Peter and James and John the brother of James" (Mark v. 37). We may of course give plausible reasons for the restriction of the number of His disciples, such as the natural desire not to crowd the house

which was beset by professional mourners. Or again, these were specially chosen to be witnesses of His benevolent deed and of His power. But the fact remains that these particular men were the three chosen out of the circle.

(2) A still more important instance of our Lord's favour to the same three men occurs at the Transfiguration. "Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them" (Matthew xvii. 1). Here again they were exclusively favoured to be witnesses. It is quite evident that they were chosen, because of the whole band of disciples they were the most likely to understand and sympathise.

(3) Again at the agony at Gethsemane we find the Master making the same choice. "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and very heavy" (Matthew xxvi. 36). It is quite evident that the reason here that He desired the company of some of His disciples was to save Himself from the sense of utter desolation.

Of course there may have been occasions when

for special reasons He chose other of His disciples, as no doubt He gave to all of them marks of His favour and loving regard, but the argument from silence is always a difficult one on either side and leaves us where we were. The fact remains that these three men seem to have received an intercourse denied to the others. This is also in line with the record of our Lord's whole ministry. His heart had its preferences, as in His noted and special love for little children, and for the weak and outcast generally. He preferred the company of the publicans to that of the Pharisees, for reasons which He Himself gives. So that outside even of the disciple circle He had special intercourse and friendship. The notable instance of that is with the household at Bethany. His whole life was ruled by love, and we know that He loved all men, but it means something special when we read that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John xi. 5). Events proved this so evidently that when a great sorrow came to this household outsiders explained the Master's tears at the grave of Lazarus by the remark, "Behold how He loved him!" Our Lord's loving thought for His mother at the end is described in an incident which emphasises the fact that He had favourite disciples. To one of them described as the

disciple whom He loved He commended His mother, and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. We are compelled by the facts to answer the question in a distinct affirmative.

But the question is not meant to be one merely of fact. I imagine it is asked because of the problems, both as to Christ's nature, and to God's whole method of working which lie latent in this simple question. The relation of the question to the first problem mentioned is a doubt as to whether we should expect our Lord to have, or need, special fellowship with a few men; that is, Is it consistent with our conception of Christ's nature to attribute to Him what we almost think a weakness? The relation to the second problem is also a doubt as to whether it is worthy of the divine purpose to ascribe any sort of exclusiveness to it; that is, Is it consistent with our view of God to attribute to Him anything approaching to favouritism?

I. The first difficulty is that it seems derogatory to our high thought of Christ's nature to suggest that He, like other men, needed the strength and comfort of human friendship. This type of difficulty is a common one, due to preconceived ideas as to what our faith in Christ's divinity demands. We are inclined to start with a cast-iron theory and then insist on

accommodating the facts to suit it, instead of taking the facts on which to build our theory and by which to test it. If we have a view of Christ's nature which makes it inconsistent for Him to have had favourite disciples, then our view is wrong. Also, we have to safeguard Christ's complete humanity as much as His divinity. If we think it unworthy of Him that He, like other men, should have a craving for human fellowship and in the great crises of His life longed for the company of loving and sympathetic hearts, the answer is the simple fact that in this He *was* like other men. He could not be a true and perfect man, if He had not the same needs and desires. He can be the great high priest of our humanity because He could be tried on all points, like as we are, because He knew the joys and sorrows of human life and drank our mingled cup and tasted what it is for a man to die. In this matter of friendship with Him, as with us, there was need for some closer fellowship when He could unbare His heart and be strengthened by sympathy, however imperfect.

Further, there was the instinct of the teacher, especially the religious teacher, in making a selection. He could only advance with men as far as they were able to go. The grade of discipleship depended on the degree of spiritual sympathy and understand-

ing. The Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom of ideas, and it was necessary for its extension that some should grasp the ideas and enter into its spirit. This of course is the reason for the existence of a disciple circle and for the long and patient training of the twelve. The further limitation was to some extent due to the same reason, though undoubtedly the chief reason lay in the personal region which explains all friendships.

We have seen that Jesus desired the comfort of companionship and for His own sake sought close human intercourse, and also for their sake gave opportunities of entering more deeply into His fellowship. The question we are discussing is somewhat complicated by the colour which has entered into the word "favourite." How a word will twist an argument and create a prejudice! To what base uses the word has been put! Favouritism has an ugly sound in our ears as suggesting unfair preference. We may be sure that there was nothing of that in our Lord's treatment of His disciples, and there is no reason why we should let the unfortunate meaning of the word colour our judgment.

A mother who loves all her children and never would show unjust preference may have one specially dear, a son, it may be, whom she feels she can trust

and lean on, or a daughter who can enter with sympathy into her thoughts and aims. In all our friendships there are degrees of intimacy settled for us by the amount of common spiritual footing we possess. Temperament and capacity do something in establishing the particular relation, but most of all the amount of real fellowship is settled by sympathy, by community of soul. Thus we may have many friends, all dear; but at the same time have some, one or two, who are admitted into the Holy of Holies. There are a few who have more sympathy with us and with whom we have more real affinity. Similarly, the relation of the disciples to Jesus was settled by their spiritual susceptibility. So that if we make it an offence that He should have had favourite disciples, it should be as much an offence that He should have disciples at all.

II. This brings us to the second difficulty that it seems unworthy of the divine purpose to ascribe any sort of exclusiveness to it. We may admit that it was no weakness for Jesus to have friends and narrowing circles of intimacy with men, but there remains the question whether it is consistent with a high thought of God to attribute to Him anything that looks like exclusive dealing. Here we come into sight of the whole problem of God's method of work-

ing in the world. Does He choose out men and nations, dowering men with special gifts and blessing them with special privilege? If this is the divine method, we see that any question as to favourite disciples is only in line with all else. Now, everything depends often on the way a question is asked, and we may state this fact, as has often been done, in a rigid dogma which offends the mind and conscience of men. Here also facts are worth more than theories. It is a fact that the world is built on this principle, and the whole history of revelation implies this divine method. There is a chosen people and chosen men within the nation, and it is absolutely in keeping that there should be chosen disciples; for we must remember here that the problem is not that there should be favourite disciples but that there should be chosen disciples at all. It is only a matter of *degree* between Peter's relation to Jesus and Nathanael's, or between the disciple whom Jesus loved and Thomas. The twelve themselves were deliberately singled from among many who were attracted to Jesus and even followed Him. They were made an inner circle out of the larger company; for we read that on one occasion "He called His disciples and of them He chose twelve whom also He named apostles." He could say of them all and to them all, "Ye have

not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Any sort of exclusiveness within that small circle of the twelve is thus only part of the same method which separated the twelve from all others. The differences among men could not be ignored by Jesus. If the process of selection is justified at all there can be the same justification for the same process of preference within the circle.

It is really part of the great doctrine of grace, and the ultimate explanation of all divine choice lies in the divine purpose. We state the question wrongly when we state it in terms of privilege and mere favour. It has to be stated in terms of the purpose for which the favour is granted. Of course there is favour in belonging to the company of disciples, and special favour that the three should be taken into special confidence. But Christ's purpose was not to confer favour on these men, but to train them for a great work. The favour they received carried with it a burden. That is to say, it is not selection to privilege but to *service*. The favour means always corresponding responsibility. It was no favour to Judas that he should have been chosen and yet have seen nothing in the choice but favour. Hear his cry of anguish at the last, and see his look of despair when he learned how dismally he had failed. And

even of those who remained faithful and went on to fulfil the Master's purpose, could their lot be described in the ordinary worldly sense of favour? They were forewarned what it meant to have the favour of discipleship, "They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." It was indeed blessed privilege to be in the company of Jesus, and special favour to stand on the mount with Him apart when He was transfigured before them, but every privilege carries penalty in its bosom and Christ's choice of men is a choice for service. To all His disciples He said, "I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain."

Had the disciples no choice in the matter? There is a true sense in which they chose their Master, or rather, Jesus chose them for the same reason for which they chose Him. In all human relations, in all types of friendship, it is to make a futile distinction to separate the two processes of choosing and being chosen. Emerson could say truly, "My friends have come to me unsought; the great God gave them to me," but on the other hand his friendships were conditioned by the kind of man Emerson was. He could have great friendships since he had the quality

of being a great friend. If we cannot make too fine distinctions between choosing a friend and being chosen by him, still less can we make too fine distinctions between choosing God and being chosen by Him. The Master takes His disciples with Him as far as they can go, and the humble and docile heart will be taken deep into the secret of His presence. The relation gathers richer and sweeter contents. "I call you no longer servants," He said, "but I have called you friends." To be called friends by our Master may well be made our soul's ambition, and the way we know is simple. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." His grace to us is made an inspiration to all gracious life by us.

XII

HOSPITALITY: A CHRISTMAS SERMON

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers [Forget not to shew love unto strangers.—R. V.]; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.—HEBREWS xiii. 2.

THE issue of the great argument of this Epistle about the Priesthood of Christ is in the practical precepts of this chapter. He who was both priest and victim made His sweet oblation of love on behalf of men. The heart and source of our Lord's sacrifice is love, and the outcome of it to His people must be love. That is why the high argument flows so naturally and simply into these practical duties and moral injunctions. The true fruition of God's love is love displayed on earth among men. Even our response to the divine love, when we love Him who first loved us, is tested by our love and service of one another. Distinctions between our love to God and our love to the brethren are mostly futile. It is the one love with different sides. You cannot decompose and dissect and analyse the fair flower

without robbing it of its bloom if not of its life. So, the first practical issue of the doctrine of the Eternal Priesthood is "Let brotherly love continue." The love of the cross must move human hearts to love. The second is like unto it, "Forget not to shew love unto strangers"—a recommendation of hospitality. As Paul expressed the same natural order and outcome, "Add to brotherly kindness charity."

This was a particular necessity in the early Church. It was a bond of union and strength to Christians that hearts and homes were open to them everywhere. So constant and noble was this Christian hospitality that heathen neighbours were impressed by it and could not but exclaim, "Behold how these Christians love one another." Persecution in one place would sometimes scatter a church, and the world-wide bond of brotherhood mitigated many of the evils and distresses. Even in normal times there was constant communication between different churches. A Christian's outlook became suddenly wider than other men's: his fatherland became a bigger thing. He was a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, and no doubt some of the local and provincial ties were a little loosened by the great imperial faith with its note of universality, breaking down all barriers of race and caste and class. It was one of the ways

in which the evangel was spread. Christians moved about more readily, sure as they were of a welcome among all who loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity. Men lost the deep-rooted distrust of unknown strangers, and the Church became an organisation which was independent of mere place. Thus we find all the Apostles inculcating the sacred duty of hospitality. Paul writes to the Romans, "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality"; and Peter writes, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging."

There is something beautiful about the sweet and simple hospitality of the early Church, when men felt themselves in the clasp of a common affection as well as in the presence of common dangers. The writer here informs his readers that it is not only a duty, but is often a high privilege. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Often such Christian strangers from other towns and countries carried the best of blessings with them, and gave more than they received. They could tell their hosts of the life of other churches, and sometimes could instruct them in Christian thought and life. If not, the virtue brought its own reward; for it was part of the debt of love they owed to God; and what they

did to one of the least of these brethren they were doing for their Lord.

Customs and manners have changed, and different needs have emerged, so that the outward expression of this duty may not be the same as when the Apostles wrote, but Christians have still a duty on this matter, and perhaps even the commonplace virtue of hospitality needs to be inculcated. No time could be more appropriate for its mention than this season of Christmas-tide when men are more genial and friendly, when reserve thaws a little, and we wish each other well. It is absurd to suppose that the difference of manners and customs among us can leave us with the same primitive and free methods of hospitality, any more than we can expect to revive the still freer customs of the East. To an Arab the duty is one of the most sacred, partly because a lonely wandering life makes a man glad to hear another voice and learn some news of men and events, and partly because life in tents makes men more open and franker, and partly because to refuse hospitality in the desert would in some places mean dreadful privation and death. A tent is open and accessible as no city house could be, and the grace of hospitality comes natural in simple pastoral peoples. To

look for primitive oriental hospitality in our city life would be folly.

But though manners and ways of living change, the heart of this virtue does not change, and the essence of it is *kindness*, thoughtfulness. The methods of expressing the feeling will differ from the oriental courtesy of the Arab and from the indiscriminate hospitality of the early Christian, but it will have methods of its own suitable to our time and place. We might well be a little more open and more genial, a little less grudging and less suspicious, and give a little freer play to kindly impulse. "To do good and communicate, forget not," writes this Apostle in this same chapter. It is easy to forget, more easy for us than for the Christians of the first days. It is easy to live a self-centred life which is uncommonly like full-blown selfishness. We encase ourselves in our own personal concerns, and give ourselves up to our own private business and pleasures. We get engrossed in our own affairs, and are quite satisfied if only we are let alone. This mood creeps on us in the city, where there are such crowds whom we do not know and in whom we can have no interest. It is easier in a city than anywhere else, strange as it may seem, to live your own little life by yourself, circumscribed by your own affairs, ramparted against

intrusion of any sort. A man can slip into a very selfish way of life without being hard-hearted to begin with. It seems so hopeless to have any relations with the single drops in the great stream of city life.

Or, we may have made advances and tried to help people, and have been so often deceived. Do you think the early Christians were not often deceived? They did not always entertain angels unawares. They must have had many an experience calculated to shake their confidence in human nature, like the good bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* who took in the convict, who repaid him by stealing the silver. If we are too careful never to be taken in we will never give much outlet to our heart. A hard heart can easily avoid being deceived. But in these days—it is part of our changed manners and needs—we have what is comparatively a new thing in the world, *corporate hospitality* for strangers and the afflicted and the needy. The support, adequate and generous support of our great Christian institutions and societies, is part of the duty laid upon us to-day. Our infirmaries and hospitals and homes and benevolent associations are a form of corporate hospitality which demands support. If people object to any sort of indiscriminate charity, and there are good

reasons for some objections, there are other ways of relieving need.

But even the generous help of all good causes does not completely cover the duty of hospitality enforced in the New Testament. There are many ways of fulfilling this injunction in the spirit as well as the letter of it. Hospitality does not mean merely giving elaborate feasts and filling rooms with a crowd. Its very essence is sympathy and kindness, and that can be shown by many a token. A pleasant look will sometimes do it, and reveal a hospitable heart; a kind word where it comes natural; a helpful hand where opportunity offers. We can all be more accessible and friendly and considerate, ready and willing to do a service. There are many natural ways lying near us of brightening solitude, and giving some sunshine to lonely and dark lives. Life is very dreary to some: life in a city is very lonely to many. There are many friendless people, and homeless folk, who don't want anything of yours to eat and drink, but who can be heartened and cheered by a little sympathy. What occasions we let slip every day of being simply kind. The heart of all true hospitality is *sympathy*. The R. V. translation reveals this deeper heart of the virtue, "Forget not to shew love to strangers." Love is the secret; and

with its methods may be very well left to themselves. Love will find its fit outlet. How futile and empty some of our hospitality looks when tested by this standard, the hospitality which is patronising and condescending, making the recipient feel how great a favour is bestowed by noticing him, or the hospitality which consists of ostentation and display with no throb of human feeling in it, performed as a social duty in the great game of beggar my neighbour. There is no grace and no virtue in the act which has no love.

The Christmas message asks for the open heart and the open hand. It comes in love, and seeks the response of answering love. The love and peace and joy and goodwill of Christmas demand room for their free rich action in our lives. Forget not to show love even to strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares, as Abraham did when the three men stood by him and he ran to meet them from the tent door and offered them all the courtesies of welcome guests. Many a blessing comes unawares, when we least expect it, looking only for the commonplace and the usual, and lo there breaks on us the glory because we were in the path of duty at the time. A blessing comes unawares to the enrichening of the whole life, when we live in love.

And what angels unawares have been *missed* because men have shut their hearts! Somebody missed a great opportunity in the little town of Bethlehem one night when Mary the mother of Jesus had to find a lodging in a stable because there was no room in the inn, and because none had the common kindness she had the right to expect. She was thrust out among the cattle through lack of hospitality, lack of ordinary humanity. Some one lost a great opportunity. To be the host of the Holy Family at such a time! No man received that distinction.

We may never entertain angels, and will never have the chance somebody missed at Bethlehem, but our Lord has Himself shown us how we can offer Him hospitality. "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger and ye took Me in." When? How? Where? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." He asks for love and the sweet ministry of love; and He accounts all loving service as unto Himself. You have heard the story of the simple pious family in Germany who always at Christmas day set a place at table for Christ Himself in case He should come. In their childlike faith they believed that it would be on a Christmas Day He would

come. One Christmas night, dark and stormy, a knock came at the door, and an old man, poor and needy and hungry, entered and took the empty place at the table. They were disappointed, but served him with loving care. When they looked and when he spoke there was something about him that awed them, and afterwards it came upon them as he left that-it was the Lord. You know the legend of St. Christopher, the strong man who served Christ by carrying over the ford pilgrims and wayfaring people. One night he went across to a summons, and when he arrived at the other side he saw it was a child. He took the child on his shoulders to carry him through the water, and as he went his burden grew heavier and heavier till the strong man tottered under it; and when he reached the bank he found he had been carrying Christ. There is a mystic heart of truth and beauty in all such legends, that all true service and all sincere love are given to the Saviour who served and loved, and are accepted by Him. "Some have entertained angels unawares."

It is not by chance that Christmas time has been associated with charity, and goodwill, and generosity. Kindly feeling and helpful act are natural at this time; and every Christian country has its pretty customs, which show how naturally men think of

others at Christmas. In Sweden, in country districts, the farmer places a sheaf of corn on a pole for the birds on Christmas morning, and his wife takes food out of her store for the poor. Hearts grow warm and tender as we think that this day was born the Saviour, born for us men and our salvation. We see in the light of our faith that life is measured not by its success and its possessions but by its love, and love is measured by its service. The hospitable mind is its own best blessing. The loving heart is its own true reward. The generous soul has unawares had an angel for a guest. We put away all malice and hard thought and unforgiving feeling, and as we show love in love's own ways we open the door to Christ. We give the Christ-Babe His cradle in our hearts, and afterwards He sets up His cross in our hearts, and in our hearts He plants His throne.

XIII

A SHALLOW OPTIMISM

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and cried with a loud and bitter cry, and came even before the king's gate; for none might enter into the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth.—ESTHER iv. 1, 2.

SACKCLOTH was the coarse material from which the garments of the poor were made, woven of rough hair, mostly goats' or camels' hair. It was of dark colour, and came to be used by mourners, and in solemn religious ceremonies. It was symbolic of grief for a great calamity, or of penitence, an outward sign of sorrow or humiliation. There are constant references to sackcloth as the garb of grief. So common was this use that the word became metaphorical of mourning; though in our own later language it is chiefly used as a metaphor for penance, as when Spenser in the *Faerie Queen* describes Corceca, or Superstition,

And to augment her painful penance more,
Thrice every week in ashes she did sit,
And next her wrinkled skin rough sackcloth wore,
And thrice three times did fast from any bit.

In any case the word implies pain and grief. It is the visible sign of real sorrow. Here Mordecai is represented as assuming all the outward signs of distress, rent clothes, sackcloth, and ashes, in token of grief for the national calamity impending over the Jews. He came before the gate of the king's palace to attract the attention of Esther.

It is a characteristic touch that follows, explaining why he did not enter; "for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth." The sackcloth of camels' hair suits the wilderness, and is out of place in a palace. "Behold they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses." It was in keeping with the oriental luxury of the Persian court that such a rule should hold that no one be permitted to remind the inmates of death and sorrow and all the ugly things suggested by sackcloth. To be gorgeously apparelled and live delicately does not prepossess men to face the uncomfortable facts of life. For peace of mind these had better be kept out of sight. Sackcloth offends taste, and interferes with pleasure. All the things it suggests can be forgotten meanwhile, if only it be prohibited.

It is a common trick, not confined to the Persian court, for men both in practice and in speculation to purchase peace by eliminating all the things that

would disturb peace. Where none may enter clothed with sackcloth, it is easy to have a scheme of things in which there is no place for sackcloth, and to assume that it does not exist. The common way of attaining comfort is to surround oneself with pleasant things and ignore everything unpleasant, to listen at ease to harmony and shut the ears to all discord, to look on what is beautiful and comely and shut the eyes to what is ugly and all that will not come sedately into our pleasant scheme. The trouble is that we cannot all issue an imperial decree which will prevent the sackcloth from getting access into the presence. We cannot rampart ourselves completely against fate. We need to shut our eyes very tightly sometimes, and harden our hearts very securely, if we would keep out all signs of the great human sorrow, and maintain our pleasant superficial peace.

In the early story of the Buddha it is related that he, the son of a king, was tenderly nurtured and carefully guarded, so that he should not even know that evil or sad things existed. He lived in palace enclosures with everything fair and sweet, that his gentle heart might never know the pang of sympathy. When at last he asked that he might ride out and see the world beyond, the king made proclamation

not only that the sackcloth might not enter the palace, but that it might not even appear in the streets while the prince rode through. No noisome sight was to appear; all the sick and the frail and the aged were to remain within doors. The city was decked with flowers, and a joyous crowd filled the streets, bright-clad and laughing. He was to see and believe that life as it is was good and the world was fair and only fair. For one day at least there was to be no sackcloth anywhere in sight. All went well till by some mistake an old man, ragged, starving, palsied, tottered from his hovel. Pain, and wretchedness, and age, and poverty were too evident; and the mischief was done. The courtiers tried to hustle him out of the way back to his hovel. The prince returned to the palace with food for thought, and never again could think of life as he used to do. The happy palace gardens could not make him forget that sackcloth was in the streets. He was of too noble soul to make-believe that the world was as his happy gardens. He must find out the worst as well as the best, and take the sackcloth into his view of life. Resolutely he lifted the veil that blinded him, and went out to see the sorrow and pain and death which men suffer, and to know at first-hand all the agony of earth. Only the noble soul could have made

this decision, and have refused to be lulled to sleep by all the delights of his own immediate lot.

There are many ways of playing the other part like the Persian king of the Book of Esther, who kept uncomfortable things from obtruding themselves before his notice by decreeing that none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. The commonest is by letting personal comfort seal the heart. When Dives is clothed in purple and fine linen and fares sumptuously every day, he may forget that there is a certain beggar named Lazarus laid at his gate, full of sores, desiring only to be fed with the crumbs that fall from Dives' table, and that the dogs come and lick his sores. In all our time of wealth, when all goes well with us and we are led by green pastures and quiet waters; when life is easy, and ache and pain and care seem far away; when the garner is full and prosperity is our portion; when life looks sweet and the world beautiful—it is easy to be satisfied, self-centred, and self-complacent; it is easy to have light-hearted, shallow views of life. Sackcloth in a palace is like a death's-head at a feast. The material can choke our souls, and kill the divine graces of sympathy and helpfulness and love. Sympathy means that virtue goes out of a man;

and selfishness would prevent such a drain of power.

Practical materialism of life, content with what the hands can gather and the senses enjoy, breeds a shallow optimism. Because all is well with us, we can afford to neglect the disquieting facts, and nothing much is wrong in what is a very good, if not the best possible, world. Physical well-being, material prosperity, often issue the decree that none may enter clothed with sackcloth, lest the happiness be impaired. To the very successful, failure is apt to be counted a sin; to the strong, weakness appears a crime; to the prosperous, adversity is a sort of offence; to the happy, sorrow is to be laughed out of sight and out of mind. The superficial gaiety, the affected ignorance, the attempt to deny the actual truth of things are unworthy of man; and worse than unworthy when the deepest source of the attempt is selfishness, when the heart is fat and the ears heavy and the eyes shut lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart. The sleek gospel of comfort, which has so many modern votaries, is surely the most degrading possible to the high soul of man.

There are many other similar methods of doing the same thing, reaching a spurious peace by deliberately

neglecting all the facts that do not suit, forbidding sackcloth to enter within the gate. There is, for example, the æsthetic method of shutting the eyes to the ugly things that one may undisturbedly enjoy the dainty and the picturesque and the artistic. There is, as another example, the religious dogmatism which leaves the rest of the world to sink or swim, placidly contemplating the happy prospect of heaven for self. Indeed, it is a common expedient to shut the eyes to the facts that disturb our theories or disturb our peace, making believe that they do not exist.

The expedient is common, not only in ordinary practice, but also in the speculative opinions of men, the theories of life we accept. It is common for men to hold an easy optimism, reached by eliminating all the dark and tragic facts that would make optimism impossible. When sackcloth, and all that sackcloth represents of pain and penitence and sorrow and death, are stopped at the threshold of the mind, men can believe that the existing order of things is almost perfect, and whatever is right. Some modern cults get their pleasant optimism by denying that the sackcloth is here at all. All the truth that is in what is called the mind-cure is no new discovery, but has been known and practised for

centuries. Every one with any knowledge of human nature knows that faith and courage and cheerfulness are powerful agents in restoring and maintaining even bodily health. And every physician knows that to revive in a patient the will to live is sometimes half the battle, especially in all nervous disorders. But there is hardly enough in that to found a new cult; and so we find an attempted philosophy of life made up of exaggeration of this simple fact. The practical method is to abandon care and regret and apprehension. Humility, penitence, remorse are to be treated as mythical, bugbears that foolish man has allowed to hagrade him hitherto. Believe that there is no pain, and pain will not be. Let each soul pass its own imperial edict that none may enter within the gate clothed with sackcloth, and peace will be their portion. It is a fit creed for men who live on the surface of life, who have never been struck by the malady of the ideal, who have never fathomed the depths of their own hearts, who are content with prosperous conditions, who have no place in their scheme of things for the ministry of sorrow and for the mystery of the cross. It looks upon happiness as the main end of life, and anything that will disturb that happiness is to be put out of thought.

Why it should claim to be superlatively Christian

is strange, since the very heart of our faith with its sublime doctrine of the cross gives the lie to the shallow creed, and points to progress through suffering as the high end of life. Surely the prophet's denunciation is here applicable of those who "have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people *slightly*, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace." All the noblest qualities of the soul are produced from sympathy; and sympathy that has never felt and suffered, never known a pang nor shed a tear, is but a name. The Captain of our salvation Himself was made perfect through suffering. The philosophy of life that makes no account of the sackcloth, that has nothing to say to the long ascent by which the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain till now, is to be set aside as a pretentious imposture.

It is the charge made against all optimistic theories that they are reached by deliberately excluding the sackcloth from consideration, by glossing over the real evils of the world, ignoring the misery and sin and shame, locking the skeleton in the cupboard that the room of life be well swept and garnished. Of course in speaking of optimism and pessimism something has to be counted to temperament; as when we find two men living in the same period, like Emerson and Carlyle, the one so buoyant, convinced

that evil is only good in the making; the other with sad apprehension of the evils that menace man, full often of a fear that was almost despair. Still we cannot but feel that Emerson's optimism was sometimes reached by evading the difficulty, by refusing to recognise the evil of life. We feel there is more hope from an honest acceptance of the facts, more real guidance and help from one who admits that besides the green pastures and quiet waters there is also the dark valley of the shadow. If sackcloth exists, it is ultimately better to acknowledge it, than to buy a cheap comfort by hiding it from ourselves. If we can only believe in the divine love by assiduously pretending that there is nothing that seems to contradict it, then it were better not to believe at all; for sooner or later the disillusionment will come.

Christianity has no sympathy with this shallow optimism. It begins with the calm acceptance of all the facts, recognising the darker side of human life, sin and suffering and sorrow and death. It is anything but content with the present order of things. There is no evading the problem of pain and tears, no ignoring the sackcloth. Its indictment of existing conditions is as vehement as that of the most despairing pessimism. There is no glossing over sin, no pretence at healing the hurt slightly. And yet

on the foundation of that pessimism it rears the most audacious form of optimism possible to conceive. It looks to a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Its eyes are open to the evils that hold the race in thrall, but it points to victory and ultimate triumph. It cherishes a spirit of high hope. It sees sin, but also proclaims redemption. It sees sorrow, but also sees sorrow working out spiritual blessing, and knows that God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. It feels the bondage of sin and death, but promises the breaking of chains to them that are bound. It believes in God and in man, and in the good that will master evil and overpower it.

It opens the gates that all clothed with sackcloth may enter, and find there comfort for their sorrow, hope for their despair, forgiveness for their sin, life for their death, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." To open the gates is its program, and nothing less will content it. The cross, symbol of shame and defeat, is the world's glory and the world's hope, declaring that the love of God is the very heart of the universe. Henceforth the one great reality of earth is the Kingdom of Heaven; and all may enter into the King's gate clothed in sackcloth. It

is the one great democracy, if we but saw it, before which our political democracies are poor and shoddy. It breaks down all disabilities of class and caste and race. Nothing will so open the gates as the principle of the Kingdom, "All ye are brethren; for ye have one Father, even the Heavenly."

XIV

THE GRACE OF GIVING

Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only.—PHILIPPIANS iv. 15 (R.V.).

PAUL was at this time in prison at Rome. His friends at Philippi, thinking of the many hardships he would have to suffer, sent him tokens of their love and gratitude—money and gifts. This thoughtfulness affected him very much, and to that we owe this letter. Yet he found it hard to acknowledge it suitably. He does not want to speak of it, and indeed was finishing the letter without referring to it, except in so far as the general tenderness expressed gratitude. But after he has twice said “finally,” he plunges into the matter. Paul was proud in such things. He who gave everything, his whole life, for others, would take nothing.

Perhaps this was not pride, so much as policy. He would suffer anything rather than give even the excuse for a sneer at his motives. More than

once he asserted his right to be supported by the Church, but gave up his right lest he might damage his work. This was in the early days when he had to break up the fallow ground. Later on he probably relaxed his rule somewhat, when there was not so much need of it; for here he says that had been his rule "In the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia." Even then there had been one exception—the Philippians themselves. Their offer in these early days was probably as spontaneous and hearty, as much the fruit of love and gratitude as now. It would have been impossible to refuse their gifts without hurting their feelings. Paul accepted them as he accepted their presents in prison, because he felt it would have been boorish and churlish to refuse, and because after all he had real need, and most of all because his children at Philippi loved him and he loved them. He accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. It is pathetic to think of Paul having want that could be thus relieved, and yet from the tone of his remarks it evidently was so. "I have learned how to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." He admits that he had been in need and thanks them gratefully that they had fellowship with his affliction.

It is the fashion among moralists, especially sat-

irists of morals, to declare that to do a man a benefit is to make an enemy of him. One could, I am sure, pick out half a dozen passages from Thackeray, for example, expressing this sentiment. "What more can one say of the Christian charity of a man, than that he is actually ready to forgive those who have done him every kindness, and with whom he is wrong in a dispute?" he says in *Pendennis*. Or this sentence from *Philip*, "Kindness is very indigestible." He wonders whether the traveller who fell among thieves was grateful afterward to the good Samaritan. "The hand that feeds us," says Emerson, "is in danger of being bitten." All the poets from Shakespeare downwards have something to say of man's ingratitude. We have accepted this idea into our thought and speech. The quickest way to lose a friend is to lend him money.

Now, all this is not mere cheap cynicism, though some of it may be. Shakespeare and Emerson and Thackeray do not agree upon a fact of human nature without very good grounds. The fact is as they state it, but the significance of the fact may not be so disgraceful to human nature as it appears. The truth of the fact is that it is hard to receive gracefully, and equally hard to give graciously. It is hard to receive gracefully. It is easier for some men to

give than to receive. It is blessed to give; sometimes it is blessed to be able to receive gratefully. The proud man has to school himself to accept. To accept help seems like taking away our rights as men. It is like an invasion of our kingdom and the loss of our independence. I know of a family connected with a Christian congregation, and the deacon of their district knew that they had a severe fight with circumstances and misfortune. He went and offered help, but they refused, declaring that they were not at the end of their resources yet. More misfortune came, and the fight grew harder, and next year when offered help they took it. Another year the prospect had lightened a bit, and when the help was again offered they refused with thanks that they were now over the crisis and that there must be others more needful than themselves. They were the true sort, with a backbone of native independence, yet without false shame. They had the grace to accept, as well as the grace to refuse. Most men have got something of that independence often crabbed and distorted. It is that which makes it hard to receive, and it is the twist in the independence which gives truth to the satirists' remark about gratitude. Men feel they are being wronged in being helped; or rather the sense of humiliation makes them revenge themselves

on the man who by his help humiliates them to themselves.

Indeed the chief fault is often on the side of the man who gives. By the manner of his giving he sometimes makes it a humiliation. This fellowship of giving and receiving is a very delicate one. There is more in manner than we usually admit. "Manners maketh man," says the old saw. The manner, in the sense of spirit, *is* the man. Gifts may be spoiled by the giving. Some men spoil all the generosity by their way of doing it. "The gift without the giver is bare." A man has to give himself, or he gives nothing. A grudging spirit, or a pompous condescension, or a huckster's manner in giving takes away all the bloom from the act. "Let him that giveth," said Paul to the Romans, "give with simplicity and him that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." If God loveth a cheerful giver, man hates a grudging one. Remember it is a man you give to—or for men. Reverence the manhood in him, aye even if he has no respect for his own manhood.

Here is the dead fly in the ointment of so much of our charity. It lacks love. There can be no fellowship in the matter of giving and receiving without love. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed

the poor and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." The fact that men expect gratitude and seek to exact it is a proof that the manner of their giving is wrong. You cannot buy love, unless you sell it. You cannot buy gratitude with goods. You cannot buy love with gifts. You cannot barter alms for spiritual returns. You cannot enter the fellowship of giving and receiving except through sympathy. Loveless charity is an offence. Little wonder if it does not buy you friends, but only makes you enemies. With love all such difficulties vanish. It is no humiliation to receive from the hand you love.

Gifts of one who loved me,
'Twas high time they came;
When he ceased to love me,
Time they stopped for shame.

The fellowship in the matter of giving and receiving becomes a natural one. It is a duty and a privilege. The Christian doctrine of wealth is the only solution of our social disorder and inequalities. We are only stewards of what we have. We can be faithful or unjust stewards, but it is not our own. We think this applies only to the very wealthy! Not at all. It is the Christian doctrine of all possessions. Whether we will or no we are all living in a fellow-

ship of giving and receiving. If labour is useless without capital, capital can do nothing without labour—not even get food to eat. All that we have is got through our fellowmen; and all that we have is got from God. "What have we that we have not received?" Nothing that we have is our own, strictly speaking, except the way in which we have it. Nothing that you have is yours, except the manner in which you receive and the spirit in which you keep. The soul is the man. All transactions of giving and receiving are nothing in themselves, except as they reflect the motives and true life of men.

It may be a counsel of perfection, but you must see that if men lived in such a fellowship, all our troubles would vanish. You dare not sneer at it as a counsel of perfection, you dare not turn your back upon it, in face of Christ's command to seek it. If you are in fellowship with Christ, you will be in that fellowship. If we accept Him at all as our Master, if we see even partially with His eyes and seek, however imperfectly, the things He sought, we will put a truer value on the rival plans of life. Paul could accept this gift, because he saw something grander in it than itself. He saw sacrifice and love in it. He valued the gift for the sake of the

givers. "Not that I desire the gift, but that I desire the fruit that may abound to your account from giving it."

It is a terrible thing when men get to love things, to desire gifts, presents, money, materials for their own sake. That is the hell of covetousness; for it is a bottomless pit that cannot be filled. Yet what a common disease it is—the love of things! How easily we all slip into the idea that happiness consists in acquisition! The Rich Fool of Christ's Parable was a fool, not because he was rich, but because he thought that the life of man consisteth in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. What poor fools and rich fools there are still, if that is the definition of folly! The reason why we cannot belong, like Paul, to the true fellowship of giving and receiving is because, unlike him, we "desire the gift." We think that if we only had what we desire, if we only had our fill of gifts, we would at last be happy. It cannot be done. The heart of man is insatiable. Like the daughters of the horseleech, it cries ever, Give, give! The sorrow of life is due to the sin of life, and the sin of life is selfishness. We clutch after things. We open out our hands and our mouths—children of the horseleech. We cannot understand why we are never satisfied.

We cannot be satisfied thus, because we were not made to lose our hearts to things. We lumber our houses with gifts and possessions. We lumber our hearts with them. We want to belong to the fellowship of receiving, and have little or nothing to do with the fellowship of giving. Many a human soul is buried in the dirty acres it possesses, or covets.

This does not mean that we should neglect business or the material side of life generally. It does not mean the attempt to resurrect any form of stupid asceticism, which pretends to despise the body and the world. The world is full of the gifts of God to be used. It only means that we should covet the best gifts. Do not let your higher instincts be killed by the lower. Do not let your soul be eaten out by selfish love of aught that the world contains. Know that your life is something more than even the abundance of the things you possess. Know that it is better to become than to receive, better to give than to get. Know that the way to be in the blessed fellowship of receiving is to join the goodly fellowship of giving. "Follow after love."

I have chosen to speak about giving by request of the Finance Committee, one of whose chief functions is to educate us all in this noble grace. Your Committee is not ungrateful for all the tokens of liberal-

ity in this congregation, and is specially proud of the high place you have ever maintained. But the Committee realises that in a church like this the only way to make up for losses is that all the members should reconsider the whole subject and should year by year make it a matter of conscience to give as God prospers them. It is to Christ the world owes its great beneficent institutions, and to be in fellowship with Him implies the fellowship of giving. Without denying Him, we cannot shut our ears and our hearts to the world's needs. The claims are many and sometimes confusing—the work of the Church, all the benevolent and social schemes for the good of men, Foreign Missions, Home Mission Work.

Yet I believe all these claims could be easily met, if we all did our duty in a business way, with system. No man can have a clear conscience in this matter who does not set apart a fixed proportion of his income. Every difficulty could be solved with ease if this were done. I would dictate to no man what the proportion should be. I know some men who give a fourth of their income, and I know many who give a tenth. Obviously a tenth to a man with a small income is more than a tenth to one with a large one. The great thing is that a proportion should be fixed according to conscience. Many im-

agine they are giving to charity far more than they are actually giving, just for lack of method, because they feel they are always giving odd sums to this and to that. Fix the sum at your disposal and apportion it to the best of your ability, and among other things you will get peace of conscience about the whole subject, and in addition the whole problem will be solved. St. Paul pointed to this systematic giving as a Christian duty: "Concerning the collection, upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." Read the 112th Psalm and note the Psalmist's description of the good man as one who can lend, and disperse, and give, and yet can guide his affairs with discretion. The two aspects of life are quite compatible, nay, are quite essential. Spiritually this is the conclusion of the whole matter, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth: there is that withholdeth more than is meet but it tendeth only to want."

The man who holds his soul by a firm grip holds all else loosely. Let possessions sit lightly on you. Paul was the same man when he suffered need as when he abounded. You too are the same man. If you know how to abound, you will know if need be how to be abased. The burnt-offering of sacrifice

has a sweet-smelling savour even to yourself, and is well-pleasing to God. Love is the fulfilling of the whole law. Love can often only be shown by our "fellowship in the matter of giving." Some of us have no other way of taking share in the Church's work except by giving. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

If we saw clearly we would see that one of the finest features of our church life is the discipline it affords in this important sphere, saving our kindly instincts from being wasted in empty emotion, affording us true education of the heart, summoning us to partake of the blessed fellowship of giving and receiving.

XV

THE FAVOUR OF MAN

Joseph found grace in his sight and he served him.—GENESIS xxxix. 4.

The Lord gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.—GENESIS xxxix. 21.

THE character of Joseph as depicted in Genesis is one of the finest in literature—a rare combination of strength and sweetness, wisdom and humility, with the strength of a soldier and the grace of a courtier. Gifted with such a happy temperament that in adversity he was able to face misfortune with a bright cheerfulness and a half-humorous buoyancy; he was also of such a sweetly pious nature that in prosperity he never grew arrogant or selfish. Added to the flexibility and grace of his character, there were strong self-control and probity that nothing could undermine. It is seldom indeed that such opposite virtues are found in one man. The sweet nature is so often weak: the strong one is so often proud. The happy temperament is inclined to be shallow: the conscientious is inclined to be hard. Wisdom is

not always humble: religion is not always gracious. Humour has not always principle: influence over men is not always unselfish. Strength in any line is often accompanied by lamentable weakness in other directions, and seldom do we find such an all-round balance of character as the simple story of Joseph reveals.

This rare combination of gifts and virtues is not yet exhausted by all we have mentioned as characteristic of Joseph; for we find it in a region where it is more unusual still. He was a dreamer, a visionary from his youth, with a sort of guileless simplicity natural enough to a man of pure and lofty imagination. Yet when the time came he showed himself to be a capable man of affairs, with command of business and leadership over men, and an easy facility in all the details of a practical situation. The highest kind of influence over others, the highest leadership of men comes naturally to him who dreams dreams and sees visions, giving him power to appeal to sentiment and imagination; but when the occasion arises such men usually show themselves impractical and unable to cope with the actual difficulties. The man who can inspire action is seldom able to control and direct it. The poet has not the reputation of being generally a good manager. The

permanent official has not the reputation of being able to see very far or to have much power of initiative, though he can conduct the business of his department with skill and efficiency. But this dreamer, who by virtue of his gift of vision commanded the instinctive confidence of men and assumed leadership, was also able to keep it. He showed by his practical sense and capacity that he merited their confidence. He was of alert, as well as of speculative, mind. Men felt his personal superiority and readily conceded it, and his management proved his right to the first place. Wherever he was, a slave in Potiphar's house, a prisoner in the prison, a statesman at Pharaoh's court, he always got hold of the strings and was prime mover of events. The young slave in the house of Potiphar gradually took over all the affairs of the household, was entrusted with more and more, and showed himself worthy of power. "Joseph found grace in his sight and he served him," till his master made him overseer over his house and all that he had he put into his capable hands. What promotion was possible in such a situation he achieved by sheer force of ability and character.

When once more the wheel turned and left him as low as could be, and instead of an honourable post

he found himself in prison, the same process began again, and he climbed into favour and power. "The Lord gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." He was so bright and serviceable, so ready to help, so thoughtless of self, so trustworthy and so capable in all he undertook, that he could not but find favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. Such men are not so common in a prison, or for that part anywhere, that they can be readily overlooked. Soon, his place there was almost as the governor of the prison instead of prisoner. He was as the very life and light of the place, and "the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison." Lovable, serviceable, faithful, there could not but be many an opportunity for him to exercise his wonderful personal influence, and touch men, all unconscious as he was, by the magnetic fascination of his character.

Now something of this remarkable success was due to temperament, was due to natural gifts, because he was a goodly person and well-favoured, and because he was of a bright, buoyant nature, and because he was of a sweet and affectionate disposition, so that everybody naturally trusted him; but to leave the matter here would be to miss all the meaning and all the moral of the tale. It was not because the good

fairies attended his cradle, as we say, that the man Joseph became as the story relates it. In the long run it was not casual, but causal, as everything in life really is, springing from moral causes. And there are three chief reasons, which help to explain the force of influence such as Joseph's, and which at the same time reveal to us the source of all such influence.

I. For one thing, whether due to temperament or to principle, he saw the dignity of service, and took *delight in serving* and helping others. Though it may have begun in his light-hearted and sweet nature, it must have deepened into principle before it could have stood the severe tests to which it was put—as, for example, in prison, where he might easily have been soured by brooding over the injustice of his sentence and the hardness of his lot. But, in prison or out of it, he turned so easily to bearing others' burdens and putting his hand to others' work, that it is evident he was inspired by unselfish regard for those about him, whether his fellow-servants in Potiphar's house or his fellow-prisoners in the king's gaol. He had something of the self-devotion that comes from self-forgetfulness. He had had early dreams of his own pre-eminence, of the great position in the world he was to attain, in which his sheaf

stood upright and the sheaves of his brethren did obeisance to *his*, and in which the sun and the moon and the stars bent before *him*; but now in his trial he did not wait for these dreams to come true before he would bestir himself. In his lot as a slave, and afterwards as a prisoner, he started right away making the most of the situation, throwing himself into his work, without thought that it was menial and beneath him. He was ready to serve anywhere, just because he took an unfeigned delight in serving. "He found grace in his master's sight, and he served him," with pleasant eagerness. He brought sunshine into the dungeon, and made life easier for all by his winsome, unselfish conduct, so that it could be said of him that whatsoever the prisoners did he was the doer of it.

II. Again, the position Joseph took, both inside the prison and outside it, was the natural *dominance due to character*. A man, who added to his lovable qualities such strength of will and such complete self-control, was bound to take precedence. He had come through the fire untarnished, with only a keener glitter of steel, and a finer edge. The peace of a good conscience kept him from being soured by the injustice of his sentence. His conscious probity freed him from all personal care, and made it possi-

ble for him to devote himself to the service of others. Such a character as the story depicts could not fail to command influence, a character so strong and so sweet, so controlled and yet so buoyant. The bright cheerfulness, which was his great charm, was one of the fruits of character. It was the result of that integrity of conscience, for which he suffered and through which also he triumphed. It was no mere chance then, but was indeed the inevitable effect of his character, that Joseph laid hold of his kingdom of personal influence even within the narrow bounds of his prison, so that "he found favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison," as formerly "he found grace in his master's sight" as he served him.

III. The third and deepest reason which explains this influence was his faith. The inspiring source of his life and of his character was *religion*. Here we get down to the bed-rock. It was Joseph's confidence in God which bred in him his strength of character, and which moved him to constant service. This is the foundation of all the rest. In his direst temptation he was upheld by a sense of rectitude and a sense of honour, so that he would have been ashamed to repay his master's kindness and trust by base ingratitude; but the chief secret of his strength was the thought of his relation to God, "How can

I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" In addition to the motives which ought to weigh with any honourable man, there is the supreme motive of religion. The inner and impregnable line of his defence is his faith in God. His nobility of nature had its roots deep down in his spiritual life. The air of distinction and the easy gracefulness with which he won men's hearts were not mere surface qualities. A constant reference to a higher law and a higher will gave stamina to his character, and kept him from the pitfalls that menace the man who is merely good-natured and obliging.

The man who has no deeper motive than that of pleasing others, or even serving them, becomes pliable and cannot be depended on. All Joseph's sweetness and amiability would not have stood the tests to which he was subjected, if there were not back of them this root-virtue of strength; and even the strength would have broken under the weight, if it had not been inspired by the assurance of the presence of God. This meant the introduction of principle into his life. Trace back the qualities we have been considering to their fountain head, and we see them springing from faith. His delight in serving and his self-devotion were not the result of a desire to be a favourite among his fellows. That motive

will not carry one very far. Joseph was enabled to look not altogether on his own things but also on the things of others, because he at the same time looked on higher things. The highest motives are the strongest motives, and the only permanent motives, and they work all along the line of life, consecrating even trivial things by the sanction of duty. The mere desire to please or even benefit one's fellows, when it is only an emotion, will not last out under the heat and burden of the day. It is often only a subtle way of pleasing one's self, and when it ceases to give the glow of benevolent feeling, it withers away because it has no root. If Joseph had no other motive than to find grace in his master's sight, what would be left to him of that motive when through no fault of his he lost that grace? And if he might pluck up heart again in prison and try the same tactics with the keeper, seeking once more only favour in his sight, could that motive alone keep him through the weary years of neglect in the dreary prison?

The mere popularity-hunter is a poor creature, when the sun does not shine on him. There are few meaner and more insecure motives than that. If no other ambition than that had been in Joseph's heart he would not have gone to prison to preserve

his master's honour and his own. To curry favour in the sight of men, a man sometimes has only to practise the trick of crawling. The easiest way of getting the goodwill of some is to have a pliable conscience and a not too rigorous standard of right. Merely to seek favour in the sight of master or keeper will soon make a man invertebrate, ever turning swiftly to the soft way. We soon begin to judge ourselves by the flexible standard of outside opinion, making others the only conscience we have. It is the curse of the demagogue that he cannot live without the sweet savour of popular applause; and to gain that he is tempted to trifle with principle and even to sell his own honour. One of the keenest and sternest condemnations of the New Testament is that of those who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

It is quite a worthy motive to seek to serve and help and please others; and we have seen that this was one of the secrets of Joseph's success. But we must surely see also that by itself it is a very dangerous motive. It must be related to something higher, if it would escape its terrible temptations. It must be held in check by conscience, by unalterable principles of rectitude, and it must be inspired by faith in and love of God, before it can be saved from its

own doom and made an instrument for good. For true living we need a higher standard than the favour of men. This beautiful story of Joseph never leaves out of account the source both of his strength and of his grace of character. The real favour he found in the sight of men owed its origin to the favour of God.

So linked were these in the sweet and sunny early life of Joseph that we cannot but think of the boyhood of Jesus, as "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." And when Joseph too, like Jesus, had to choose between the favour of men and the favour of God, he chose the hard way, the way of the cross, rather than give up his Heavenly Friend. Even there in the prison he found the way of serving, and the Lord was with him. These three hidden forces explain the life and character of Joseph, a delight in service, unflinching probity, and faith in a living and loving God—and the last of these is the greatest, being the very source and fount of the others.

Even if the good man does not find favour in the sight of men through his untoward lot, he is not bankrupt of hope and strength. He has a life hid in God. He has the peace of a good conscience, and the approving smile of his Heavenly Father.

Though all the world condemn, it is enough that He commends. Like our Lord, however misunderstood on earth he be, it is enough to be understood in heaven. Though human favour be withdrawn, it is enough to have found favour in the eyes of the Lord. He loses nothing who loses not God.

XXVI

THE SANCTUARY OF LIFE

*But Pharaoh said, Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say,
Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord.—EXODUS v. 17.*

THE Children of Israel were becoming mere beasts of burden, sullen, soulless, despairing. It is the lot of the slave. Men become what they are treated, and what they are supposed to be. If you want a child to grow up gentle and noble, you must deal with him as if he were; you must trust him to be that. To treat a dependent human being as a dog is to make him a dog—he may be a very affectionate and faithful dog, but a dog nevertheless. The curse of slavery, even in its lightest forms, has been that the higher possibilities of human nature have been excluded; and in its vilest form men have become brutes. The Israelites in their days of bondage were losing all that made them distinctive, losing all the moral and spiritual traces of their ancestry. Their taskmasters were grinding the soul out of them. They were treated as an inferior race, and so were becoming inferior. Being beasts of burden, they

were not supposed to need any provision for the higher instincts of their nature, the consolations of religion, the strength of worship, the hope of their own peculiar faith. True patriots like Moses and Aaron must have felt how intolerable the state of affairs had become. Added to their faith in God and His loving purpose with Israel, there would be the passion of wounded love at the wrongs and insults heaped on their brethren.

They spoke to Pharaoh in the name of religion, which is also the name of humanity. They asked for alleviation of the hard lot of the oppressed. They asked that respect should be paid to their religious needs. Moses saw, as a wise statesman if nothing else, that his people would lose everything worth having unless their religion could be saved to them. He knew that it was only that which kept them from the low level to which all other slaves sunk. He felt that life needed a sanctuary to make it true life. He asked from Pharaoh some relaxation of the tight bonds which held them to their sordid existence. "Let us go three days' journey into the desert, we pray thee, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God." The king of Egypt said unto them, Why do ye, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their works? Get you unto your burdens. As a punishment for

presuming to think that slaves had souls like their masters he added to the burdens, and commanded, Let there more work be laid upon the men that they may labour therein. And when the cry of the oppressed came to the king, he declared it was all an excuse to get off work, "Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice unto the Lord."

It is the natural philosophy of the slave-driver. It would mean three days less work done, and would be a dangerous if not also a useless pampering of the workers. The talk of religion is only an excuse for idleness, and shirking their tasks. From such a point of view it was natural to find a godless disregard for human life, or at least a disregard for the highest functions of manhood. We find the same reasoning, not only in the slave-driver Egyptian or otherwise, but in all who hold the slave-driver's philosophy. The root of it is that the material is everything and the spiritual is nothing; and Pharaoh's reasoning comes perhaps natural to as many men in our day as ever before. Our age is so severely and intensely practical, that many have little patience with anything which is not suffused with the same spirit. The rapid advance of natural science has done much to give us this standpoint. The

keenest and finest brains have been directed to scientific investigations. We have been dazzled by the wonderful discoveries which enable us to use material forces. Science takes the place in the estimation of men which formerly philosophy held. It is natural that our ideals of life should have become more materialistic. Then along with the advance of science, and as a consequence of it, there has been as great an advance of industry, in the application of the forces of nature. Machinery is more important in modern conditions of manufacture than the labour which directs it. Business capacity ranks higher than ever it did. Everything has its market value; even a quality of brain can be classified according to the wages it can demand. A material invention for saving labour is of much more moment than any amount of abstract thought. We are becoming slaves to the practical. So, in the opinion of the mass, the active, energetic life takes precedence over the contemplative life. So that the temptation is a very real one to look upon everything which cannot be rated in the money market as mere idleness. In some business circles, for a boy to wish to be an artist is to blast his character with a lasting disgrace; and a father would not dream of encouraging his son to become a minister, or enter into a life of serious

study, and would be alarmed and shocked to know that he wrote poetry, though he might forgive him if he could write popular novels and make plenty of money by it. We have such vulgar standards, judging everything by the practical return it makes us; and of course what does not come up to our standard is set down as futile and useless and idle. This false method of judging life plays endless mischief. It even ruins our industry, and is responsible for the ugliness and poor quality of so much production. We think more of the amount of work done than of the character of the work. And the artistic spirit is killed in the sordid atmosphere which appraises everything by its price.

There are many virtues in the eager, practical utilitarian spirit of our age, and it carries much hope for all of us in its bosom, hope for an ultimate social condition juster than any hitherto reached; but this need not blind us to the dangers and faults of our prevailing type of life. We have to learn that the world will not be saved by machinery and electrical appliances; that these can be developed to an undreamt of degree and yet leave man essentially where he is, lower indeed in the scale of life instead of higher. We have to learn that there may be moral degeneracy alongside of the splendours of

material prosperity. We have to learn to judge things by a higher standard than even the standard of utility; that in Victor Hugo's phrase the beautiful is as useful as the useful. We have to learn that the end of civilisation is not money, but men, and that the true wealth of nations is more than having our ships in every sea and our commerce in every market. We have to learn the limitations of our common standards and to see that what sometimes passes for idleness is the truest work, and the busiest practicality is often, from the standpoint of eternity, the idlest trifling. Life needs a Sanctuary to save it from perishing of cold.

In religion the principle of Pharaoh is common enough, by which we judge of movements and churches by the vulgar standards of what is visible to the eye. It is so easy to make much of mere machinery in church work, to give a church its place in our classified scale according to the outward signs, members on the roll, the state of the balance sheet, the organisations and committees and fussy activities; forgetting the very thing that makes it an ally of the Kingdom of Heaven which cometh not with observation. The essential function of the Church is not social, or political, or practical as we count practical. It will have a bearing on all these things,

will influence society, politics, and practical life; but its essential function is that of *worship*. Some say impatiently to the Church that they want to see something practical, they want schemes and plans, and say with Pharaoh, "Ye are idle, ye are idle, and therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord." Some declare they support the Church as a useful institution to effect valuable social changes, and would be satisfied if she could be cured of her innate idleness in leaving practical problems to go and do sacrifice to the Lord.

The Church stands as an eternal protest against the shallow surface life which is ever in danger of withering away because it has no root. It is a constant protest against the idea that the contemplative life, the culture of the devotional, is idleness. It calls to prayer, to praise, to worship, to shut the door on the world, and forget the distracting ambitions and desires and works, and wait on God till the fire burns. It stands as the Sanctuary of the race, for the weary and the heavy-laden, and all the beaten, broken lives of men. And it tells the strong and the victors in the fight, that away from God their strength is spent for nought, and their victories are empty and barren of good.

It asserts that even work without worship is idle,

the frantic beating of the air. For, this need which the Church supplies is more than a graceful addition to life; it is a necessity for true life at all. Our activities cannot keep themselves up: even our religious and social activities cannot keep themselves alive. They must be fed by blood from the pulsing heart of faith. The cold will numb the limbs when the heart slackens its beat. To learn truly to be active to good purpose, we must go back to the Sanctuary of life, and gain that inner sense of things which keeps us from confusion from the outward whirl. Is it not our great need to-day to develop the contemplative life, the holy meditation which makes a man calm at the heart, and therefore strong for all the needs of living? We must gather the soul again at the centre, and root ourselves in the larger life of God.

This is the argument for prayer. I need not develop the argument. You see it from what has been said. It is not idleness, whatever the Pharaohs may say. It restores the fevered life; cuts it off from its sordidness and worldliness, and gives it back again its youth renewed like the eagle's. It rests the soul, as sleep rests the body. Pharaoh's charge rebounds upon the accuser. It is the other way about. It is easier to be busied with little activi-

ties than to face up to the serious tasks of culture. Men miss culture of mind because they are idle, because busybodiness is easier really. And men miss culture of soul because they are too idle to make use of the means. You have to give yourself to prayer and meditation before the rebellious heart is curbed. You have to submit to discipline before the will is conformed to God's will and the life is clothed with the garment of holiness. The retort is often legitimate—Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, We have no time and no inclination to go and do sacrifice to the Lord.

And this is the argument for the true use of the Sunday. Need I develope this argument also? It is the slave-driver's philosophy and the slave-driver's interest to make Sunday as every other day, to call it idleness, and to seek if they could to lash men back to their burdens. "Why do ye, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their works? Get you to your burdens!" If we are wise we will not be misled by sneers about Sabbatarianism, and will resist every encroachment against the sacredness from work of the Sabbath. It is not enough to make it a day of cessation from toil. It is a unique opportunity for the true refreshment of the whole man, for worship, for thought, for communion with God

and with His people. You are living a mutilated life if you are living for the present, impoverishing your soul by neglecting the means of grace. Guard jealously your Sunday: use it jealously, to get the true good from it, to make you a better and a stronger man, and fitter for your daily work. It was the oppressor of men's bodies and souls who said, "Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord."

The point of all our thought, illustrating it by the function of the Church, by prayer, by the true use of the Sabbath, is that there is needed for us all a centre of rest, a Sanctuary of the soul. I would dictate to none where he should find it; so that he find it and is brought near to God through it. Emerson asked a young woman working in his household if she had been to church that day. She answered brusquely, "No, I don't trouble the Church much." He said quietly, "Then you have somewhere a little chapel of your own"—a courteous assumption which might have made her think. Choose your own Church, by all means, but be sure it is a Church. I do not plead for the institutions which we call churches, unless there you get the Sanctuary which your soul needs. But don't tell me, with the cant of the time, that your Church is the solitary wood

or the quiet chamber, if you never worship there.

You don't trouble the Church much. Very well. Then you have somewhere in your life, somewhere in your burdened, sinful, stricken heart a little chapel of your own, a Sanctuary of the soul where you meet with God, where you bring your thoughts and desires and affections and ambitions and hopes, and submit them to God, some place where you are idle from the world's business and pleasures, and do sacrifice to the Lord. If you know the meaning of the Sanctuary, it is the strength and the glory of life, and saves you from the sordidness of the world and from the strife of tongues.

XVII

DISCOURAGED YOUTH: A SERMON TO PARENTS

Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged.—COLOSSIANS iii. 21.

IN passages like this Paul shows how the Christian faith accepts the fact of the different relations in which we find ourselves, and deals its impartial justice all round. The precepts are simple. They are to be obeyed not as strict rules, but as expressing the spirit of the religion we profess. They begin with the obligation resting on Christians as members of families. It is only with one aspect of that with which we are concerned at present, but we understand the Christian method better if we notice how Paul treats it as a whole. The family life of the time was most corrupt, and Christianity purified it not by revolutionary methods but by instilling into it the pure spirit of love. We are all placed in definite relations, as husband and wife, children and parents, brothers and sisters, masters and servants. There are some relationships over which we have no control, and

others we can to some extent control; but in either case we cannot escape the responsibilities. Every new position carries a new responsibility with it. There should be no light-headedness in entering into a new relationship, such as marriage, and there should be no shirking the obligations resting on us in any present relationship. The one is folly; the other is crime. Wives, husbands; fathers, children; servants, masters are all enjoined to act according to their place and function in their respective spheres; but not singly. The one corresponds to the other, and both together make up the whole. Every duty is connected with a right; and every right brings with it a corresponding duty. We have all our rights, whether we get them or not—the wife as against the husband, the child as against the parent, the servant as against the master. We have all our duties, whether we do them or not; and our duties correspond exactly with our rights. The duties of men and women in the relationships of life are mutual, not one-sided but balanced on either side.

Notice how Paul groups them together, showing first the one side, and then the reverse side. Is the wife to submit to the husband? Then the husband is to love the wife. Are children to obey parents? Then parents must not provoke and discourage the

children. Are servants to obey their masters? Then masters must be just and generous in their treatment. We are good at claiming and maintaining our own rights; are we so careful to maintain the rights of others? We are loud upon the duties that others owe us; do we feel as strongly the duties we owe them? Our duty is only another person's right. One side is turned towards him; the other towards us. Other people have rights which we must respect and gladly concede. Even slaves have rights; for of course it was to slaves Paul wrote when he spoke of servants. This was a startling idea at a time, when even in law a slave was looked on as a thing, a possession with no inherent rights. Even children have rights. This also was startling at a time, when the power of a Roman father over his children was practically unlimited. Obedience was demanded from the children; and Paul asks them to give that obedience cheerfully and willingly as to the Lord. But he insists that the father also has duties. "Children, obey your parents. Parents, provoke not your children."

You have often heard the one side enforced; but this converse side must not be forgotten. Indeed, if there is any difference between the two, this one is the more important. If parents did their duty to

their children, there would perhaps be less unfilial and unnatural conduct to parents. And, for another thing, they should know their duty to their children better than the children can be expected to know their duty to them. I do not speak of the debt parents owe society and owe the children for being parents. There would be fewer thoughtless, foolish marriages if that aspect were always considered; but I speak at present of the duties involved in the present relationship, accepting the facts as they are. I know that the subject is an unusual one, and some who would listen with approval when the lesson of obedience is enforced upon children may object to the turning of the tables. It is the old story. We listen willingly to the statement of our rights, but are just a trifle deaf on the subject of our duties.

But having made clear that children have rights, natural and inherent rights because of their position in the family, for their presence in which they had no say; and having asserted that parents have towards them corresponding duties, I would not be tempted to spend more time on this (I hope admitted) general question, or to dissipate attention by referring to the hundred and one claims children have. The claims to care, food, protection, education, and such like are recognised in every Christian

community. I propose to focus our thought upon an aspect of home-training often overlooked. It is found in the text, "Provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged."

What Paul meant is quite evident. After telling children to obey, he turns to the parents and asks them to make it easy for them to obey. He warns against provoking or irritating youth by over-exactingness and constant interference and fault-finding. Authority is good and necessary, but perpetual exercise of authority in small things as well as large is disastrous both for the authority and for the real good of children. It prevents growth in the qualities of manhood. It *discourages*, takes away the hope of ever being able to please, and so keeps from the attempt. All education and discipline need wise interpretation of powers. Every power put into the hands of a man carries with it the possibility of abuse. The natural power which is a parent's due—and which in its measure is a teacher's due—is of course given to be used. A man must rule his household. Children must be trained, disciplined, guided, restrained. It is no appeal for anarchy. Even a despotism is better than no government at all. But if little ones are under your power, and rightly so, they are in your hands not for your pleasure and

that your will may be done. They are human beings, immortal souls, with inalienable rights. Sins against them will recoil most terribly against the sinner. We see them recoiling every day, and that is why a sermon on this text is necessary, though you may have never heard one on it before.

The first natural cause we think of for discouragement in the young is over-severity, though that is not so common to-day as it has been. Still, it is easy to overstep the line, to be too exacting upon their obedience. The danger of over-severity is not very pressing when children are young; for then they are so weak and helpless and their ways are so winning that they find the road to all hearts. Then sometimes the danger is the opposite, of over-leniency, letting whims form into habits and petulance become a vice of temper. The danger of being too exacting is greatest at that undefined period when boys and girls are no longer children and yet cannot by the greatest stretch even of their own imagination be called men and women. It is a difficult time, as all guardians and teachers know; and it is not a time to have the hand ever on the bearing rein. The Christian parent who has trained his children faithfully and lovingly must at such a time have a little faith—faith in the Master to whom he dedicated his

children, and faith in the children themselves. Their hearts will turn sooner or later towards home. "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Novelty, new surroundings, adventures, sometimes enchant the imagination and lead captive the heart; but the mind will soon turn with longing to the place of love and peace. Yea, if even—which God forbid!—a son forgets his mother's love and his father's God, and lives in some far country of sin and folly, the memory of the beautiful past will be the only chain that binds him to good, and the cry will break from his heart, "I will arise and go to my father."

When we speak of over-severity producing sullenness or despair, it usually works through an injured feeling of justice. Injustice will drive even wise men mad; and certainly the harshness of injustice rankles in the mind of the young. They have an innate sense of justice, and when that is outraged a great wrong is done. They may not be able to explain it, but instinctively they know it not to be right. That is why a system of favouritism does so much moral harm. Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, speaks of the effect a small injustice had upon his life when he was a boy. He was wrongly punished for something of which he was innocent. The passion

it raised in him was so great that fifty years after, when writing about it, he felt his pulse quicken. At the time the sense of injustice almost suffocated him, and to relieve his feelings he kept screaming, Carnifex, carnifex! Torturer! tormentor! The sentiment of indignation left its scar on his heart; and that incident was the end of his childhood. The effect of it, he openly confesses, was that he was less ashamed of doing wrong, and only more afraid of being found out: he learned to dissemble, to rebel, to lie.

It is not the mere strictness, but the injustice which wounds. Martin Luther said to a friend, "Be temperate with your children; punish them if they lie or steal, but be just in what you do." He referred to a time when his mother beat him about some nuts till the blood came. He knew that he had done wrong, and that his mother meant well, but he felt that the punishment from its severity became injustice. His school days were not happy either. "Never be hard with children," he said afterwards. "I was once flogged fifteen times in one forenoon over the conjugation of a verb. Punish if you will, but be kind too, and let the sugar plum go with the rod." Luther himself, as you know, was very tender with children all his life. Biography is full of examples of the evil effects of a loveless youth. When

we read the story of Byron's early life with his heart gradually hardened by neglect worse than cruelty, we can trace the germs of his fierce temper, his selfish lust, his sad life. He was early discouraged, and was perpetually provoked; and the result was a sullen youth, and the shipwreck of great hopes. Great is the responsibility for all failure of life; but where does the responsibility end and where does it begin?

St. Paul makes his warning about harshness very tender by the reason he adds, "that they be not discouraged," that they may not lose heart and hope. "A broken spirit, the bane of youth," says Bengel. It is at least the end of youth. Youth is the time of hope. The world needs the early vigour and the sweet strong faith of youth. It is a terrible thing when in any line the young are discouraged and have lost hope. It makes them old before their time, gives them the vices of age without its virtues. Who would wilfully rob them of their hope? Not one who loves them and wishes them well. And yet this is the warning to parents to avoid discouraging their own children. Something like this is the great temptation of superior age and experience. Men make too much of mere length of living, and crush down the opinions and endeavours of the young by

a grand assumption of wisdom. Some set themselves deliberately to discourage and irritate. Nothing that is good is ever done now: this generation is all wrong: young people are sadly degenerated—until the young begin to think, Well, we must be pretty bad if we have degenerated from *that*.

We who are older or are getting older lose our rightful influence over the young by foolish croaking or nagging, or however our attitude should be described. We lose much when we alienate them from us; and, what is more serious, *they* lose much. They lose the benefit of our wisdom, and experience, and advice. If your children do not come to you for advice and help, if they do not bring their joys and sorrows, may it not be because you discourage them so that they have not the heart or inclination to come? Be it yours to encourage, to inspire, to guide the young to turn their energies into the right channels. Character is developed in children by a judicious policy of both intervention and non-intervention—especially let me say non-intervention; for perhaps more are spoiled by too much meddling than by too little. A combination is wanted of care and trust, care over them and trust in them—a new mixture of faith and works. Work for the child as much as you will and in as many lines as he needs; and

also have faith in him to let him do some work for himself. Give the child a Christward setting for his life; and Christ the child-lover will reach him. If anywhere, it is in the home that there should be much of the love that suffereth long and is kind, that seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil and is not easily provoked, and does not lightly provoke. Tenderness does not mean laxity. It is not a reckless affection which is needed. It is the law of love. Love is there, but it is a law. The weak indulgence of one ministers to selfishness as much and has as fatal results as the over-severity of another. The love which watches and prays and works, which counts no toil lost which helps to the great end, the love which is wise as well as gentle, which is strong as well as sweet—that is the highest ideal of influence.

There is no sphere of work so fruitful for God and the world as work among and for children. Christianity is a religion of the home-life. God blesses the world through families. He is the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Christ has for ever consecrated the family circle. The child takes his place by right there, and he is the type of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let the altar of the home be the sacred centre for every heart. A good mother—her children arise up and call her blessed: a good

father, who can face Him of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named with the beautiful words, "Behold, I and the children the Lord has given me."

XVIII

BIRTH-GIFTS: A SERMON TO CHILDREN

What manner of child shall this be?—ST. LUKE i. 66.

WHEN John, who afterwards became the Baptist, was born, there were many things which made people wonder what kind of man he would grow up to be, and made the best people expect a great deal from his future. He was peculiar, exceptional—men spoke about him even when he was a baby, and hoped he would be and do something wonderful, and there was even a promise given his father that he would be great in the sight of the Lord. Not only his friends, but all sorts of strangers were curious about him, and people asked curiously and hopefully, *What manner of child shall this be?*

That baby was not really different from any other baby. He was only exceptional in degree, as we say, that is, he was special because he had a special work cut out for him, and because of that more people were interested in him than usual. But there is the same kind of curiosity and the same kind of hope-

fulness about every other baby that has ever been born. Somebody at least is full of wonder and full of anxiety over every little child. Your father and mother and friends and teachers and minister and everybody who thinks of you and wishes you well, when they knew that you were born, asked in some fashion the same question, I wonder, I wonder what manner of child shall this be?

If I were preaching from this text to your parents instead of to you, I think I would do it differently. I would not say the same things as I mean to say to you, because you see their duties are different from yours. I think if they asked me about you, and if I had to answer in a single sentence, What manner of child shall this be? I would say, He or she will be the manner of child that you, the parents, make him or her.

Yet I am not sure if that would quite satisfy me. It would if there were not something which we call, in religion, grace, a special element which enters in a special measure into different lives, if there were not a peculiar and incalculable thing about every one of you, that makes you different from anybody else in the whole world. And so a text like this is not only for parents; for the manner of child you are, and the manner of man and woman you will be,

depend a great deal on yourself. Each human life is separate and peculiar a thing by itself, as truly separate and special as John the Baptist was; and yet like each other, with the same possibilities in kind, capable of becoming, like him, great in the sight of the Lord.

You have all got certain good gifts given you at birth, the gifts which make you human—birth-gifts. We talk of some children being born great, or born lucky, or born rich, or as the proverb has it, born with a silver spoon in their mouths, which is often a very bad and unfortunate thing indeed. But when looked at truly, these things are not real gifts, and do not really count when a man's life is summed up at the end. But all of you are born great in the sight of the Lord, and that is the gift of gifts.

People's minds are full of stupid and wrong notions about these gifts that are given to little children, as you can see from the foolish way they speak about them. Men even think that they can themselves *give gifts*, birth-gifts, and birthday gifts, and not bad things at all these things are, are they? It is a very good thing indeed, is it not, for your friends to give you pretty things and nice things and things good to eat on your birthday, if only they and you

will remember that they are not gifts at all but only presents? And they do it because they are interested in you, and love you and are continually wondering what manner of child you are going to be. You know that when Jesus was born, wise men (and they must have been very wise) brought precious things to lay at His feet. But the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh the wise men brought were not the true gifts which the little child Jesus received. He was born great in the sight of the Lord, quite apart from all these things.

Even the lovely fairy stories which men write for you sometimes mislead you about these real gifts. You know how the fairies are said to give some lucky little baby splendid things, finer and better than presents of gold and such-like. You know the story of the princess, who was the only child of her parents. They had a very fine christening for her, and the princess had for her godmothers all the fairies who could be got in the kingdom, seven in number. Just when they were going to sit down at table, another old fairy came in who had not been invited, and who was angry because she had been passed over. You know that the custom with fairies is that after they have been entertained at such feasts, they all give some gift to the child. Well,

they all gave this lucky princess the best gifts they could think of. One gave for her gift that she should be the most beautiful person in the world; another that she should be clever, the third that she should be very graceful in everything she did; the fourth that she should be a lovely dancer; the fifth that she should be a charming singer; the sixth that she should play all kinds of musical instruments magnificently. When the spiteful and angry old fairy came over the cradle she gave as her gift that the princess should have some terrible misfortune, that a spindle should pierce her hand and she should die, or some such unlucky thing happen to her. And though one of the seven fairies had suspected this, and had hidden behind a curtain so as to be the last to wish something and if possible make things better for the poor princess, yet she could not quite overturn the misfortune, but could only wish her something which would help to make the misfortune less.

Now these things such as the fairies gave to that princess cannot be the real gifts about which we have been speaking, because you remember we said that the real gifts were given in some measure to all. You cannot all be so accomplished as the beautiful princess. You cannot all be great singers. You cannot all play the piano well if you practised all

day and every day. Because, as we say, you have not all got that gift.

And yet there is truth in the fairy story, in the strange mixture of gifts, of mingled good and bad fortune implied in all such giving, the dread penalty of all privilege given to every human life. Will you let me try to put the little allegory in my own words, of the wonderful thing that happens whenever a little child is born, and that happened when you were born, and that made people ask wonderingly and anxiously, What manner of child shall this be?

The guardian angels of a little human life met to form for it a human soul. They meant to give to it the best gifts which even heaven could bestow. They meant to endow it with every possible good. They ransacked eternity to lay precious offerings at the feet of a little babe. No mere commonplace riches that could be grubbed from the earth were the angels' birthday presents. Each angel vied with another to add to the whole the richest gift. It was a beautiful soul. And when the eyelids opened it looked out through the unconscious eyes so clear and pure. Ungrudgingly the angels brought their gifts, but with a strange, wistful sadness in every motion as they formed that perfect soul. And here was heard a sigh, and there a sigh; so low that the

ear scarce believed it heard: but they were there a chaplet of sighs wreathing and circling round the little head, till every sigh was turned into a prayer. With one long, lingering look the angels left, and that human soul, so carefully, so tenderly prepared, was added to the world's life. But why the sadness, if they brought the very best gifts? Strange to say, the sadness was due to the fact that their gifts were the very best. If they had been set to any other task, cheerfully and gladly they would have done it. But here tears fell over the work, and all the fear that angel bosoms feel was felt for that soul. Strange gifts these, were they not, which though counted the best, were given so strangely. Strange gifts, which made angels tremble while they served.

Were they the best gifts? The very best. All that makes man man, all that distinguishes him from the beasts, all the properties so rich and precious of the human soul, were there. They poured into it power, intelligence, capacity, will, freedom, love, innocence—what more could be given? But the sighs are explained by the gifts, if you but think of them. Our birthday presents consist of *things*, ornaments, precious stones, a silver spoon, or a golden cradle. They are all materials which always remain the same, unless changed from the outside. But these angel-

gifts were not things but *faculties*, which alter according as they are used, or unused, or misused.

One angel brought power, power over things, power over self, power over others to some extent; and power can minister to selfishness—is it wonder that he sighed? Another brought intelligence, which may be exalted by thought and care and study, or degraded by carelessness and thoughtlessness. Another brought will, which has to regulate the life, will which can obey good and disobey at pleasure—marvel not at the long-drawn sigh. From another there came the strange gift of freedom, which makes men as gods, which lets us taste of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, freedom which trembles at the verge of license. Another brought capacity for joy, which bears in its bosom the possibility of sorrow. A gentle angel endowed the soul with love, which can be turned into hate. The last added innocence, which the world's mire would surely smirch; and his sigh ended in the prayer that when innocence was lost, virtue, which lasts through eternity, might be gained.

Now you know of what sort these gifts are which belong to you all, and which make all who love you ask, trembling and hopeful like the angels, What manner of child shall this be?

Every gift you have, of brain or heart or soul, is

from God. It is yours because it is His. You can only avoid the danger of the gift by constantly remembering that it is His, given you for His use. It is no fairy story, but solemn, serious fact. I want you to think of all that He has given you, all that lies in your hands, and I want you to determine that you will live with the thought ever with you, that you were given back to God at your baptism as truly as John the Baptist was given; and I want to close with putting the question a little differently. If all these gifts were consigned to you, What manner of children *ought* you to be?

XIX

THE POWER OF ENDLESS LIFE

After the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment but after the power of an endless life.—HEBREWS vii. 15, 16.

THE author is contrasting Christ's priesthood with that of the ordinary Levitical priesthood of Israel, and at this point lays emphasis on the enduring quality of the new covenant. It is not subject to change, and decay, and death. Christ is a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For one thing, the Levitical priests are men that die, and their priesthood for the time being terminates. Christ's title is not made of man, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life; and this is a guarantee of the finality of His priestly acts. The covenant, too, which He makes for His people is perfect and final. The eternal priest becomes the surety of an eternal covenant.

Thus we are justified in taking these words as applying also to ourselves, who are made kings and priests unto God through our great High Priest. We

too are made after the power of an endless life. I take the words as suggesting the influence our faith in immortality should have over our character and life. This same author, in the previous chapter, speaks of Christians as those who have tasted the powers of the world to come, indicating that the spiritual laws and principles of the future life run into and cross through the present life, and can be tasted and used. It means a great moral and spiritual dynamic now, if a man can reinforce his present life by bringing into it the powers of the world to come. Immortality is not a dead creed, an empty speculation, an interesting question of intellectual curiosity. It is a power, a force, a moral dynamic that can lift the life to a higher level and drive it to great ends. If it has no great influence over us, it is because it has not entered heart and conscience as a power. We hold immortality as a doctrine which we accept theoretically; we do not submit to it as an influence which will mould our whole being.

The reason why the faith has so little effect is because we merely look upon immortality as endless life in the sense of life continued to a limitless extent, a mere matter of time carried on and continued. Mere duration in itself cannot do much for us, and even can do little to impress us. An extension of

time does not necessarily mean an addition to moral force. It altogether depends on how the thought of duration is filled up and coloured. We must look upon immortality as affording scope for progressive development, the carrying forward of all that is in us at present as mere potentiality, the fruition of all our rudimentary capacities, growth into likeness to the perfect God. The power of endless life is the power of endless growth.

The spiritual life in us is only in its seedtime. It contains within it capacities and powers that lie latent and undeveloped. Given the right environment and conditions, the soul wakes and moves and grows; life springs from the germ; forces are let loose. We are only the hint and shadow and suggestion of what we can be, what we shall be. Our spiritual history is merely the faint promise of what our spiritual destiny may be. All we are at the best is but a hint of endless being, the *first strokes of a design* yet to be accomplished. This is to us the power of an endless life, and it is also the great argument for immortality, that apart from the future the past is a stupid riddle. "Life," said Franklin, "is rather a state of embryo, a preparation for life. A man is not completely born, until he has passed through death." It is the promise and potency of

life as we know it, which should make us open ourselves to the power of endless life to shape our ways. In the light of such purpose and such possibility we can understand the new values Christ put upon things, as in the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" If we could realise what the power of an endless life is and may be, it would alter our whole conception of things.

It has often been said, by way of condemnation, that most men live as though they would never die. The idea of that condemnation is true, meaning that most men forget the judgment of life that will be, and are content to go on carelessly and without thought of the serious issues. But the saying can be put exactly oppositely with perhaps more real truth. Most men live in imminent knowledge of death. They know that life is short and look upon death as an end of life, and try in their own way to make the most of it, try to crush as much into it as possible. If men lived really as though they would never die, if they lived, that is, in the power of endless life, they would live differently. We cannot take immortality as a real article of faith without influencing life all along the line. So important is this even from the point of view of mere duration that

one would think we would give the subject more consideration. We only need to think to realise how nearly it concerns us. As Pascal says, "The immortality of the soul is a matter of so great moment to us, it touches us so deeply, that we must have lost all feeling if we are careless of the truth about it. Our every action and our every thought must take such different courses according as there are, or are not, eternal blessings for which to hope, that it is impossible to take a single step with sense or judgment, save in view of that point which ought to be our end and aim." Our faith in this great verity should influence all our conduct and be a mighty motive in every region of life. And if the fact of endless life has no effect on us, it is time we examined the nature and quality of our faith.

In the long run, what men believe on the mortality or immortality of the soul will create their morals for them. If to-morrow we die, if our vision is bounded by time, the practical ethics of the mass can only be, "Let us eat and drink," let us snatch the day ere it flies. Men will not spend themselves for long results, and lose their lives in the pursuits of high ideals. How can they? Why should they, if everything must end in failure, and the web of life be torn across before the pattern is well begun? But if

our earthly life is a school of discipline for a larger, if the great designs started here will have time and chance for growth, we can bend to the greatest tasks in patience and hope. If

Imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part to grace the after-time,

we can have faith, and wait and work in peace. The power of an endless life now begun will already transfigure the beggarly present with its own glorious light. Even the faith which is asked of us now, believing where we cannot prove, is taken as the necessary preparation for the fuller life beyond. We number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

We have said that the power of endless life is the power of endless growth; and this is the great inspiration of the faith to us. Here even our best faculties are hampered and dwarfed by untoward conditions, and while progress seems a law of human life, yet it is so slow and so tortuous. Everything is so imperfect and so disappointing. Aspiration outruns attainment: result limps lamely after desire: the real laughs the ideal to scorn. Even the good that we would do, we cannot. It all means simply nothing, if it is not a training for a freer sphere. It is

the fate of the best of men to die in faith, not having received the promises, but only having seen them afar off. Our mortal life needs immortality to give it consistency and dignity, and indeed to give it any meaning at all. There are everywhere in us suggestions of great possibilities and immense resources, which only need to be drawn out and developed. The foundations of our life are laid on a plan that is simply idiotic, if it is not meant to be carried further than is possible here. Life is indeed only a preparation for life; and the right and wise scheme is to make it such a preparation, to lay hold of the power of an endless life and let that power work its will on us. If we refuse to taste the powers of the world to come, we are abrogating our rights as men and throwing away our birthright.

What can this power of an endless life do for us? How can it evidence its power? It will give us victory over death. We are able to put death in its proper place, to see what it cannot do. It is the man who lives for the years to come, who gains in wisdom and sober courage, and grows into a true and strong man. It ennobles character not to live for the present moment, even when the outlook is only a few years ahead. To work for some future date, to plan for it, to sacrifice for it, means to live by faith even to

that extent. The *power of the future* comes into a man's life, and lifts him above the petty cares and futile pleasures of the moment. To look beyond the present, though it be only a very little forward, brings victory over the present. To look beyond death gives victory over death. We come straight up to the grinning visage, look right into its eyes and recognise it to be only a sham power, and we lose any fear of it. It is like waking up after a nightmare, to know it to be only a nightmare. When we know eternity to be our home and live in the power of it, we at once get the victory over death, the last enemy. This is our Lord's Easter message to a world held in the grips of death. "Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This victory over death carries with it an even sweeter victory, the victory of our love over loss. This is the keenest sting of the grave to every sensitive heart, keener than any possible stab to self. The power of an endless life is power over the dread spectre that haunts all human love. Mr. Watts-Dunton, in *Aylwin*, reads aright one of the deepest facts of life, when he makes his hero listen to the words of his stricken father, "Should you ever come to love as I have loved, you will find that material-

ism is intolerable—is hell itself—to the heart that has known a passion like mine. You will find that it is madness, Hal, madness, to believe in the word 'never'! You will find that you *dare* not leave untried any creed, howsoever wild, that offers the heart a ray of hope." From that madness we are saved by the power of an endless life. The resurrection conquers that sorest of all fears of death. Our affections are a prophecy of immortality. We know that he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God; and love so born can never die. Our faith triumphs over the grave, looks beyond it in the power of endless life.

But further, the victory is more than the defeat of death. If we open ourselves to this power we attain victory over life itself, and over the world. With such a faith we will not let ourselves be too much entangled by things of sense and time. We are set in this field of strife not merely to fight, but to conquer; and conquer we shall if we put on the whole armour of faith. Faith is not a thing to be proved as an intellectual satisfaction; but a spiritual instrument to be used for the warfare of life. It is a power in our hands by which we triumph, over sin, over loss, over death, over trial, over all that is in life. "This is the victory that overcometh the

world, even our faith." Earth loses its dominion over us if we live in the power of an endless life, making the present a preparation for the future, making the world a discipline for the world to come, taking our spiritual gifts, however feeble and fragmentary, as given us to be endlessly unfolded, accepting life as an opportunity for growth in grace and faith and love and knowledge.

"Who is he that overcometh but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ?" To have the victory is to live in the power of an endless life; and to live in that power is to live now the Christian life, and be inspired by the Christian faith. May this be my end and aim, my desire and passion, so to live that I shall see Thy face, O Lover of my soul!

XX

HEAVEN ON EARTH

As the days of heaven upon the earth.—DEUTERONOMY xi. 21.

THE literal translation of these words is “as the days of the heavens above the earth,” meaning as long as the heaven endures above the earth, a figure for continual prosperity. They are part of the promise attached to the keeping of the commandments. If Israel will live in remembrance of the law of God and will observe it faithfully, then Israel’s national life is secure, and her future will be enduring. They are asked to live by the law of God, to make it the centre of personal and national life, to do everything possible to prevent either themselves or their descendants from forgetting the commandments. They are to make the law the inspiring force of all action, and the controlling standard of all thought. They are to lay up the words on their heart and their soul, imprinting them on their inward life. They are to bind them for a sign upon their hand and for frontlets between their eyes, as an ever-present

memorial to be suggested at every turn, every time they lift their hand to work or open their eyes to look. The relationship in which they stand to God is to colour all their life. They are to turn everything into a material visible expression of God's love to them and their loyalty to God. They are also to make the law the foundation of their family life, to teach it to their children, to make it a subject of conversation lest it be ever forgotten as the one condition of their national existence, sitting in the house, walking by the way, when they lie down and when they rise up. They are to live as though the law were written on the doorposts of their houses and upon their gates. These are all figures of a devoted, whole-hearted loyalty to God, and a determined desire to mould their life according to the law of God.

Then comes the promise that if they will so be guided and ruled and controlled by the law of God they will assuredly secure true and lasting national prosperity for themselves and for future generations. They will have a stable tenure of their country and will not need to be afraid of outside dangers, since their national life is safe within, established on a strong foundation. Their days will be multiplied, is the promise, and the days of their children in the land which the Lord gave to their fathers as the

days of the heavens above the earth. That is to say, *perpetually*, as long as the heavens endure. The conditions of permanence are within them, and God's blessing cannot but rest on them.

I takē the words this morning as a motto, using them as translated in the Authorized Version, with the additional meaning they contain; for this sense is implied in the promise. The permanence of the life promised springs from the quality of the life. The continuance of their national existence is the necessary fruit of the rich and deep religious life to which the prophet looks forward. "As the days of heaven upon the earth." This has been the dream of man in all ages, the hope of the faithful, the vision of the seer, in some form or other the aim of every sincere lover of his kind, the great consummation which inspires the work of reformer and philanthropist and missionary. It expresses the ideal for the world, the happy future towards which the whole creation groans and travails, the golden age ever in front of us, of which we dream and for which we pray, "As the days of heaven upon the earth."

The words aptly describe that reaching forward which we trace in every page of the Bible, through the history of the chosen people, through the typology of the priestly narratives, through the vision of the

prophets, through the hope and despair and sorrow and joy of the psalmists, as they cry, "O Lord, how long?" or as their song is hushed into peace when they see the vision. Nothing else will satisfy them: nothing less will they strive for—"the days of heaven upon earth." There is no single phrase which can so sum up the one underlying aim of the Bible amid its manifold variety.

Think how it expresses the expected result of the *Books of the Law*, that human life may be so governed by divine law, so restrained and impelled by the fear of the Lord that it may indeed become as the very days of heaven upon the earth. Think how it gives the moral of all the *historical books*, even when they record failure, and the very opposite of this dream, when they tell of days that are as hell upon earth, when they have to paint desolation and destruction through evil living and false religion and foolish government and the weakening of morale. It is all the obverse of the other possibility, all a sad pointing of the moral that it ought to be different, that it might have been different, been even as the days of heaven upon the earth. Think how it expresses the *prophetic books*, so varied in tone and temper in language and in situation, and yet one in the same passion for righteousness, and one in the

same prophetic hope, pleading, warning, threatening, pronouncing doom, preaching patience, or pointing to hope—all inspired by the same faith and all sustained by the same sweet vision, of the days that may be to faithful Israel, days that shall be, the days of heaven upon the earth.

Think how it also colours and explains the New Testament, from the message of John the Baptist, with his announcement that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, to the last vision of St. John the Evangelist, "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Think how it expresses much of our Lord's teaching—His teaching about the gentle life, of forgiving one another, of love and goodwill, of peace and service, of humble piety and sweet faith in the Heavenly Father, His teaching about the Kingdom

of God which indeed He came to found, gathering men into its glorious dominion, transforming the world by its holy laws—even His prayer which He taught His disciples to pray that God's will may be done on earth even as it is done in heaven, and that His Kingdom may come among men. Is not the promise of the Christian faith only a richer and grander variant of the words, "as the days of heaven upon the earth," pointing to true blessedness and peace for the individual believer and for the world, when the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God and His Christ?

The words are as a master-key to unlock the many doors of the Bible, because they are as a master-key to unlock the human heart. Deep among the secret things of the human heart lies this faith for the future, this hope of a golden age. No cynic's sneer or satirist's scorn can destroy the hope which comes back after every disaster and every disillusionment ready to hope again and to work again. In every sphere it is so. The reformer thinks that if only he can get this abuse remedied or that reform introduced it will be the beginning of a new régime, the beginning of the days of heaven upon the earth. It gives him courage to labour and patience to wait.

Even when sometimes the expected reform comes and disappoints with its small results, the true reformer is not dismayed. He strikes into the battle for the next point of vantage, the next gain which he believes will at least bring nearer the good time of the days of heaven upon the earth. In Church and State, in business and politics, true hearts ever look forward to a better future, and long for a nobler condition of things, for a finer type of life, and a juster state. In all things we are saved by hope, and hope rarely fails the world for long.

Even in our personal life we live much in the future, and if our thoughts of the future are right and our prospects are based on right foundations, that future of which we dream may be a source of strength and inspiration to us. If they are grounded, as the Bible always grounds its hope, on moral foundations, if it is not a mere sluggard's paradise we are dreaming of, a selfish Eldorado where we imagine ourselves heaped with good fortune, every desire appeased and every whim satisfied; if we, on the contrary, see that peace can only come from righteousness and that lasting blessedness can only come from being worthy of blessedness, our dream may inspire us to follow the gleam, to strive after the highest.

Our very wishes for each other at this time when

we have entered into another year, wishes of happiness and peace and prosperity, are of a piece with this vision of a time which can be truly called as the days of heaven upon earth. When we have love in our hearts and think kindly of others and are full of generous desire for their good, when we wish men well, as we do from custom at this season, are we not only asking that this dream, which we have traced through the whole Bible and through human life at its best, should be to some extent realised and that earth might feel itself as only a little bit of heaven? As men we dare not let go wishing and hoping and working for this, or we slide back to lower levels of thought and life. When our hearts are warm and are moved to generous thought, we could almost use the very words as a prayer that those we love should find life for them during this New Year as the days of heaven upon earth.

But what would that mean? It does not mean merely the usual elements of what we call a good lot, long life, and happiness and prosperity. These things are not excluded, but they are not themselves the blessing which could be defined by words like our text, days of heaven upon earth. The barns might be full to bursting, with never a cloud to hide the sunshine of prosperity, with all good wishes of

friends fulfilled on the outside, with at the same time an empty life, without peace, without hearts-ease, without joy, without love. It is foolish to condemn the things which we call in common speech the good things of the world, but they themselves cannot secure this blessed state worthy to be called as the days of heaven upon earth. They are to be found sometimes where there seems little on the outside to produce happiness. While again and again has it been seen that some of the things, for which men long and strive, have only brought vanity and vexation of spirit. Again and again in history has it been seen that a palace (the highest type of human happiness) has been a hell upon earth, where human hearts wore themselves out in pain and unrest and sated desire.

That life may be as the days of heaven upon the earth, it must aim at things which are beyond the bite of the moth and the stain of the rust. It must have treasures which the thief cannot break through and steal. It must know love and joy and peace, the strength of forgiveness, and the sweet content of service. It must covet the best gifts, and follow hard after them. Before the Kingdom of Heaven can come among us, we must come into the Kingdom. We must come humbly as a little child if

we would even see the Kingdom. It is religion that man needs above all his other many needs, the vision of God, the faith and hope which stretch out after the unattained. When life loses religion it loses buoyancy and the impelling power, till it dwindles into frivolity or is swamped in grossness. These days of heaven upon earth can never be reached by material progress, or by wealth even beyond the dreams of avarice. They are of the heart, conditioned by qualities of the heart. These days can only come when men make the self-surrender to the will of God and live in His love.

Even now these days may be to us a present reality, if we but saw what is the eternal fact that to be carnally-minded is death but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace. To live in the love of God, to walk in the light of His presence, is already to have attained the promise; for whenever a human soul takes God for his portion, heaven stoops down and touches earth and consecrates it, turning Luz, hard and stony and barren, into Bethel, the house of God, the gate of heaven. These commonplace days, that will be told out day by day in the tale of this year, can be glorified by a light that never was on sea or land if we are not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Make them as the days of the Son

of Man, full of love and service and faith, and they will be days of heaven upon the earth.

And though, like the heroes of faith of old, we may have to die in faith, not having received the promises, but only having seen them afar off, it is not failure but success. The success is to have *seen* at all. Life is judged not by its grasp but by its reach, not by its failure to receive but by its faith to dream and to dare. Let scoffers say in derision, Where is the promise of His coming? the heart of faith sees, afar off, yet sees the flaming of the advent feet, and is content. Though the days are prolonged and every vision faileth, speak not of failure of the man who dies in faith. He may never seem to have known the days of heaven upon earth, or his first early vision seems to have played him false, he dies with his face to heaven, within reach of the ladder—and the angels ascending and descending are near.

XXI

THE PARALYSIS OF CRITICISM

He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.—ECCLESIASTES xi. 4.

THE writer of Ecclesiastes had tried the different ways of life which have been ever possible for men. He had given himself up to the rival claimants which appeal to life. He had tried pleasure; he had tried knowledge; he had tried philosophy; he had tried literature. He had wealth and culture, and all that the world at the time could give. The great temptation of such a life, an ever-recurring temptation, was to pronounce upon all things the verdict of vanity, that everything was equally worthless, and nothing much counted anyway. The satiety which comes from such a life destroys all serious, earnest purpose, and turns a man into a querulous, captious critic of things, instead of a strenuous worker.

The author has realised this temptation, and has come back from the sceptical philosophies which would cut away the feet from healthy action, and declares that men must walk by faith, must trust

the world in which they live, must not let doubt interfere with the duties of life, must often take a good deal for granted, and must not let ignorance of the future sap the energies demanded by the present.

Men know very little about the great realities of the world in which they live. Much lies beyond their control. They know not what evil shall be upon the earth. Their nicest calculations can be overthrown by some incalculable freak of fortune. In a world dependent upon harvest, which itself hangs upon the turn of the weather, ficklest of all subjects of human knowledge, men do not even know the way of the wind and the rain. They only know that if the clouds be full they empty themselves on the earth, and if the tree fall to the south or to the north there it will lie. Meteorology was not an exact science in the time of Ecclesiastes, and it is not an exact science yet.

For the practical business of the world men must risk something, and must not allow their general ignorance to prevent them from their particular duty. The art of agriculture, on which in the ultimate issue the race depends, could never be carried on by criticism of the weather. If every wind unnerved a man from sowing, and every cloud kept

him from reaping, life would cease. Ignorance is no excuse for inaction. Doubt is no reason for perpetual delay. The agriculturist does not wait for the ideally perfect day before he will sow or reap. He waits for the general season for either of these necessary operations, and then trusts to the great laws of the universe. If he spent his time scanning the sky, watching nervously for every breeze of wind and every drop of rain, it would be proof positive that he was not built for a farmer. Mere criticism paralyzes. Farming needs faith, and cannot be carried on as an adjunct to the meteorological office. A farmer does not choose a blizzard as the time for sowing, and a thunderstorm as the time designed for reaping; but the possibility of blizzard and thunderstorm must not prey on his nerves and keep him from his work altogether. The very uncertainty of the future is an argument for industry, for decision to do your own part wisely and well, leaving the rest which is beyond your control in the hands of God. Sow your seed, and reap your harvest; and do not let the paralysis of criticism unman you. If you calculate chances too finely, it will end in doing nothing. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."

This is an axiom in the practical business of the world. The successful man is a critic of chances, but not only a critic. He knows how easily the boundary line of criticism can be passed. He acts prudently, but boldly; cautiously but firmly. He is not afraid of risking something. He takes a large view of his opportunities, and will make ventures. He makes swift decisions, and will not let enterprise be choked by caution.

The shipper will not keep all his vessels in port because there is a constant menace at sea from storm and fog and collision. It is not his business to let his ships rot in the harbour. He will equip them as fully as possible with care and skill and science, and send them out for the harvest of the sea.

The engineer will not be kept from lighting the fire lest the boiler may burst. He will examine and test and try and criticise, but he will also proceed to action. The world's business could not be done merely by criticism. There are times in business and in life, when to hesitate is to be lost. It does not do for a man of action to have his critical faculty too finely developed.

The genius in practical affairs can wait long and patiently for his opening; but when it comes he seizes it and pushes out his venture. He only asks

for the practicable; he does not expect the ideally perfect opportunity. If he examined all the obstacles in the way too closely he would never venture; if he observed the wind too minutely he would never sow; if he regarded the clouds too exquisitely he would never reap.

Says this same author in another place, "If the iron be blunt and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct." If the iron is blunt, whet the edge; but don't be always sharpening the axe and never using it. Fit proverb for many a man who spends all his time perfecting his instrument, furnishing his mind, whetting his intellect, for work which he never attempts! If the tools with which we have to work are imperfect and cannot meanwhile be mended, then they have to be used with all the greater skill and strength. Truly, wisdom is profitable to direct. And acting on this many a man not so well equipped, with inferior opportunities, with fewer talents, has been able to make more of his life than some with every advantage, with edge of intellect finely whetted, with the critical faculty keenly sharpened—but without decision of character, without practical outcome of all their education.

We can often see in literature and art the paralysis

of criticism. A man may make his ideal, instead of being an incentive, a positive hindrance. It may terrorise over him, and keep him from producing any work at all. He is so critical of others' work that he is afraid of doing anything that has to run the hazard of others' eyes. A poet may be so finical about the right words, so afraid to venture anything, so concerned about perfecting his poetic apparatus, that he can produce nothing; and when he does it may be refined away to mere elegance of speech, without virility, without thought, without any special meaning. As a matter of fact, in most cases where the comparison is possible, to compare the first rough draft of a poem with the finished product does not exalt the latter. In most cases the changes have not been for the better, and the strength of the original expression has been rubbed away out of the fear of criticism. The vision, the intuition, the poetic impulse are often weakened by a too great regard to the formal standards in vogue. It may be even that some Milton is mute and inglorious, because he has paid too much heed to the dictates of criticism, and would not allow his own spirit to have free course. It is not that it is wrong to have a high ideal. The ideal cannot be too high. But it should be an inspiring force, and not a deterring. In all artistic

work this is a special temptation, because the artistic temperament is not easily satisfied, and dreams dreams unrealisable, and sees visions surpassing in beauty anything ever attained.

In all art, such as the interpretation of beauty in painting, or the interpretation of thought by writing in literature, or by speech in oratory, the first and chief factor is *intuition*. It is not attained by analysis, by criticism, by resolving the thing into its component parts. It is creative, constructive, a great emotion which opens the eyes to the beauty or the truth. Criticism is not incompatible with it, nay, is necessary for it at its highest—to compare the result with the laws which regulate all beauty and truth; but if it is dominated by a spirit of criticism, by a too great regard for rule and convention, it loses all distinction, and takes its place among the great crowd of mediocrity. Has not the paralysis of criticism come over much of our art and literature? “He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”

This is true also in other regions of life than those already mentioned. Take *philanthropy*, for example. The author of Ecclesiastes has been speaking of this subject, and has been recommending a charity which does not look too closely into details. “Cast

thy bread upon the waters. Give a portion to seven and also to eight." Charity should not be grudging, calculating, critical. It is easy to become suspicious of everything that calls itself charity, to harden the heart because we can point to endless cases where we have been imposed on. Professional critics of charity tell us that promiscuous giving is demoralising to everybody concerned, that it only makes paupers, and steals away what lingering self-respect may be left to those who accept doles. All that is no doubt true. But there is a real danger of becoming too suspicious, too critical of every story of misery and poverty. We are inclined to have an over-sensitive fear of being duped. Benevolence may have often been abused, but worse than that even is stony-hearted indifference to the calls on benevolence. The man who boasts of never having been taken in is advertising his own hardness of heart. Criticism paralyses beneficence, as it paralyses poetry.

Also, by refusing to minister to poverty, we may be only ministering to greed. The suspicious man is never the generous supporter of generous causes. The wind is never from the right quarter for some men to sow. We must let no general principles stifle the promptings of our hearts. Charity organ-

isation is dearly bought at the expense of the extinction of charity itself. We can be too critical about all philanthropical schemes, and find an excuse for our own parsimony and niggardliness in stories of imposture. Do not let generous emotions be over-ridden by criticism. "Give a portion to seven and also to eight."

Kind heaven disdains the lore
Of nicely calculated less or more.

In religion also the same paralysing effect of criticism is often felt. In our day especially is this temptation prominent. The records have been subjected to such minute criticism. The Bible has been put into the crucible. Every doctrine, every article of faith, every form of creed, every authority has been tested and examined. All this is good and necessary. You cannot set bounds to the mind of man, and say that religion must be let alone because of its supposed sacredness, or law because of its supposed authority. But the very real danger arises of mistaking the scope and function of criticism. Because theology is in process of re-statement does not mean that religion may be given the go-by meanwhile.

Religion is life, and is independent of criticism. The forms of religion, its history, its foundations in the past and the present, its formulæ of statement, can all bear investigation. But no microscope or test-tube can alter the fact of it. It is spiritual life, and like all life it *lives by its own divine right*. Religion is no more affected by the Higher Criticism than the earth is affected by geology, and the flight of the eagle is affected by biology. It is stupid to think that Christian work ought to be suspended meanwhile because men are investigating the records of religious history, or are criticising the statements of theology. Life must go on, and we cannot call a halt to wait for ultimate decisions of criticism. An exclusive view of the conditions of faith is debilitating. You will not refuse to eat till you have made an exhaustive analysis of all the articles of food. Chemistry has its practical limitations. So has criticism.

Some things are sure to us beyond all question. There are facts of religion to us. We have our Christian experience to fall back on, the experience of communion, the actual facts of the life of faith. We can wait serenely for every established fact of science; for we know that nothing can affect the ultimate issue. We refuse to let ourselves be driven

about by every wind of doctrine. We refuse to stop our Christian work and life, till we are made sure of the dates of Books of the Bible, and have put every record under the lense of the microscope. We must not let our faith be shivered by the paralysis of criticism. He that is ever nervously observing the wind will never sow; and he that is ever tremblingly regarding the clouds will never reap.

This hesitating, questioning, calculating temper is often merely an excuse for unbelief. A man does not want to bend his heart to the yoke of Christ, he does not want to take on him the sweet burden of faith, he does not want to submit his will to God and to live the life of service; and so he rides off on the plea that he is not satisfied that the fit conditions have come, that the wind and the clouds are right for his decision. He will not make the venture of faith, and will not obey the prompting of his own highest self, and so excuses himself by magnifying his intellectual doubts. Christ's claims to the practical allegiance of his life, Christ's call to take the side of good against evil, are put off by a sham excuse. He will not put his hand to the plough, because he is not satisfied that the conditions of wind and cloud are exactly to his taste. Is that a very uncommon case?

We can always find reasons for letting well or ill alone. The time is not ripe for action, the season has not come for sowing, the day is not propitious for reaping, the wind and the clouds are against us. As in our Lord's parable, men need not search far to find an argument for sloth, "I pray you, let me be excused." He summons us to a great work, to take our place in furthering His Kingdom among men. Our native sluggishness of heart prompts us to refuse, and to justify our refusal by some such excuse. It is quite beyond the point to condone neglect of plain duty by some intellectual quibble. "Doubt is ended by action," said Carlyle. The policy of faith is the bold policy. It asks for a place to serve, a corner of the vineyard, and displays its faith by ready and cheerful work. Faith bends the neck for the burden humbly and sweetly. When the Master says "Follow Me," His true disciple does not cast about for a good excuse to turn back. He does not regard winds and clouds: he regards his Master's word, and goes on to his duty.

The fields are white to the harvest: truly the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Do not miss the great opportunity by mean calculation of chances or by weak hesitation or by faithless indolence. God's harvest is worth working for, worth

giving up all earthly joy to have a share in. Let not nerveless doubt keep you from your lot in it, waiting, hesitating, till the harvest is past and the summer is ended, and there is no need for hand or sickle.

XXII

CHRISTIANITY AND THE STATE

Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?—ST. MATTHEW
xxii. 17.

THE popular outburst of enthusiasm for Christ only roused to greater activity the malice of His enemies. They were troubled waters in which designing men fished, and there were many ways to remove a troublesome intruder. An attempt had been made to discredit Christ with the populace. That attempt was defeated and the plotters outwitted, and in chagrin the Pharisees withdrew to take counsel how they might entangle Him in talk. This time they set a snare for Him that He might lay Himself open to a civil charge. These religious representatives joined forces with the Herodians, a purely political party opposed in principle to the Pharisees; for they had given up the national hope of a theocracy and upheld the ruling dynasty of the Herods. It is not the last instance on record in which religious men have joined with irreligious, or in which priests have combined with politicians to snuff out a reformer

for mutual benefit. Perhaps the only point in common between the Pharisees and the Herodians was their secret opposition to the Roman power. The Herodians wished to make the dynasty of the Herods purely national, independent of foreign influence; the Pharisees went further and wanted to see Israel a pure theocracy as in the days of old, with neither Herods nor Cæsars. The plan was to get Christ to declare openly that He agreed with what they held secretly. And then they could denounce Him before Roman justice as a traitor to the Emperor Cæsar.

We can hardly estimate aright the temptation which was here presented to Christ. There were these Herodians, who as yet did not seem particularly opposed to Him, but who would be made His active enemies if He declared against their pet scheme. And there were the great mass of the people who would have shouted themselves hoarse with hosannas, if Christ had condemned the unpopular tribute money. The wily Pharisees, so wise in their day and generation! We think they failed in their pitiful purpose. They did fail in their primary object of getting Christ into conflict with the powers that were. But they did not altogether fail: they were wiser than the very Child of Light. They at least suc-

ceeded so far as to reduce and send back into ebb the flowing tide of His popularity.

We see that the question asked here was designed to put Christ in the wrong whichever answer He gave. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?" To say no would give His enemies a handle to denounce Him before Roman justice. To say yes would alienate the people, who bent unwilling necks to the Roman yoke. His enemies had introduced the question with flattery about His well-known probity and truthfulness and fearlessness, a sop thrown to the watchman to get entrance into the citadel—a Judas kiss before the treachery. Our Lord read the malicious purpose and showed them that in a higher sense He was indeed true and cared for no man nor regarded the person of man. "Show Me the tribute money." They brought Him a penny, a Roman silver coin in which the tribute money had to be paid. "Whose is this image and superscription?" He asked. They say Cæsar's. They had put the question to Him as though for information on a new and unsettled point. But here they themselves afford ocular demonstration that the Roman Government over them actually existed, and was practically recognised by themselves. Tribute could not be paid in Jewish money, and they possessed and used the

Roman coins with Cæsar's image and superscription on them. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's."

As usual, our Lord lifts the question out of the particular into the general, and out of the region of the material into the spiritual. Not that He burked the difficulty by taking refuge in a religious platitude. He fearlessly answered the question. The very currency of the Roman coin was a tacit witness to their political dependence, and implied duties and necessities arising from that dependence. Jesus does not lay down the principle that it is always right for a dependent country to continue payment of tribute. He merely assumes the fact that they had Cæsar's money, and they had duties in connection with it to Cæsar, and what was a duty let them render, what was a tax let them pay. But He showed them that His function was not to be a judge and divider over men with regard to the dividing of the inheritance, either between man and man or between Cæsar and the Jews. He was in no sense a popular demagogue or political agitator. The kingdom He desired to establish was not like Cæsar's, or Herod's, or the national kingdom of popular imagination. It was the Kingdom of God. He showed men by teaching

and example that freedom does not consist altogether in exemption from paying taxes and tribute. He preached the doctrine of the freedom of the soul, which made it independent of Cæsar.

Christianity is not directly concerned with politics as such. It is concerned with men. It has to do with the heart and soul of living men, and through them will affect the whole domain of duty, private and social, political and religious. Christ lifted the question out of the region of particular expediency into the region of general principles. He did not content Himself with saying, pay Cæsar the tax which you own to be due by the very possession of Roman money. He makes obedience to God the standard of obedience to all earthly authority. Duty to God is the ultimate test, that is how Christ frees the human mind from all kinds of thralldom, but duty to God implied all duties. He who renders to God the things which are God's will render to Cæsar and to all men that which is their rightful due. Whatever duties are involved in the actual relationships, these the Christian must perform, and these he performs because of his higher duty to God. The Kingdom of God is more than of this world, and men can be citizens of that Kingdom under any circumstances, even if their country be under a foreign yoke. Christ

opens up to men a Fatherland of the spirit, from which no human power can evict them. This is the great religious significance of our Lord's wise answer.

History repeats itself in a wonderful way. Almost the same problems come up for settlement, only modified by the peculiar circumstances of the case or time. How often since have men asked, Is it lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar? How far should religious men fall in with the social or legal or political necessities of their country or age? Some extremists have said, and still say in one form or other, It is not lawful. Quakers say it is not lawful to fall in with the procedure of our law courts: it is not lawful for a Christian man to take the oath before giving witness. Tolstoi, who has many disciples in Russia, declares that it is not lawful to use law courts at all, that legal justice can never be God's justice. The Reformed Presbyterians held that it was not lawful to vote, to take office under government, not lawful to recognise king or parliament or even to pay taxes (though they have ever been law-abiding citizens and have paid taxes, but with a sort of conscience clause—under protest). Without troubling with the historical reason which led to this, that has been, and is, their position.

Others less extreme have been seriously exercised

about their duty to Government with regard to certain laws they have felt to be unjust. In England at the present time there is a large body of the best citizens who have taken upon themselves a pledge of passive resistance against the Education Act, asserting that it is not lawful for them for conscientious reasons to pay the rate. This relation to the civil power was the question the Evangelical party in Scotland put to itself in 1843, and which caused the Disruption and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. We thus see that it is a wide region which is opened up by this question. In fact, if we had time to put it in all its many varied forms, we would find that perhaps all of us have asked in some fashion, Is it lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar? How far do the claims of the civil power extend? How far must we obey the law? How far must we, as religious men, associate with irreligious in the matter of politics? You can put the question a hundred ways. We see how in some form or other it touches us to-day.

In Christ's answer to these Jews we do not get in a sense an answer to the particular question, but we get a principle enunciated which is for all and for all time. He did not attempt to settle the petty disputes of His age, or to give an answer to every quirk

and quibble raised. If He had, His influence would only have been local, not universal, temporary and not permanent. He answered individual difficulties by the statement of eternal principles, by which all action may be judged. He throws men back on their own conscience. It would have been easier for us, but surely not better for us, if we could have received cut-and-dry rules by which to judge everything. But not that way could Christ make us free. Rather He lets us work out to freedom and to decision through ourselves, through the enlightenment of conscience and heart. He gives us the universal touchstone to which to apply our difficulties. Duty to God is the standard and the test. It is first and foremost; all else in life circles and gathers round it. God is above Cæsar; nay, if we render to Cæsar it is because we render to God. Render therefore to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and to God the things which are God's.

There seem points in Christianity which rather connect it with anarchism, than with constituted authority—its unflinching criticism of social conditions, its demand for justice and its undying hatred of injustice, its indignation against oppression and wickedness in high places, its sympathy and tenderness with the oppressed and outcast. The gospel is

a social message, a proclamation of the rights of the poor and weak, and it might be thought almost to give an excuse for revolution. Also, the loyalty it demands for "another King one Jesus" seems to lift its followers above all lower judicatories. It proclaims the spiritual independence which makes a man free from outside interference. There was a temptation in early times, as there is still in all times of high feeling and spiritual vision, to despise the inferior power of the state and make a man a law to himself. Antinomianism is a heresy, which insidiously dogs the heels of spiritual religion. When we say rightly that the spiritual man alone can be the judge of spiritual things, it seems an easy step to go further and say that the spiritual man can refuse to be judged of any in any sphere.

Apart from any such extravagancies of Christian freedom, there have been times when insurrection has been a sacred duty in the interests of the social order itself, as well as in the interests of freedom and the higher life of man. There have been times when true men are called to obey God rather than men. It is said of a philosopher who was disputing with Augustus Cæsar that at a stage in the dispute he began to weaken in his argument. When asked afterwards the reason, he replied, "Would

you have me contend with the master of thirty legions?" There have been times when no such graceful concession has been possible for Christians, when they have been driven by the imperative of conscience to contend at all costs and stand firm against all powers of earth, against Cæsar and his thirty legions.

At the same time the divine right of the State in its true sense is upheld and enforced in the Christian teaching. This doctrine has of course been also stated in a one-sided way, and in servile times it has been stated as the duty of passive obedience, no matter what the Government may be, or as the divine right of kings, as in the stormy days of the Stuarts in England, a doctrine which has been wittily put as the right divine of kings to govern wrong. There could be no social conditions at all without government. A great lesson of civilisation is to learn to be amenable to authority, to learn obedience to law. Some organisation of society is necessary for the moral order of things, and so the Christian faith, in practice, has been the strongest bulwark of the authority of the State, that men may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Constituted authority has rights over us by virtue of our existence. The social order is of God: law and

its representatives have their source of power in God; and it is the duty of Christians to give honour and willing obedience in so far as conscience permits. This is a lesson of our Lord's own life, who came not as a revolutionary and advocated no political propagandism, and who pointed to duty to God as the great standard and test of all life. Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and to God the things which are God's.

In a closing word the text may be read not only as a plea for obedience to lawful authority and the recognition of the supremacy of the State, but also as a plea for active interest in public affairs by all who have pledged themselves as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is especially so in our democratic days when government after all is the embodiment of the people's will, when it is representative of ourselves. If we blame it, we have only ourselves to blame. It has claims on us: we have duties towards it, and what have we done to make the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of God and His Christ? If we complain of civic or national government, if we lament about public life or social needs or reforms or the want of reforms, if we sneer about politics as a game, a sphere for personal ambitions, whose is the fault? The old word of the prophet

sums up the situation for those who take no interest in the larger social life, "My people love to have it so." The responsibility for the State, the law, politics, and social conditions is ours. The gospel is concerned with soul first, but the life that is offered to God must spend itself in the service of men. If we truly give ourselves to the things of God, we dare not selfishly shut our eyes to the things of Cæsar.

XXIII

CONTEMPT OF CHURCH

What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.—1 CORINTHIANS xi. 22.

IN the fair picture of the early Church, with its new life and brilliant hope, with its heavenly love and sweet charity and the unearthly beauty of a new type of holiness, there were some dark blots. Or rather these beautiful characteristics of the faith were soon menaced with the corruption that is in the world through lust. Abuses and disorders and irregularities very soon crept in to mar the harmony and disturb the peace. One of these was the degradation of the beautiful Love-Feast, as we see from St. Paul's sorrowing remonstrance. It is almost incredible to us that at the early time of writing this Epistle the sacred rite of the Lord's Supper should have been so profaned. It would be incredible, if we did not know how easily a good custom can lose its virtue. The worst corruption in the world is the corruption of the best.

To understand the abuse of the administration of the Lord's Supper recorded here it is necessary to recall the situation. Communion in the early Church was preceded by a meal, just as the first Communion followed on the Passover Feast. It was an actual supper, after which our Lord instituted the Sacrament. The early Christians met together to eat at a common table, and Agapæ, or Love-Feasts, was the name given to the common meal. Each brought contributions in kind as he was able, the rich of their plenty, and everything was distributed equally. Part of the gifts was reserved for the poor, especially for the widows and orphans. We can imagine what a splendid occasion it was for the exercise of Christian charity and Christian temperance. The underlying idea was that Christians belonged to each other, and were a brotherhood. They sat as one family in social as well as religious fellowship. In Corinth corruption of this beautiful custom crept in. The Love-Feast became sometimes a scene of selfishness and greed, the rich partaking of their own provisions without thinking of the others; and sometimes even it became a scene of revelry and excess. The poor were put to shame by being overlooked, and what shall we say of the scandal to the humble, pious souls? In such a prevalent practice there could be no dis-

cernment of the solemnity of the rite that followed the meal, and of the sacred obligation of the brotherhood of the Church during the meal. We may well wonder how such license could come from such a sweet custom, but when men forgot the spiritual meaning of the meeting, and forgot the sacred dignity of the occasion, and forgot that it was no common meal but the Lord's Supper in commemoration of the death and love of Christ, anything might happen. We may wonder rather at the restraint and gentleness of St. Paul's rebuke, "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." As a matter of history, the Church soon saw the danger of joining the sacrament with a social meal at which people of all grades of spiritual culture met, and was forced to dissociate the two.

Here in a series of questions St. Paul points out how unworthy their conduct was. He puts the celebration on its true level as a religious rite, tells the rich to take their meals at home, shows what a disgrace it was to degrade such a holy rite, and brings before them the two high motives which would prevent these disorders, one the motive of reverence, the other the motive of brotherly love. One question points to the sacredness of the occasion, which should save them from profaning it, "Despise ye the

Church of God?" The other points to the true love of their brethren, which would save them from putting the poorer members to shame by their selfishness, "Do ye shame them that have not?"

The conduct of the Corinthians showed lack of genuine and tactful love of others, and a lack of real reverence, as if they held in contempt the worship and fellowship which they met to celebrate. If they had any real appreciation of the ordinance, if they had true worship in their souls, and also any true conception of the dignity of their brethren in the congregation whom they were putting to shame, they would not desecrate the occasion as they did. In sorrow, and almost in irony that such should presume to hold contemptuous views of others, St. Paul asks, "Despise ye the Church of God?"

We to-day have no temptation to the same kind of error in connection with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The temptation about it is rather the very opposite, to hold it in a reverence which tends to superstition, or to neglect it as something which is too high for us and removed from all contact with life. For example, the modern High Church practice prescribes Communion to be taken fasting. It seems absurd that a party which pre-

tends to go back to primitive customs and faith should adopt a custom in this which is neither primitive nor scriptural. The tendency in this case is to make Communion a sort of occult rite with magical property conveying in some mysterious way virtue apart from spiritual capacity, so that it ceases to be what it certainly was in the early days, the symbol of the relation in which Christ and His followers stood always. In any case, we are in little danger of despising the Church of God in the same way as the Corinthians by turning Holy Communion into a revel.

But there are other attitudes of mind, of both those within the Church and those without it, possible to us to-day, which make the question still appropriate, "Despise ye the Church of God?" First of all, look upon the possibility of such an attitude within the Church itself. Whenever we are contemptuous of other types of Christian service and Christian worship and Church government, whenever we hold theories that would unchurch other Christian communities because they do not happen to agree with us in our traditional forms of church life, whenever we use bitter and insulting words regarding other denominations, when we are pharisaical in our judgment of a dominant church or

are contemptuous of what we slightly call dissent; whenever we refuse to recognise the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, are we not despising the Church of God in a way akin in spirit to the Corinthians?

In this very matter of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, how often it is made a separating and dividing influence instead of being the one common platform on which we all stand! We even use the word to distinguish and divide. We speak of the Roman Communion, the Presbyterian Communion, the Anglican Communion, to mark off and separate different sets of Christians. It is an offence. There may be Roman and Presbyterian and Anglican systems of government and worship, but there is only one Communion, and one Church of God; and to unchurch one single soul that names the name of Jesus is to despise that glorious entity, that communion of the saints, that universal Church of the living God. There are churches which in their exclusive and insular contempt would exclude you from their communion, though you had been baptised into the name of Jesus and had for years been a member of His Church and served Him and loved Him, and though you had been ordained to special service in the Sanctuary and had for years preached

the gospel of God's grace. They would assume that you had never been a Christian, and would not recognise you till they had readmitted you, reconfirmed you, reordained you. They would not break for you the bread nor pass you the cup, symbols of the body and blood of Christ broken and shed for love of the world. It is an offence, more alien to the spirit of Christ, worse a thousand times than the offence of the Corinthians who desecrated the Table of the Lord by gluttony and drunkenness. Yet we plume ourselves that we are beyond the irreverence and irreligion of the Corinthians who degraded Holy Communion, when we may be shaming Christ's brethren with our narrow, arrogant conceptions of His Church, contemning the true Body of Christ. This and this alone is sectarianism, not that men have separate systems of government or differences of worship or creed, but that they in spirit sin against Christian charity and despise the Church of God. Surely we see the offence of this; and surely we see what is the true note of universality in the Church, as in the poet Crashaw's fine lines,

Christ's faith makes but one Body of all Souls,
 And Love's that Body's Soul . . .
 What soul soe'er in any language can
 Speak heaven like hers, is my Soul's countryman.

But this despising of the Church is not confined to such mistakes within the Church. There is to be found sometimes outside the Church (or what counts itself outside the Church) a more arrogant contempt still. Men refuse to associate themselves with the Church in worship or work, and do their best by speech and action to shame the humble Church members they affect to look down on. We do not need to go far to find illustrations of this arrogant tone or affected indifference. You will find it expressed or implied in the streets and in the Press any day. Sometimes it is frankly in the interests of a candid worldliness; sometimes as a supposed intellectual superiority, and even sometimes in the name of a higher religious culture. We have all met the man who prides himself on the fact that he is not as other Christians, who says he can read his Bible at home and worship God among the hills or fields amid the beauties of nature as well as in a church. Others may need the strength that comes from public worship and communion and Christian fellowship, but he is self-sufficient and does not need anything that is symbolic in religion. I would not judge this man lest I misjudge him. All I will say is that the specimens I have met have not impressed me with their religious attainments. I do not know

any easier way for a man to delude his own soul, and to forget God and lose his moral susceptibility. Is there no conceit and spiritual pride and insolent contempt of Christ's brethren in such an attitude? Despise ye the Church of God, sitting aloof from other men in their needs and their worship, as if you too had not the same needs, as if you were not dug from the same pit, and could be better than just a member of the same body? It is not they you are despising merely, but the very Body of Christ.

There are others who are kept apart from the Church for other reasons, and for which sometimes they are not altogether to blame. It may be because they have wrong conceptions of what the Church is. They think, and have been taught to think, that the Church is an institution which graciously ministers to its members, and consists of the clergy, the officials of the institution. That is but part of the outward organisation of the Church. The Church is the whole family in heaven and earth named after the name of Jesus. The organised institution which we call the Church can at the best only represent the eternal reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, the ultimate society of redeemed humanity, "the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven."

And the work of the Church is to reveal to men the love of God. The Church exists not for itself, but for the world, to witness to the divine, to bring to men amid all the sin and sorrow the healing of the cross, to preach the gospel to the poor and the broken-hearted. Its message is to all men. You are the Church who believe the love of God, not the officials who are your mouthpiece. The Church is for you, whether you recognise it or not. The Church is for the world, whether the world accepts it or not. "Despise ye the Church of God?"—You are despising your own birthright, scattering ashes on your own hearth, despoiling yourself of your own privileges, rejecting your own true good, and refusing the trumpet-call it all means to your noblest duty and service. For, as the Church goes out to the long warfare, goes like its Master to the great task of the world's redemption, to let them that sit in darkness see the great light, to make the wilderness of our social life blossom like the rose, in a word, to claim the world for God, is it not craven in you to make no response and to turn from the tacit appeal for succour? Despise ye the Church of God, which seeks, blunderingly, imperfectly, if you will, but sincerely seeks to obey the Master's command and move to the will of God? Which is the despicable part, if it be a

question of despising, the critic who sneers complacently, or the man in death-grips with the wild beasts that ravage human life? Despise ye the Church of God, ye who do not move a little finger, who shrivel in selfishness while the world dies, who have never been broken by the passion of the cross nor felt the pang of the Saviour's compassion as He looked on men and saw that they were as sheep having no shepherd? It is a common part of the critic neither to do the work nor let others do it in peace.

The Church is in essence only the instrument for attaining the purpose of Jesus, the instrument for bringing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. So, the Church will remain, when all that lifts its head against God finds its fitting grave. Despise ye the Church of God?—"It is hard for thee to kick against the goads."

XXIV

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD: THANKSGIVING DAY

In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths.

—PROVERBS iii. 6.

THE first section of the Book of Proverbs has for its subject the praise of Wisdom, which is knowledge of the true life for man. The gate to it is stated as the fear of the Lord, the reverent obedience to the moral law, submission to the divine will. This passage from which our text is taken sets forth the blessings which attend on Wisdom. It brings its own rewards. The man who does fear God, who makes God's law his rule of life, whatever he may lose or gain as compared with the irreligious, at least has many a joy and is spared many a sorrow.

This is declared to be one of his rewards, that his path is illumined for him, that he is not left in the dark, but is guided by an inward power. The man who lives acknowledging God in all things has within his soul a permanent principle of moral guidance. Dependence on God is in this passage op-

posed to self-sufficiency. There are only the two ways of it; trusting God, or leaning on our own understanding; fearing God, or being wise in our own eyes. The wise men of Israel assert, as the whole Bible teaches, and as the saints of all ages have proved, that reverent obedience to the divine will is the secret of true life. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

What is it to acknowledge God? To acknowledge God means more than to admit His existence, and to profess belief in the fact. It means to obey His law, to conform the whole life to it, to think and speak and act with constant reference to Him, to own His allegiance. It is not a profession of faith, in the sense of accepting as an article of creed that God is. That of course is involved in it, but may be merely a speculative thing. It means the practical submission of every power and faculty to Him, recognising His supremacy over heart, and conscience, and life.

There are many *formal ways* of acknowledging God, many of them necessary, and perhaps all of them good. Every act of worship, every place of prayer set apart as a Sanctuary, every custom and word even which presupposes God, is a formal recognition of Him. But all these may mean very little,

and may never touch the real life. We may be very reverent in our speech, and may never omit any religious duty, and may indignantly repudiate any suspicion of blatant unbelief, and yet may never once in all our lives have acknowledged God in the sense the Bible means by it.

There are empty forms of acknowledgment, which pass for the real obedience which is the meaning of our text. Boswell reports a conversation of Dr. Johnson's about Dr. John Campbell, a celebrated political writer of their time. "Campbell is a good man, a pious man," said Johnson. "I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows he has good principles." Boswell takes the occasion to inform us that he himself could not absent himself from public worship without remorse, and records also the words of what he calls a truly venerable judge, who said, "If I have not been at church on Sunday, I do not feel myself easy." All this is very pleasant to read of at a time when men felt they had almost to apologise for showing any sign of religion. Dear old Johnson liked to see these outward marks of respect for the religion which was so precious to himself, and was charitable enough to assume that such marks were

signs of possessing good religious principles. But a man may pull off his hat on passing a church, or may be uneasy if he absents himself from public worship, and yet may never once have really recognised religion and its paramount claims over the life, and never once really acknowledged God and owned His supreme appeal to the human heart. There may be every form of polite recognition, and not one graceful acknowledgment omitted, without the corresponding reality. We talk much of recognition of religion, national and otherwise, but the recognition which religion desires is that men should be religious, should acknowledge God in all their ways. Perhaps as many men formally acknowledge God to-day as ever did; certainly few deny Him; the Atheist as he used to be is almost an extinct species; but of how many can it be said that in all their ways they take God into account, and walk ever as in His presence? And yet that, and that alone, is religion.

It is the same distinction as our Lord made when He asked, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" It was not an empty recognition which Christ sought. He got that when the people wanted to make Him King, and when the crowd rent the air with Hosannas. He desired a moral and spiritual recognition, that men should

own Him as Master, and bend to Him heart and will. He asked for obedience as well as profession, doing His will, as well as calling Him Lord. Christ is recognised in some fashion everywhere. Never was there such appreciation of His teaching. Everybody calls His name the old prophetic one of "Wonderful." Men go out of their way to acknowledge Him. Every writer who touches on religion pays Him compliments. He is called the prodigy of the race, the sweetest, gentlest, noblest soul that ever lived, a Master in Israel. The recognition of Christ is almost universal; but is it what He desired and claimed? We cannot call Christ Lord in any real sense unless we have affinity with His spirit, unless we do the things which He says.

Religion must enter into life, or it is nothing; and it must enter into the whole life. Every word, every act of Christ was a protest against divorcing religion from life. Our lives cannot be divided up and portioned off into different compartments. If we are to be religious at all in the true sense, religion must be to us the motive power behind and beneath all else. It cannot be set apart as one of the activities of mind or heart or soul. The scope of its work must be universal. It must pervade the whole being. From within outward it must be supreme all along the line,

moving the centre of life, and tingling to the very finger-tips. It is this which explains our failure. We must confess to this much failure at least that we do not have a constant sense of being God-directed, with all our paths made plain. It is because we have not acknowledged Him in all our ways; because we are keeping back part of the price. We have not given ourselves up entirely to His sway. We do not feel ourselves to be God-directed, because we are not God-possessed. It is not speculative atheism which we need fear for ourselves or others; but the practical ungodliness which keeps Him at a distance from the affairs of life. And so we miss the promise, because we omit the conditions. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

If religion makes thus a universal claim, then there is no region of our individual or our social life which can be exempted. It demands, for example, *national* recognition. As citizens of a great nation entrusted to us in the ultimate issue by God, we have laid upon us duties and responsibilities, which can be summed up in obedience to the eternal law of God. National recognition of God may be quite a different thing from what we mean by national recognition of religion. In England national recognition to many consists of tithes and teinds and

state ceremonial and the upkeep of churches and a representation of bishops in the Upper House. These may be advisable or not; but to acknowledge God as a nation is more than all that. It is the submission of the national affairs and ideals and aspirations. How easily these may be debased history reveals! How easily we can lay down the white man's true burden for what seems the white man's chance of gain! How easily in all our doings we can forget to take God into account! When this happens, when we transact our business with no relation to higher things, when the traffic of a nation includes in the lurid words of Revelation, besides gold and precious stones and all manner of merchandise, the "bodies and the souls of men," when justice and truth and mercy no longer direct our plans, when God is not acknowledged—the ship of State is among the breakers. But here also in national affairs the promise holds good of divine guidance, if we seek to do His will and be led by Him. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

But far more clear is it in *individual* experience, since religion has always a personal side. The promise is that if a man submits his life to God, God will take charge of it, and will lead him to large ends. If

a man gives himself to God, God will rule him, and govern him, and guide him. Spiritual submission brings spiritual illumination. Moral obedience brings moral enlightenment. This does not mean that in speculative things the man of faith gets a cut-and-dry solution for every problem that formerly troubled him. It means that in the practical difficulties of life, he is not left in doubt as to duty; and when he goes straight forward in God's strength, the way opens up to him, he finds a plain path to his feet, with light enough by which to walk.

Even in the intellectual life, to acknowledge God puts us at least in the way of getting rid of our most stubborn problems. We flounder amid hopeless contradictions, or else must give up the quest in indifference and let ourselves drift, if there is not at the bottom of all our calculations the acknowledgment of God. If there be no moral order, no infinite wisdom and goodness and love behind and above the welter of the world, what a miserable trifle human life is, with no rational meaning in it, no design for which it exists, no purpose towards which it moves. But in the Christian faith we at least know that we are neither the sport of idle chance, nor the victims of blind fate. We know that there is in the world wise law, and loving purpose. To believe in God is

to make many dark things light, and many rough places smooth. God is the first presupposition of all knowledge. It is because the world is suffused with mind that the human mind can have any relation to it at all. To the unbeliever the world is full of insoluble problems—hopelessly insoluble. But the man who acknowledges God has at least hold of the clue of the maze. In Browning's strong words—

I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.

Far greater than any intellectual enlightenment is the rest of heart which comes from yielding to God. You never can know peace till you have found your Master. The wayward will is the seat of unrest. Peace comes from submission. Life is not easy for any one of us; our path is beset with dangers; difficulties and perplexities and trials await all; we have to run the gauntlet of fiery temptations; there are pitfalls for the unwary feet; seductions and enticements allure the foolish eyes. When we think of all the dangers of the pilgrimage, all the failures, young lives entangled in trackless labyrinths, or scorched by the hot breath of passion set on fire of hell, we can understand why the Bible

should speak of it as this great wilderness. We are not fit to walk there alone. With all your self-sufficient thoughts, believe me, you cannot do it with impunity. Where are you going to, and do you know the way, that you step out so carelessly and so unprepared? Must your bones also whiten the roadside, with those who would only lean on their own understanding and be wise in their own eyes, and despised the eternal laws of God, which is the law of your own life? We cannot order our life aright by ourselves. It is the confession of all the saints and sages. Every self-sufficient life has sooner or later broken down, and been a tacit confession of Jeremiah's cry, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

But the man who in all his ways acknowledges God walks with Him as Guide. He feels himself in harmony with all the world, because he is reconciled to the God of his life. He is at peace. No real harm can overtake him. Seeming failure becomes the deepest success: the bitter cup turns sweet: he seems in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field are at peace with him. His path becomes plain to him; at least he can always see enough for him to take the next step, and the

next; and God is with him in them all; for he goes with God. And even death, the last enemy of all, is transformed into the gleaming portals of a larger life. Blessed is the man who so lives in the love of God, who so walks with Christ his Master; he has found the secret of peace, and the source of true joy.

His strength is as the strength of ten
Because his heart is pure.

XXV

VICARIOUS SUFFERING

Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done?—2 SAMUEL xxiv. 17.

OUR subject is not the somewhat obscure historical incident of the numbering of the people and the subsequent plague which was looked on as punishment, but the great problem suggested by David's words and illustrated a thousand times in history and daily experience, that the innocent suffer with the guilty through the strange and subtle union which unites the individual with the mass. For a consideration of this fact, it is not necessary for us to discuss fully this old-world census which David commanded and why it was considered sinful. The taking of a census itself was quite lawful in Israel, and on more than one occasion it is related of Moses that he took a census of the people. The Chronicles seem to suggest that it was of a military character, possibly to arrange taxation for an increased army. The nation was on fire with their foreign conquests, and there was a real danger of Israel becoming like the ordi-

nary oriental despotisms. Pride and ambition were certainly in David's heart, and a spirit of vain-glory took possession of the nation. The vulgar ideal of mere triumph of arms and Jewish dominion over other races was the prevalent temptation. Worldly glory, vanity of numbers, imperial ambition, pride of their success in war, a desire to emulate other nations seem to have been the spirit which inspired David at this time. The same spirit, no doubt, also leavened the whole nation. It was not for an ideal like this that Israel had been chosen and led and prepared. Not for this had the best spirits sorrowed and suffered and seen the vision. The great religious purpose that Israel had to perform in the evolution of religion could not have been fulfilled if this temper grew. Hope was deepened, faith purified, life was made more spiritual, not by Israel trusting to the arm of flesh, but by learning dependence on God.

The writers take the occasion of the plague to read a lesson to the nation. The fact that the plague was accepted as a punishment of sin, as a direct blow to their pride, reveals the spirit which existed before. It was not entirely a sin of the king; for he would reflect in an exaggerated degree the general mind. At the same time, he from his exalted position had a larger responsibility in this as in all other national

affairs, and so David's cry was not merely the true penitence which humbly accepts all the guilt, but also represents the terrible and tragic fact that individual sin *does* involve other innocent people in the common ruin, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?"

A king was the "shepherd of the people," in the phrase so commonly used in Homer of King Agamemnon. In the Old Testament the word pastor, or shepherd, when used in a metaphorical sense, is always applied, not to the religious leaders of the people, but to their civil leaders. It always refers to the government. The prophets speak of the kings as called upon to be pastors, to feed the people with knowledge and lead them wisely in the way of God's will. In the first Book of Kings Micah the prophet, in seeking to convince King Ahab of his terrible failure of his kingly duty, says, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have no shepherd." Jeremiah in the time of Judah's most distressed state, suffering for the folly and evil of her rulers as well as her own sin, points to a golden age, one of the blessings of which is that her princes shall be true pastors, true shepherds, serving the people faithfully, caring not for themselves, like hirelings,

but for the highest interests of the flock, "I will give you pastors according to mine own heart."

It is a beautiful thought with the truest conception of the duties and responsibilities of kings and all in places of rule, a mirror for princes—that they are called on to bear rule for God, that their place is not one of right but of duty, and that the test of success of their rule is the true prosperity and happiness and goodness of their people. But the thought carries with it the other side of the tragic failure of those in authority and in places of influence, who grasp their power for selfish ends, or use it for glory or ease or pleasure, who are hirelings in soul and not true shepherds, that their mistakes and follies do not end with themselves but blight and curse others.

What examples of this history records, where the sin of one man was paid for by the blood of multitudes! How often, looking back, can we say in pity and almost despair, "He sinned and did wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done?" We see the innocent suffer with and for the guilty: we see one man drag down many others in his ruin: we see blameless lives helping to pay out the price paid for the folly and sin of others: we see the sheep scattered and slaughtered for the cowardice of the

shepherd: we see a nation brought to shame by the ambition and selfishness of its rulers: we see the children's teeth set on edge for the sour grapes the fathers have eaten. What is the meaning of it, and is there any meaning?

Well, in any case let us accept the fact of it. The chief and first duty of man is not to find reasons, but to find facts, to learn and obey the laws of life which are laws of God. We are bound up in the one bundle of life, not only the life of our time but also the life of past time. In a historical retrospect of the past of Israel a Psalmist associates his own generation with all that had gone before. They participated in the triumphs and the defeats of their fathers, and this not only politically and socially, but also religiously. He even associated himself and his generation with the sins of the past. "We have sinned with our fathers," he said, "we have committed iniquity (in their iniquity), we have done wickedly (in their wickedness)." His confession is not merely a confession of wrongdoing similar to theirs, but the acceptance of the fact that they were partners with all the past. Sin as well as suffering and punishment and redemption is vicarious.

How true this is in the case of nations we have seen from the incident of our text, and we can see

it illustrated by almost every page of history. A nation is a bundle of life from which there is no escaping, and all who are bound up in that bundle partake of the fortunes of the whole. The nation has its own history, not merely a history of the outward acts done in its name at different times, but a moral history tying us all to its condition. With our will or without it we take our place in that history, and are held responsible by the universe for all the past and all the present. How often, as in the lurid case of the French Revolution, has a later generation had to pay the penalty of the accumulated follies and sins of those who preceded them? How often can we point the same moral as David, and ask in compassion, "These sheep, what have they done?"

The same is true socially, as well as in the large field of national and international relations. We are surely learning the lesson that society cannot rid itself of its inherent responsibility regarding all its individual members. Would that we learned the lesson a little more quickly and completely in education, in all social effort, in our industry, in our home-life and our city-life that we are bound together by the subtlest and yet the strongest bands. Thomas Carlyle, in trying to enforce this lesson, used an instance that occurred in Edinburgh related by

Dr. Alison in *Observations on the Management of the Poor in Scotland* (1840). An Irish widow with three helpless children sought aid from various quarters and was refused. She kept on till strength and heart failed her: she sank down in typhus fever; died and infected the whole street with fever; so that seventeen other persons died of fever in consequence. The question was put in its lowest form, Would it not have been *economy* to help her? Carlyle paraphrases her appeal thus, "Behold, I am sinking, bare of help; ye must help me! I am your sister, bone of your bone: one God made us; ye must help me!" They answer, "No, impossible; thou art no sister of ours." But she *proves* her sisterhood; her typhus fever kills *them*: they actually were her brothers, though denying it. Nothing is left but that she prove her sisterhood by dying and infecting you with typhus. Seventeen of you lying dead will not deny such proof that she *was* flesh of your flesh; and perhaps some of the living will lay it to heart." Surely by the most unlikely methods the truth of the Apostle's words is being brought home to us, "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

We see it in every region of social life. Whoever calls the tune, we have to pay the piper. A yellow

press inflames the people and stampedes the country into a needless war, and it is our boys who have to march off for the bullet to find its billet. In some form or other we have to face the music. We see it also in the more limited sphere of the family, where all the members suffer for the sin or the shame of one, where children are poor and naked and miserable through the drunkenness of the parents. Little children begin life with dreadful disability, infected by evil example if not with an evil taint of blood, and hampered by an evil environment. Sin is there, and wickedness is there, and the full price is exacted; but these sheep, these lambs, what have they done? /

To leave the subject here would be to leave it in despair, as if we were held hand and foot in the grasp of some vampire. It ought to make us solemn, but never make us despair; for this fact of the physical and moral unity of the race is a law of life, and is designed for life. It serves a great purpose in the progress of man. It is meant for strength, not for weakness; for life, not for death. It is a heritage of good as well as of evil. For one thing, it should deepen in us a serious sense of responsibility for others. Every privilege we possess is a corresponding duty. Every point of vantage is a point of influence. Wealth, position, rank, gifts of intel-

lect, places of authority, situations of power, are all appeals to sacred duty. It is not confined to rulers and those in high places; for we have all our sphere of influence; we all have our area of authority. To a man who accepts the great fact of life we have been considering, the meanest action on earth is to accept the fruits of office without the burdens, to be tenacious of rights without one thought for the duties.

When we think of how we are bound together, will we not make it a great union of high thought and noble deed, a mighty engine of good for the preservation and propagation of good? Will we not give our lives to the service of the best? When we realise how lives can be blasted, and hearts broken, and souls degraded by our sin and our selfishness, will we not look upon our influence as a sacred duty, and be willing that a millstone be hanged round our neck and we be cast into the midst of the sea, rather than that we should by evil influence or example put a stumbling-stone before one of these little ones? When we understand the dread power given to each of us to make or mar, to bless or curse others, will we not be touched by pity for the pathos of human life? Will we not feel something of the divine emotion of the Master Himself, who when He saw the multitudes was moved with compassion because they

fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd? Is there nothing we can do to take our share of the heavy but blessed burden, nothing we can do of social service, nothing to guard and teach the children for the country we love, nothing we can do to sweeten and save and hallow human life for others? Will we not vow that our influence at least shall be cast on the side of the angels, on the side of pity and love and goodness, on the side of God and the right? Or will we merely stand aside with those who see the irony and the tragedy but feel no sting of pity and offer no swift hand of help, who merely say in the sorrow that has no succour or the anger that has no inspiration, "These sheep, what have they done?"

For, further, this dread fact of the solidarity of the race, besides being a call to duty, is also the great hopefulness of the situation. It is because of this that every effort tells. Every noble life, every beautiful character, every gentle deed, even every high aspiration leaves its mark. If punishment is vicarious, so also is goodness. If sin is vicarious, so also is redemption. If evil contaminates others, so also love is a centre of light and life. Just as every wicked man lowers the tone of social vitality, so every true life creates an environment where others can

grow in gracious life. This is the true and ennobling way of looking at the whole problem. It is a summons to every form of Christian endeavour. We enter somewhat into the mystery of the cross, filling up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ.

These sheep, what have they done? "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

XXVI

A MEEK KING!

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; meek, and riding upon an ass, even a colt the foal of an ass.—ZECHARIAH ix. 9; ST. MATTHEW xxi. 5.

ONE of the most remarkable things in the remarkable history of Israel was the way in which the nation clung to the idea of *kingship*. In spite of constant disappointments, in spite of weakness and folly and oppression and shameful sin among so many of their actual kings, the people never gave up the hope and expectation that at last the God-given king would arise and lead them to a great future. They looked back to David's glorious reign, and looked forward to a son of David establishing the throne in righteousness, a true ruler of men, a very signet ring on the hand of God.

The failure of their kings historically only drove them to enrich the idea of kingship, and make it more spiritual, and alter its features, till it became the beautiful picture of the later prophets. He was

still a leader of men, still a hero who should establish righteousness and peace, and heal all the grievous evils of the body politic. But the ideal has changed from the ordinary strong king, warrior, and statesman, with the pomp of courts. The figure loses in external trappings, but becomes infinitely sweeter and nobler, and gains in inward grace. In the school of God, through which the nation passed with much tribulation, they learned to look deeper for the real marks of kingship; and so we can trace the gradual growth in spiritual power of the idea. After the abject failure of the kings of Judah, which was a religious failure as well as a political one, after the exile had disillusioned the nation, the dream of a true son of David did not die out of their hearts; it only took a deeper hold. He would still come, the Servant of the Lord, who would rule in the name of the Lord, but he would be different in character from the old dream, different from the ordinary oriental despot, which most of the kings had made their ideal. His glory was to be different from even the glory of Solomon.

Here, for example, in this passage of our text we see how the new glory of a beautiful character had impressed the nation in its expected deliverer. The passage is one of the most terrible in the Bible, full

of judgment on the heathen who oppressed Israel, pronouncing doom by the whirlwind of war. But when the king is mentioned, who is to be the agent of God's will in the world, the tone softens as the prophetic figure is depicted of the kind of king he is to be. In the very heart of a passage which tells of war and war's desolation, with the flash of the arrow and the blast of the trumpet in it, there is inserted a beautiful picture of the Prince of Peace, in meekness and love riding into the city to establish His Kingdom, putting an end to the miseries and cruelties of war, speaking peace even to the heathen, and delivering the poor prisoners who languish for release with a hope which is almost despair. From this alone we see that the wretchedness of Israel's latter history did not kill the prophets' faith in God: it only drove them to a deeper and more spiritual conception of what God's purpose with Israel was; certainly to a nobler conception of what a true servant of God must be.

The ideal king of their dreams and prayers was no longer a warrior, but a peacemaker, a deliverer of the poor and the helpless, doing God's holy and loving will, just and merciful, showing to men by his deeds the pity of God. The prophet's vision pierces past the terror and distress of the time to the

beautiful future. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy King cometh unto thee"—and *such a King!* Victorious indeed, but most of all in that he has conquered himself, and the marks of the conquest are on his character. He comes not panoplied in armour as a conquering warrior, but clothed in humility and peace; not proud and haughty because of fancied power; but gentle and meek, gentle because he is great, meek because he is strong. He comes not riding on the horse, symbol of war and military triumph, but riding upon an ass, symbol of peace. This is the vision of the Messianic King who comes from God.

With absolute fidelity to the prophet's portrait could the Evangelist declare about Christ's last and triumphant entry into Jerusalem that in Him was fulfilled the word spoken by the prophet. More than the mere accuracy of detail, which in itself is nothing, is the fulfilment in the essential features of the portrait. "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, *meek,*" so different from anything that the world looks for in kingship, with none of the trappings of power, with none of the pomp and splendour of dominion; and yet regal in His moral majesty, grasping a spiritual empire before which all earthly sovereignty pales,

establishing absolute supremacy over the hearts and lives of men. The manner of His riding into Jerusalem was nothing, except as another indication of the character of the sway He claimed as King. The manner was in keeping with the claim, and in keeping with all His appearing among men. The keynote of it was struck at the very beginning on that first Christmas morn, when the King came as a helpless child, loaded with disabilities of place and family and position in the world. The stable and the manger and all the other conditions of that birthday of Jesus in Bethlehem are only object-commentaries on the essential feature of His character and work. His life was consistent from the manger to the cross, the same Prince of Peace in His triumphal entry to Jerusalem as His humble entry in Bethlehem.

Yet in spite of the preparation for such a King by the prophets, in spite of the spiritualising of the conception of the Messianic King, when the King came unto His own, His own received Him not. "There was no room for Him in the inn"—that is also an object-commentary on the different kind of expectation which the Jews had regarding Him. It is easy to explain this. We only need to know a little of our own hearts, and the natural motives which rule us, to see why it was that a King meek

and lowly, who based his jurisdiction not on external power, should be rejected and despised. The first natural appeal to which the heart leaps is to strength, to manifest strength. We are all hero-worshippers. Men are ever waiting for leaders. They may be easily allured by the sham hero, but that is only another evidence of their desire to find great men. There is no hope too forlorn, no cause too difficult, for men to attempt, if only they are inspired by devotion to a leader in whom they trust. The first natural response men make is to strength and iron will. The first hero is the warrior king. The great soldier gains his empire over men's minds and imaginations most easily of all other forms of greatness.

Flash on us all in armour, thou Achilles,
Make our hearts dance to thy resounding tread.

Other kinds of greatness are not so evident: they have their seat in subtler regions; and most of all moral and spiritual greatness is most difficult to all to recognise. It is not patent to the eye, unless it have combined to it advantages of place and worldly power, as with Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher but also Roman Emperor. Our eyes are easily attracted by the glitter of evident power, whether of

rank or wealth or position. Ordinary lordships over men find ready response. But only men of spiritual insight could recognise the supremacy of Christ amid all the signs of weakness and poverty and failure.

Jesus, recognised now as He is as Lord and King, has taught the world a new idea of majesty which it is learning, though slowly. True majesty is seen not in pride and haughtiness and insolent force. Since Christ, that sort of majesty is only a reversion to type, a pitiful attempt to carry off in manner what is really lacking in character. The disciples all through their intercourse with Jesus felt this moral supremacy. St. Luke, after describing the healing of the demoniac child, as the simple fruit of love and compassion, says the effect of it was that they were all astonished at the majesty of God. To them such outpouring of loving, pitiful power was the very majesty of God. And that triumphal entry into Jerusalem was the prelude to the cross.

From the outside view, even the triumph of the moment seemed almost a burlesque, an extravaganza in burlesque imitation of a Roman Triumph, when the successful general rode into the city in the intoxicating pride of conquest. It seemed a mock majesty this of Jesus, with children and peasants for the serried ranks of soldiers, and branches of trees

and cast off garments for the royal purple; and an ass and the foal of an ass for chariots and horses. It is to the eyes of government only another edition of the stable and the manger, the shabby conditions of a mean lot of life. Yet in the eyes of the wise men there was no place in all the world so worshipful as that stable of Bethlehem; and to all spiritual insight, what can match for pathos and tragedy and greatness of soul that entry in to the passion at Jerusalem? It has *altered the world's centre*, altered even the centre of mankind's standard of judgment, and taught what the true greatness of life really is. And the whole life of Jesus teaches the same lesson, even this moment of seeming triumph just before He tasted what it is for a man to die.

Now, the revelation of God carries with it also a revelation of man. It throws light on what true human life should be. It is human life from the standpoint of eternity. In this rare atmosphere all externals fall from man. His worth is the worth of his naked soul. His judgment is the judgment of the spiritual qualities of character and life. In Christ we see deep into the meaning and value of human life. The title of king, which means the very pinnacle of human power, the title which of all names suggests the very pride of life, is shown here

by a flash of revealing light with its true meaning given to it. Behold your king, the king of Zion, the King of men, cometh, meek, lowly of heart, giving Himself up in humble service of others, giving Himself up even to the death, a true shepherd of the people. There can be no real revelation of God to you, unless it also has this revelation of man for you. It can bring you no secret of the divine life, if it does not bring in its bosom this secret of human life.

In the light of Christ's birth and life and death, the world's standard of judgment is wrong. Sometimes, even we with our dull eyes and gross hearts see it to be wrong. In spite of our adoration of success, and worship of mere power, and love of the glory and pride of life, we see that the highest types of manhood and kingdom are in another region. The empire over men even now is given not to mere greatness as the world counts greatness but to goodness, not to pride but to meekness, not to the strong who ride roughshod over men to attain their selfish ends, but to the loving who touch us by their devotion, their sacrifice, their unselfishness. True power is attained only by the good. The meek inherit the earth after all: they inherit all that is best of the earth, though they may never possess a rood

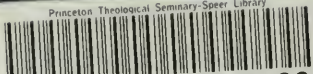
of it. The true King of men is the man of sympathy, the humble-hearted who lives for love. Before that glory all earthly glory pales and fades. All earthly ambitions are mean and poor compared with this divine ambition to serve men and to bless human lives. Love enters into its Kingdom, and what a rich Kingdom it is!

Can we not bend to it in the strength of its weakness, we who could not be broken by mere power? Confess how it claims you, and enthralls your heart. Confess how the adorable beauty of this vision entrances imagination and will. Behold thy King cometh, and you can bow to His allegiance without doing dishonour to any part of your nature. To bend to His sway is to bend to the highest in yourself, as well as in God. A little child shall lead us, lead us to see the Kingdom. Our own hearts at their best tell us that we were born for the love of God; and the Saviour who is Christ the Lord is the pledge and the promise of that love. "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass"—and never more divine than then; for in Him we see the very majesty of God.

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