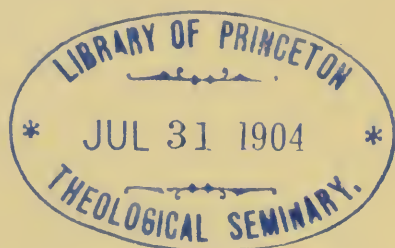


THE PRESBYTERIAN
PULPIT
SEEING DARKLY

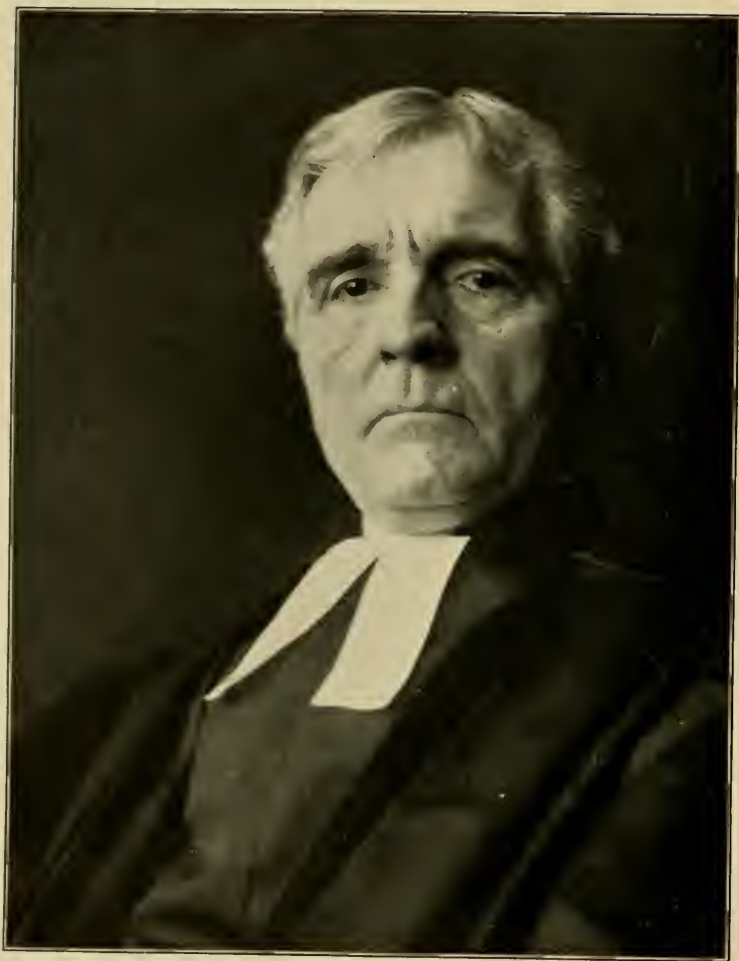


BY
J. SPARHAWK JONES
D.D.



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Seeing darkly

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J. SPARHAWK JONES, D. D.

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The Presbyterian Pulpit



SEEING DARKLY

BY THE ✓
✓
REV. J. SPARHAWK JONES, D. D.

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I

SEEING DARKLY

SEEING DARKLY

I

SEEING DARKLY

“For now we see through a glass, darkly.”—I COR. xiii : 12.

By way of illustration, a parallel is here run between childhood and manhood, putting the one in apposition to our natural life in this world and the other to typify a higher life, a life to come. This is an apt figure. Manhood is the period of the broadest development of our powers, and hence fitly stands for the immortal vigor and luxuriant pulse of a future and ideal state of being; whereas childhood is a preparatory, unpractised, unripe stage of the human creature, during which he is only getting ready to live, storing up materials for use in succeeding years.

For it has pleased his Maker to lead man—who is yet the master-piece of creative skill, upon the stage of action in an unpromising plight—a child. He begins with unconsciousness and helplessness and comes slowly to moral sentiments

and intelligence. He begins with instinct and ignorance, and learns little by little the rudiments of knowledge and how to carry himself in the world. The astronomer who predicts eclipses and transits of Venus and lays off infinity had once to learn that two and two make four. Only by this road could he reach the higher calculus. The surgeon who dissects the fibers and demonstrates the human anatomy once spelt out with incredible difficulty the little monosyllable "man." We begin with balls, whips, tops, and end with systems, creeds, philosophies, and theologies. And Paul here hints that even these are only bigger balls and more ambitious kites. At any rate, his reference is evidently to the notorious order of development among our faculties. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, . . . when I became a man, I put away childish things." In other words, the subjects which interest a child and the mental processes of childhood are different from those of adult age. At the earlier period mind is just dawning, learning to think, organize, compare, and has not attained to abstract ideas and finalities.

Now, according to this fine analogy, man, living under the present order of things, is in his minority, will not become an adult, of age, and

be graduated until he has entered a higher state of being. Paul means to say that the questions which now occupy attention, the cares which vex and harass, the whole web of mortal life is, relatively, a childish affair, like the rattles and straws, the Noah's ark and mimic soldiers, which one discards when he buckles on the harness of life. Our pragmatism, pompous little world—according to this apostolic figure—is a wide nursery of infants in swaddling bands, learning to balance themselves, to carry themselves, to express themselves in the simplest syllables. The human spirit is cased and confined, at present, within narrow limits, can receive only oblique and straggling glimpses of higher certitudes. Man cannot look with open face and steady vision upon those full-orbed suns, but only sees them obscured and overcast: hence the inadequacy and unsatisfactoriness of current religious knowledge. That unseen firmament where God dwells and works and divine tendencies rise and fall like the tides is not directly accessible. We are apprised of it indirectly; now we see in a mirror darkly, imperfectly, obscurely.

A We read that the ancients, before the mechanic arts were advanced and perfected, used in their windows thin plates of horn or isinglass or some

translucent material, through which objects could be recognized in a general, indefinite way. Their mirrors also were metallic and gave a blurred and vague outline, revealing the face, form, figure, but nothing clean and clear. And this is the homely analogue by which Paul, comparing great things with small, sets forth our mortal apprehension of God and the sphere of angel and archangel and the whole spiritual economy. He says that living in this envelope of flesh, in this opaque and frosty air, beset by infirmities, perplexities, doubts, men do not get more than a fugitive, occasional glimpse of the great worlds of nature and grace, the wide kingdom of eternity with its tremendous machinery, its mighty invisible forces and laws, its thrones and principalities and orders of nobility, its priests and paladins, and kings and elders, and all its processions and histories—these eternal reals we sense very imperfectly, do not see them in their naked realism, by reason of our feeble grasp, our fleshliness and sensuous crude organization. We look at the things of God and at the ultimate ground of being—through a dim mirror, and do not see the supernatural distinctly.

Confessedly this is an apt description of our case and of the posture of the human mind, in relation to the highest topics of thought. It is

certainly true that moral and religious ideas are part of man's outfit. We have them. We ponder them. We turn them over in reflection. Once in a while they flood the soul and ride high on the shore and submerge the low flats of our ordinary life and make the world look mean in the presence of their majesty. It is a stupendous truth that man can think about God and eternity, about the endlessness of knowledge and the beauty of holiness and the sovereignty of love and the ceaseless progression of the soul in all the higher elements of personality. Thinking upon these, one does not feel that he deals in fairy tales, in Arabian stories of enchanted palaces and impossible combinations: there is no sense of contradiction, grotesqueness, or absurdity cleaving to these supernal ideas. There may be a vein of superstition running through human nature, but if so, it is a reflection of something deeper, of a strong and silent undertow that sets out toward unseen kingdoms of miracle and wonder. All questions ultimately become religious questions, if carried to their logical limits.

So, this rhetorical figure of Paul's is highly descriptive and forcible. This present, he argues, is the alphabet of universal knowledge, the childhood of immortality, the lowest form, the primer.

Man, busied with manifold work, elaborating his philosophies, exploring nature, building bridges, founding cities, trying his experiments and rearing his civilizations, using his practical intellect and letting his idealizing, imaginative intellect and his æsthetic reason fly abroad and mount the heavens, is only beginning to try his infantile powers, and all that he ascertains, discovers, demonstrates, is only hint, flash, shadow of immense, unutterable, enduring substances, out of sight. Thus men cannot give an adequate and satisfying definition of God, His mode of being, occupations, enjoyments; so soon as they attempt it, directly they are plunged into contradictions.

Likewise in regard to the spiritual body—how it is equipped, its actions and passions, its ascensions and errands and immortal energies; this, too, is seen only through a dim mirror. The everlasting future also: who shall compass such a thought and fill it up with histories, experiences, vicissitudes, work? The bare idea of endless, conscious existence staggers us, strikes us dumb, casts us into suspense and silence; it is too vast, voluminous a thought to handle at our present stage.

We think again, of angels and archangels, of seraphs and the hierarchies of moral intelligence that rise tier above tier through the boundless

dominions of God. M. Angelo, Raphael, Titian, have depicted them with glistening wings and with glorias circling their heads, but we know little or nothing of the avocations, uses, ambitions, enjoyments of unseen immortal creatures. We believe there are such; that there is no finer clay in the universe than man, no higher organism, no erect, stalwart, lofty being compared to whom Plato would look like an infant, and the music of Mendelssohn sound like the preparatory scrapings and guttural hubbub of a discordant rehearsal, this indeed, is not likely.

Beyond us there surely are creatures more powerful, alert, sagacious than we. Again, touching the future of the world and the progress of our species, we see in a mirror darkly. That there is a far-off goal toward which mankind slowly moves, and that one coming New Year day there shall be a clanging of bells and a clashing of cymbals and a chorus of hallelujahs, proclaiming a kingdom of heaven upon earth—compared to which all that went before and all previous celebrations shall be like penny candles and penny trumpets—toward such a civilization and settlement all truly good men and women look forward. It is the burden of Hebrew prophecy, an age of harvest and of vintage, that

shall gather up into itself all the power and glory of preceding ages, and be their grand climacteric and burning focus and fulfillment; but when and how this gorgeous horizon of purple and gold will unroll itself, what shall be the form and fashion of that time, its worship, creeds, laws, work,—concerning this, we see darkly.

Men preach and pray about the millenium—a kingdom of righteousness and love—pillared and domed and set upon sure foundations on the earth; but when we come to particulars, the vision recedes, melts, dissolves into generalities. We see through a glass obscurely. This is the fate that cleaves to all human imaginations touching the future and the unseen. We speculate upon the vast possible addition which would be made to man's information and capacity if instead of five organic senses he had six, seven, or ten. Unquestionably a creature supplied with seven senses would have openings into the universe which we have not, and avenues of knowledge not available by us.

Compared to such an one, man mayhap would stand in much the same relative position as a mole or dark burrowing animal stands to him. Yet in relation to the invisible firmaments and kingdoms that arch over us, man is like one

who lacks the sixth sense, the appropriate organ, the prehensile grasp, or has it only in a rudimentary, ungrown form. There are phases of truth that only flicker on the horizon's brim. We know enough of them for practical purposes of reverence and obedience, but nothing at all commensurate with their amplitude and grandeur. Even the few sublime secrets that God has divulged through the Bible and in conscience, none of them probably appear to us—looking upon them from our shore—as they appear to higher and more powerful intelligences, and as they shall appear to man himself when he has been armored with his sixth or seventh sense and stands amid the stupendous developments and dawning visions of eternity. For then he shall see upon many sides that polygon which now he sees only upon one or two of its sides.

~~X~~ **B** Yea, verily now we see through a mirror darkly. Nevertheless we see, says Paul. We see something, we have hold of reality by the fringes, by the hem and skirts. "We know in part," but "we know." "We see dimly," but "we see." Those conceptions which have risen upon the human mind touching God and the invisible are authentic and true. We may build upon them, we may take them for granted. Those religious

definitions and ideas that have worked themselves clear from the mud and silt of superstitious accretion and that commend themselves to the moral instincts and sober reason of the best part of mankind, these may be said to be known for all practical ends. "We know," albeit in part. "We see," even though it be "darkly." Unless earth, time, life, is one stupendous delusion, a swirling eddy of aimless atoms, then it is certain that so far as the few great religious truths go, which have been revealed to man, they are real, reliable, substantial, worthy of all acceptance. Respecting them, we stand much where the astronomer does in the matter of the stars. He sets his telescope for Jupiter, Saturn, Sirius, and reports that he has found them; there they are, he says, each with its atmosphere and physical constitution, its day and night, revolutions, seasons, temperature and chemistry. But when I push inquiry and ask him, Are they inhabited? have they parliaments and congresses, Catholics and Protestants? do they favor a king or a president? have they a pope and politicians? is there what we call a civilization on those mighty orbs? do they found colonies and send out fleets? are there philanthropies and humanities there? do they use our logic and multiplication table? Tell me

about their customs, creeds, social usages, the astronomer answers: I know nothing of all this. I do not even know that those flaming worlds that cross my glass have any tenantry at all; they could not be of our human build and make, in any case. I "know only in part," I "see through a glass, darkly" but I see, I see enough to satisfy me that they are prodigious revolving globes supported by that same force of gravity which holds our earth-ball together and keeps it going. What I do know about the sidereal heavens is absolutely and mathematically certain for me.

So, similarly, it fares with those transcendental ideas and deep, mysterious presentiments that stir sensibility in man and excite wonder and hope. There is a hemisphere of them, lying in shadow, in the night, and another hemisphere wheeling through the gray, misty dawn and hence visible.

✓ True, I cannot adjust the foreknowledge of God with the moral liberty of man; but I see enough to know that there is an adjustment, a point of intersection, an eventual harmony. I cannot comprehend the mystery of the Incarnation or the Person of the Christ. I cannot conceive the condition of disembodied spirits. I know nothing about heaven and hell—these and other high

themes immediately present antinomies and contradictions in thought; nevertheless I see enough to convince me that there is something there; if only the human brain were big enough and the vision of mortal man keen enough to take it all in. As well might a caterpillar crawling leisurely over one arc of a great circle think of expounding that geometrical figure as I the immensity of God and His universe. The poor, dark worm would have to crawl for ages, past kingdoms of fish, bird, mammal, clear up to the mathematical man, before it would find out that "a circle is a figure generated by the rotation of a line, one end of which is stationary." While this analogy between man and the caterpillar is by no means exact, since man has a born faculty and affinity for moral truth and religious ideas, there is yet this much force in it, that we mortal men are creeping along one single radius or segment of a circle that sweeps through all firmaments—its center everywhere, its circumference nowhere. Consequently it happens that one says, "I am a Calvinist," another, "I am a pantheist," another, "I am a deist," another, "I am an agnostic." They stand at varying points of this huge circle flinging its radii into space. Some see farther, some not so far, some not beyond

vision
 of
 knowledge
 Divine
 knowledge

their nose; but none see all, and all see darkly. The unity of God's design, the glory of His idea, the end of His creation, the fulfillment of prophecy, the consummation of this experiment of man on the earth—these immense horizons and unutterable things we apprehend, "we know" about them; but it is a partial, fragmentary knowledge; like broad, round, red suns on glowing axles, they wheel across our object-glass—"we see" them, but not on all sides, not perfectly, not adequately, not as they are.

Now, in view of this disability, the ~~practical~~ ~~concern~~ for every man is to see to it that the mass of his ignorance and doubt does not cast any prejudice or injurious reflection upon what he feels must be true, what he is bound as a moral, responsible, religious being to believe and to practise. It is not likely that the everlasting future will impugn our fundamental beliefs. The rim of that vast wheel that revolves out of sight is surely rounded into perfect symmetry with that section of it which you see. All real truths are consistent. If you believe you have hold of one or more of them, you can safely steer by it; it will not wreck you, it will not deceive or mock you—in the great Hereafter. There are finalities, there are views of God, of sin,

"
to be about
vs.
of "acquaintance"
"

of redemption, of character, of destiny which instead of being swept away, doubtless will be enlarged and confirmed in the progress of the soul.

I read that there are rivers on the globe that are fickle and treacherous and apt suddenly to change their channel, so that in time of flood the farmer may see their mighty waters strike a new pathway across his timber-land and cotton-field and swallow up his possessions. But there need be no fear that the current of divine purpose, by any sudden rise or turn, will wipe out and overwhelm those first principles and fast landmarks which are established in the best and most serious thinking of men upon supernatural things. We see darkly and dimly, nevertheless we see. Let us hold firmly by what we are sure of and that commends itself to our reason and conscience.

The Christian centuries and all the centuries have been at work digging, boring, blasting, smelting, trying to separate the slag from the ore, that which ought to be believed and done from that which is false, mischievous or useless. The workmen all see in part and prophesy in part. The stones are quarried and dressed gradually and lie here and there, and only the Master Builder, in whose thought lives the archetype and

plan of a perfect universe, can put them together in symmetry and order

Augustine works out his scheme and Pelagius takes a divergent direction; Athanasius and Arius cannot agree, nor can Luther and Tetzels, nor Calvin and Socinus. Each of them says, "This is the truth for me; this is what the make of my mind constrains me to believe." They all see in part and through a dim mirror, but doubtless some more accurately than others. The same is true in regard to the Providential leading of the world and God's treatment of man. This also is a section of human experience that awaits the rising of the curtain and needs to be illuminated.

Sir Henry Bessemer discovered a means of rapidly converting iron into steel by blowing a blast of air through the iron when in a state of fusion, by which the production of steel was enormously increased; so, too, the hard, dull iron of man's earthly history is, one day, to have a blast of air poured over it—the breath of the Almighty—whereby it will be converted into something quite different, and by a far better than Bessemer process. We can only dimly conjecture, at present, the meaning of sin, sorrow, pain, but the point which Paul presses is, that these are

parts of a larger whole, and that the higher unity will be grasped when man has reached a higher level. And here he is our spokesman, and voices the universal feeling.

We do not quite see whither God is leading the world and the race. The years multiply, centuries rise and set; meantime, what it all means, what is the inner logic of events, what the revolutions, changes, drifting of society signify—what they are ripening into; what will come next; this is not immediately apparent. The involutions are obscure, the intricacies are complicate. All is yet fragmentary, inorganic, vapory, unfinished. Nevertheless we see in part, and that part will dilate toward greater amplitude and perfectness. Hold fast to what you see. “Cast not away your confidence.” This is the error of men; they say, “There is so much we cannot understand, we will not take any of it;” but this is a mistake. The kingdom of heaven is as a mustard seed. Do not despise the little you know and see; it is an installment of still better things; seize upon it, act upon it, live by it. Oh, yes, the world is multitudinous, immense, but it is only a part. The earth is beautiful but it is only a hint. Nature is gorgeous, tender, solemn and gay by turns, and full of suggestion, but nature is a symbol. There is

much, too, in human society that is hopeful and of high augury. Civilization, culture, refinement, humanity are constantly rising higher on the shore and leaving a watermark where none had been before. The divine purpose for man is slowly filling up its vast orb; we may discern the general drift and direction. Some points have been gained in the long conflict of ages, yet what we see is only a part. New years come, but the New Creation still tarries; Paradise is not yet regained.

As you look out upon the world, in this early hour of the twentieth century, you see an unfinished edifice, you see the foundations and floors of a mighty building, you hear the broken jangling rehearsal of a coming symphony. Whenever you espy a man who is trying to repent, to believe, to pray, to aspire, to live under the power of the world to come, he is a white blossom of the coming Spring. Whenever you cherish a high resolve, a devotional mood, a spiritual affection, whenever you do an unselfish deed, it is the symptom and rudiment of the new constitution and order that is to be. Whenever you hear of any effort to lift society, to put down evil, to propagate the Gospel, to bring in the precepts and spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ and to organize


and operate them, it is a part of the plan, a segment of the circle of Divine Purpose. We see in part, we see darkly and through a dim mirror, and cannot foretell accurately unto what the swelling seeds and tender shoots and dawning possibilities, of which the world is full, will grow and what forms and flowering they will take on. Moreover, this our ignorance and dubiety is not a real disadvantage, if we only act upon such knowledge and probability as we have. This is all that God requires.

It is the hall-mark of greatness and not a defect that the Bible does not tell everything, that the Christian revelation is not an exhaustive account and full explanation of all that men want to know about the unseen universe. Any school, church, sect, seer, or prophet that arises and claims by an inspired ecstasy or by a psychological penetration or a special permit to tell mankind more than the Bible tells about God and the future life directly arouses suspicion. We do not need to know more; we know enough already for practical purposes. It was not intended that we should see otherwise than through a dim mirror and darkly. Any new doctrine, interpretation, vision, that purports to chase away the thick fog that sits upon the farther shore and to let in the light, and so to

improve upon the Christian Gospel, is *prima facie* a suspicious phenomenon. It is possible for one to tell you so much, that you believe not a word of what he has said; he has overdone his part. The same is true in religion. The silences, the omissions of the Bible, its moderation and balance and self-restraint—this is part of its grandeur, part of its credibility, part of its case.

What did Jesus say to his disciples? "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"; and again, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you." Oh, yes! the things the Bible does not tell, the secrets it does not reveal, its reserves, its reticence! how significant and weighty! Jesus awoke his friend, Lazarus, from a mysterious slumber, but no Evangelist reports the man's subsequent conversations with his sisters, Mary and Martha. We should like to have had them printed large in the New Testament, certainly if he said anything to the purpose. The silences of Holy Scripture, how effective they are! Now we see through a glass darkly. It was so intended. Any school, apostle, or doctrine that rises up in the world and says, "Come to me. I will tell you about God and heavens and hells and angels and the disembodied and the dead, about the

Millenium and the battle of Armageddon and the 'man of sin' and the time of the Second Advent; I will draw the curtain and show you things to come:" I merely say that was not Christ's method. On the contrary, he said so little, was so vague and meager, that all Christendom wishes he had said much more; but he knew where to stop; he was perfectly poised and sane. There is a voluminous gospel in what he does not say, as in what he does.



Evermore it remains true that we see darkly. It is necessary; it is part of our education; we do not require to know much just yet—a little here goes a long way. I do not need to know the metaphysical nature of God, or about the state and occupations of the dead, or about the destiny of the heathen, or how many shall be saved, or how long the world is to last under present arrangements, and when the great historic drama of our planet will enter upon another act, or what rising hierarchies of angels there are, and what they look like, and what they do, and how they subsist: all this is irrelevant to my condition. We see darkly but we see enough. We feel that there must be reality behind these appearances, that behind the universe must be a Mind that made it; behind time must be eternity; behind the carnal kingdoms

of this world, the kingdom of eternal Love that shall one day replace them; behind man's soul with its hankerings and hungers and thirsts and clamors, a God who can satisfy them; behind all the sin of the world, a salvation from it.

Oh, yes, we see something of the eternal realities; we see their majestic shadows as they sweep by and the long train of light that follows in their wake; we hear the boom of a deep, mystical, solemn sea out of sight. And it is a great, inestimable thing to know even as little as we do and to "see through a mirror darkly." Hold on by that little. Add to your faith knowledge. Whatever religious truth or spiritual hope you have grasped, let it not slip. See to it that the years as they pass and as they come increase your faith and do not diminish it; enlarge and enrich your nature and do not impair and impoverish it. For you should know more and see more clearly as time lapses, and as your pilgrim feet pass the milestones and approach the dark portal of eternity; not less, but more is what you want; more life, more light, more certainty, more joy, more vision. It is a great thing for a man to live. For, properly conducted, life means the bursting of bubbles, the snapping of rinds and bands, the collapse of quackeries and illusions,

the falling of scales from the eyes, the sloughing off of old skins and shells, and getting out of the grub-state, and moving on into light, and taking hold of reality and of God through His Son Jesus Christ. Try to see ever clearer even though through a glass, darkly.

II
RAHAB

II

RAHAB

“And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.”—JOSHUA ii : 21.

FROM one point of view, the action reported in this chapter does not command unqualified commendation. Actions differ in quality; some of them appear absolutely and eternally right in any possible world; others appear to be not intrinsically excellent, but expedient and lawful by reason of their bearing upon high ends of great value which set up a justification and apology for them. In one view the hospitable reception of the Israelitish spies by Rahab and her collusion with them was treason, yet centuries later her name stands in the roll-call of departed valor and worth, as a distinguished example of faith.

Evidently there is a higher law, a supreme canon of moralities; there are transcendent interests by which actions and careers must be ultimately judged. Looking at Rahab's conduct by itself, it cannot be applauded in that crisis of national

peril, when her country's liberty was at stake; undoubtedly she ought to have stood by her people; it was unpatriotic in her to listen to the traitorous suggestions of the Hebrew spies or to harbor them for an hour. But, as matter of fact, we cannot always detach an action from its connections and environments and subsequent consequences. Actions must sometimes be considered in their larger relations, and a thing may be unconstitutional and irregular and yet be right. And it is always better to be right than to be regular. Hence it comes to pass that a deed which in its local aspect and isolated is indefensible, sometimes receives applause and a vindication when its affiliations and remote effects are made clear. At any rate, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews hints that Rahab's faith sanctified and condoned her treachery.

Nor, observe, was it faith in a coming Messiah, for even the Hebrews just escaped out of Egypt did not profess that; it was not faith in the unity of God or in the Decalogue, for she was a poor, heathenish Canaanite, who had probably no inkling of those sublime truths. Rahab's faith was simply the presentiment—amounting to a profound conviction—that this wonderful, conquering race that had been campaigning through the land, would

take Jericho, eject the inhabitants and settle on their premises; that these hordes pouring out of Egypt into Canaan had the unseen and upper powers on their part; and that the omens of victory perched upon their banners. She had heard that this multitudinous and aggressive people was spreading and rising like a freshet in spring-time, she may have heard of how they forded the Red Sea and of their victory over Sihon and Og, and she believed that her countrymen could not stand up against the God of these strong Hebrews, that He had greater power and skill than the gods of Canaan. And this simple conviction and clear insight of the situation connected Rahab with the world's immense future and saved her, joined her by a moral sympathy with that race from which Messiah was to spring and in whom the whole earth is to be blessed.

It is worth considering, then, that the gospel or divine heavenly message for one age is not by necessity identical or coterminous with that of another. It is a truism to say that there has been a development of doctrine, a process in the unfolding of moral and religious truth. No one individual, no one century can compass and appropriate the whole body of knowledge on any subject; new informations and new lights are

evermore springing up, or else fresh applications of old and familiar truths are discovered. The human mind looks upon the orb of absolute truth from different distances and at different angles. The gospel delivered to the antediluvians was the impending flood and the instant need of repentance and reformation. The gospel delivered to the idolatrous kings of Judæa and Israel by the holy prophets was the coming of captivity and exile—the grim Assyrian was God's besom and scourge, and the need of national regeneration to fend off so great a calamity was declared to be the duty and business of first importance. The gospel delivered to the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai was the earthly Canaan with its milk and honey, corn and wine, and the purpose of God to lead them thither and incorporate them as a body politic. The gospel delivered to them under the Levitical institute was the necessity of instant practical obedience, even in minutiae and circumstances, and the virtue of altars and sacrifices to reconcile them to God—in some mystical manner. The gospel revealed to Pharaoh in Egypt was that he should liberate the Israelites and allow them peaceably to leave his dominions. The gospel delivered to Gideon and Samson and Deborah and Samuel was that they should arouse

the Hebrews to a patriotic zeal for their traditions, and should defend their country against heathen invasion, because it was the land of promise, given by solemn covenant to their forefathers. The gospel preached to the contemporaries of Christ—to the scribes and Pharisees and to that Jewish world—was the impending Messianic age—that it had actually arrived, and that they might enter upon a career of unexampled prosperity and renown, and achieve primacy among the nations, by recognizing their opportunity. So, too, in the pagan world, wherever conscience has spoken, wherever any great moral censor or teacher has arisen to impress upon his time, the sovereign ideas of duty, of self-renunciation, of accountability to God, and of the supremacy of the right and the true—there also and in that fact there has been a gospel for that age and for those who heard it.

Indeed moral and religious truth resembles the moon—one age sees it in the shape of a sickle or crescent, another sees it between its quarters, but no generation has ever looked upon it full-orbed and on all sides, or seen more than four sevenths of its surface. In the same manner there is a secular evolution in the sphere of religious doctrine; particular duties, demands, obligations are

laid upon an individual, a community, an age, and men are called to live along the range of their knowledge and light.

Now there is no telling what beliefs and prospects may have entered into Rahab's prevision at that date. We cannot define or limit religious inspiration. God can enable the human soul to see much and far—in ecstatic moods—not given to ordinary judgment and observation; doors may be opened into the heavens of the future, hasty glimpses may be vouchsafed, high suggestions may slide into one's soul, a sagacious penetration may be granted, illimitable ellipses and parabolas may spring across the void of immensity, along which the eye of the seer may travel, powerful presentiments can take possession of man—this was doubtless the case of the Hebrew prophets. Nor would it be possible to determine how much or how far Rahab saw—only this, that she had a deeper, truer gospel than her contemporaries; she saw clearly that that civilization was doomed and departing—she saw the handwriting on the wall, and she was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

A grand conception is this of the gradual disclosure of the will of God; like the solar day, He does not burst upon the world unheralded. He

reveals Himself little by little. He tells one man and one age more than another ; some are so dull that they catch no sound of Him, some hear a little more, but none a great deal at any one time. One century interprets God in one way, another varies and widens the interpretation ; one literalizes, another allegorizes ; one mind lays the main stress upon the attribute of goodness, another upon power, another upon order, beauty, balance, another upon justice and irresponsible sovereignty. In a fragmentary way, in unequal portions, by successive revelations, God makes Himself partially known to mankind. Thus the antediluvians had a gospel, and it was their prime business to heed and obey it, which they did not do. The patriarchs had one. The old Egyptians, with their transmigrations and animal worship, the Chaldean astronomers peering into the mystical pomp of the night at the placid, solemn stars, the flash and plunge of meteors, the pale beams and reddening dawn of the morning, all the changeful aspect of the eternal skies—they too had a gospel—living away back in their twilight time. The Persians, too, and all the old people whose glory has perished, each of them, doubtless, had a doctrinal belief in reference to the nature of God, and the duty and destiny of man, and it was their solemn

part to revere and respond to these. It was not my gospel nor yours; it was not Christianity, God manifest in flesh; but whatever absolute truth their creeds and cults held, whether little or much, it was important that they should learn to obey it.

It is not necessary that one man should know as much as another, but it is always necessary that he should do what he knows. It is important and imperative that he should take and express in life and action those of his thoughts which represent things, and which stand for enduring substances and imperishable reals. Hence it is nothing to the prejudice of Rahab's faith even supposing that it did not include several elements that have since come to light and become fundamental to religion; these ideas were not then in the world, in the air, were not available, not to be had on any terms; no one had conceived of them, the soil was too thin and poor, the air too bleak and wintry for such fruits to ripen. One single serious truth was patent to Rahab, "The Hebrews are coming, like the multitudinous waves of the sea; they are leveling every resistance before them, and are now breaking in tumultuous thunders round the rocky walls of Jericho"—this much was obvious to Rahab. Moreover, she cherished the shrewd surmise, amounting to a profound convic-

tion, that they were the vanguard of the kingdom of light, and that the stars and the equities and the currents of law and the shuttle of destiny were all on their side and working for them—this was the fragment of truth revealed to Rahab, and her merit lay in the fact that she seized and acted upon it.

Of course, she did not grasp the whole sequence of events that culminated in the incarnation of the Son of God—only the first link, the first fact, the occupation of Canaan by the chosen people. That was enough to save Rahab; that has served also to immortalize her. She subordinated the ephemeral politics of Jericho to the greater truth that old things must pass away; that there is a Providential order; and that from age to age God incarnates His purpose afresh in new institutions and in higher forms. It was not large intellect, nobility of character, purity of life, a deep, rich, sensitive nature, any splendid virtue or harmonious combination of mediocre qualities producing a fine effect, that has set her among the immortals; it was not that she foresaw the age of Christ, His discourse, miracles, cross, and resurrection, and the subsequent centuries of Christendom—all these things were then sleeping below the horizon. But the

fact was simply this, that the world had come to a fork of roads where it must make a sharp turn, and file through a different scenery, and Rahab entertained the spies as the heralds of that new era, as those who stood in the forefront of the world's civilization. It was "by faith" that she did this.

It was a clear persuasion that the Supreme Providence did not intend to perpetuate the outworn type of society that prevailed in Canaan, or to stock the earth with the kind of people who lived in Jericho—it was faith in a higher law, in a nobler nature, in a better morality, in a Power that works for righteousness and order,—the hearty acceptance of this truth lifted her clean above that crude, coarse age, and has lit up her brow with a gleam of fame and encircled it with a nimbus. It goes to show that one does not need to know much or to believe many things, but only to be true and loyal to the deposit of truth committed to him. Some one has wittily said that one's creed should not be longer than his decalogue, but this is often unhappily the case. It was not so with Rahab; she acted upon her convictions. Short and frosty as her light was, she followed whither it led. A sure, firm grasp upon one great principle, an intuitive perception

of its supreme importance, will carry her name wherever the gospel shall be preached. It is not so vital that one believes a long list of metaphysical articles as that one faithfully honor and daily practise what he does believe—the doctrine or duty clearly revealed to his conscience as obligatory and imperative ; at any rate this is what saved Rahab.

Another suggestion of the story respects the imperfection of those human agents whom God employs to do His work. The individuals selected to act conspicuous parts, and to stand, as it were, on the hinge of great affairs, have not always been such as we should antecedently expect, either in respect of intellect or of moral character. Our policy would be always to choose from the best men and women, in every sense of the word—the *élite*, the optimates, the true nobility of worth and mind—these we would anoint and consecrate and make them the commanding figures of history. But this has not been the historic programme. God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise. Moses in his basket of bulrushes, little Samuel from the mountains of Ephraim, the little Hebrew maid who waited on Naaman's wife, Joseph and David who followed sheep, Rahab the harlot, Peter, James, and John,

the Galilean fishermen, Matthew the taxgatherer, —these and many more such have been the candidates for promotion.

The same is true also in what is called secular history. They who have invented, discovered, achieved, in such a way as to impress themselves upon their time and make it memorable, would not always have been designated as the kings and captains of renown by our fastidious tastes and natural expectations. Their cradles were not invariably rocked amid luxurious surroundings or hung around with bright blue and pale gold; their parentage was not always gentle, their disposition and inborn qualities were not altogether admirable. So that had you or I been present at the chief epochs and turning-points in the life of humanity, and had we known the intimate thoughts and hidden soul of those who were providentially thrown to the surface and invested with power, and to whom it pertained to speak the last word in critical junctures, and to hold the helm through dramatic times of angry discussion and antagonism; it is not likely that we should always have approved of their temper, manners, or opinions. We might have said of one, "He is a Pharisee;" of another, "He is an atheist;" of another, "He is a fast, loose liver;" of another,

“ He is a moving mass of conceit, a preposterous fop ;” of another, “ He is a bear, a cynic ;” of another, “ He is a sly fox, a slimy viper.” Take any forceful character and masculine genius who has trod this mortal stage with a grand, impressive air—William the Conqueror, Hildebrand, Henry the Eighth, Martin Luther, Mirabeau, Napoleon, Bismarck, and many another—and had you stood in the presence of such men and noted their foibles, superstitions, mannerisms, meannesses, watched their conduct and heard their talk, probably you would have marveled that God had chosen such to represent any forward movement or work out any high purpose.

It is by no means certain that righteous Noah would have suited us. Abraham, too, might have been found quite disappointing, nor would wily Jacob have filled up our idea and left nothing to desire. Samuel and Elijah would have seemed stern, cruel, and implacable upon occasion. St. Paul, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Constantine, Cromwell, Calvin, Erasmus, prophets, priests, martyrs, mystics, reformers, saints—perhaps there was not one of them but would have disclosed some obvious weakness, some glaring fault, sufficient to compromise him ; but, if so, the evil that was in them was not allowed to upset the Providential

plan. Each was enabled to play his part, because the main interest seems to have been to get the necessary work done. As to who should do it has been a secondary consideration—the tools have fallen to those who could handle them. Hence, much “hay, wood, and stubble” have been mixed with useful and indispensable characters. Many have been badly pock-marked, but have been chosen not for the evil but for the grain or two of essential good that was in them. Some one quality or force they had, necessary to the time, and that must be invoked to save a tottering world.

It may have been leonine courage, tenacity of purpose, a faculty for rapid organization; it may have been executive ability; it may have been the power of expression and vigorous speech and trenchant invective, the gift to arouse and incite supine and coward populations—the fire of Demosthenes; it may have been the foresight and finesse of a diplomat or a power of patient endurance and unwearied industry and indomitable will which the crisis called for.

But whatever property or trait it was, upon this the soul of the time seized; God chose this individual, God thundered out of His Zion, saying, “*Hic est*—This is he; this is My Cyrus, My Alex-

ander, My Nebuchadnezzar, My Alaric, My Mahomet, My Luther, My glittering sword to cut the hard knot, to shear away the tangle, to shovel out the congested mass of lies and cobwebs; this is My magical key to open the gates of justice and mercy to mankind." Hence it happens that individuals often seem to stand in the same relation to the progress of society and the betterment of the world that mortar-hods, windlass, block and tackle bear to structures of brick and granite; they are good and necessary for the work, for the exigency; they have it in them to do what no one else can do, and so are tolerable, are even applauded—so far as they go. Their sole merit lies in this, that they have some one virtue that is apposite to the circumstances. Men are often God's sword, hammer, trowel, torch, His ox-goad, whip-lash, dynamite, to alarm, arouse, punish, shatter, and overturn, as the case may be.

Take the individual apart from this function and there is nothing in him. Set him down at another date and in different conditions and he will not be heard of—will die uncelebrated, unsung. But toss him into a day of tumult, of hissing and astonishment, and he has it in him to speak peace, to command the waters that they subside and the dry land that it appear. Thus it is that God uses

that in men which is fit and apt to fulfil His ends. Four fifths of the individual may be unsound, unclean, irrelevant, abominable, but the fractional balance is just the thing demanded by the age, by the hour, and so is harnessed and set to work like blind, brawny Samson grinding in the mill; because the work must somehow be done; the world has a preëstablished orbit; God has a path—a destination for it.

It is not a green-coated, stagnant pool filled with frogs, but a broad glancing river seeking the sea; there is a divine idea dominating and directing all things. Whatever great and fine faculty any one has, the Master builder will hew and dress it as a cedar from Lebanon, and set it up as a pillar in its place; the rest of him may be rubbish. Men are serviceable and are saved by what is good in them. Consequently if the problem be to find perfect, flawless men and women, it is a vain quest—such never have been here. St. Paul told the Lycaonians: "We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities." In that word he struck clear and firm the note of difference. In the ground-forms and in his centrality man is one; but some have larger intelligence, loftier aims, deeper convictions, more moral courage, a pro-

founder sense of unworthiness, a livelier sense of divine things, more idealism. It is in regard to these occasional glimpses of higher truths, and the power of subordinating the seen and sensible to the unseen and imperishable, that men chiefly differ. All are full of shortcomings; all have to fight the animal, the demon within—some more, others less.

If the moral government of the world had been conducted upon the principle of throwing out this one because he is obstinate and combative, and that one because he is sensitive and irritable, another because he is vain and vaporing, another because he is coarse and common, another because his cradle was rocked in a garret by a poor, pale, distracted mother, another because he is a bastard or a glutton or the like; I say, if all the Ishmaelites and Esaus and Nazarenes and Beotians were cast out of the world's story, simply because there is something about them that awakens prejudice or inspires contempt, and that does not square with the highest standards of dignity and fitness, in that case there would not have been material enough to do the world's work. Human history would hardly have got past the ark and the deluge if Divine Providence had waited for men and women fit in all

senses to wear the mitres and lead the armies and execute the laws and write the literatures of the world. But God is not afraid of weakness, imperfection, and sin. He can overrule it. He can mold it like dough or clay. He can work with depraved, disproportionate materials toward superlative issues.

Not only the good, serviceable material, but the obstinate and obstructive is manipulated by a skill that defies defeat. No noble scheme, no beneficent impulse was ever given to the race that did not directly gather around it unworthy creatures, hungry camp followers, time-serving hangers-on, to spoil and disfigure it; the finger-marks of human handling are visible on everything, so that, if God were to wait for immaculate men and women to give currency and ascendancy to any one of His ideas and ends it would suffer an indefinite postponement. But this has not been the divine policy. God chooses the harlot Rahab to open the promised land to the Hebrew people; her lying fabrication and deceitful craft are taken up like threads in the fast-flying shuttle of the Almighty and wrought into His design. He leaves men to act out their natural and spontaneous instincts and turns these

to the best account—the actors pass, the principles abide.

Look at any new theory, institution, or order that has promise in it, and you will likely be scandalized by the jealousy, selfishness, spites, low views, private interests, of those who are seeking to organize it; the thing seems to be a whetstone, and each has an axe to grind; but look away from the human agents and their infirmities, and consider them as attorneys and trustees; turn your eye to the practical, ultimate and final end, the substantial values involved, and there you get the true angle of vision and the right impression, and are encouraged once more. It will not do to study individuals too closely; few can stand the lime-light. Judge no cause entirely by its advocates and disciples. Had even the Christian religion been estimated by reference to those who made up its first following, the worldly-wise would have said: "This thing will founder in our time; will not outlast the century." And had we witnessed Rahab and the spies concocting treason in her shanty on the town-wall, out of such a low origin and wretched intrigue no man would have predicted the throne of David or the magnificent age of Solomon. But some one has prettily said that great events march through

gates that are set on small hinges. We must study the event, the drift and development of things.

Observe also the mode of Rahab's deliverance—she bound the scarlet line in the window. This was the preconcerted signal which Joshua and the Hebrew army agreed to recognize and honor when they entered the land. It was a typical transaction, for the central truth of the gospel lies imbedded here. In that dark and brutal age God intimated in cipher that He would one day conclude arrangements for the reduction of this sinful world to the obedience of Christ. The parallel is impressive. Rahab seems to prophesy. For, in this dramatic action is depicted the serious truth that our world is a heathenish, ungodly Jericho that must be ransacked and revolutionized and set on a better basis; it must be searched and cleansed and receive a new constitution; a loftier manhood must come in, a higher and finer social order. And to prefigure this future God has displayed from the walls of our world-Jericho a scarlet line, a flaming banner, and has lifted up a holy cross, as a hopeful signal.

In this Old Testament story behold a vivid picture of darkened, depraved man waiting for a deliverer, waiting for a kingdom of purity, right-

eousness and love. I can see Rahab examining the casement from day to day to find whether the line would hold or had slipped. Every night she listens if she can catch the multitudinous murmur of the approaching host; how often does she strain her eye in that direction. Through all the hours of the day her continual thought is: They are coming, it may be to-night, perhaps to-morrow, certainly by this day week; it cannot be long ere the Hebrews are here. Then she looks at the scarlet line for the hundredth time to see that all is right and according to stipulation.

Now these things are an allegory. Yonder shanty on the wall and its red rag fluttering in the breeze is an Old Testament sign of a New Testament truth. It means a beleaguered world that must some day capitulate to a righteous king; it means a Canaan of idolatry, ignorance, and sin, flying a flag of distress and waiting for a redemption, for a better covenant, a new era, a kingdom of light and of holiness. And the personal question for each one is this: Do I know that I belong to an evil generation, to a sinful race, and do I long for a Liberator, a Saviour? or am I content with my native Canaan, its sins and shams and shames and all its disorder?

“ The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain ;
His blood-red banner streams afar ;
Who follows in His train ? ”

III

THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

III

THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT.

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?”

“And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?”

“Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”—LUKE xvii : 7-10.

HAD Christ thrown out this parable avowedly against the doctrine that the end of man is happiness, and that this was the purpose in his creation, He could not have hit His mark more accurately. There is such a doctrine, and it is widely prevalent, that God as a Being of infinite love has only one motive or principle of action, which is the production of happiness. Men differ as to the meaning of life—that is, what it was given for, why it was bestowed. The problem of existence is one of the ultimate, insoluble prob-

lems, and the most comprehensive of all, and will always receive different interpretations so long as man continues in his present state of ignorance and doubt.

There are those, and perhaps they compose the majority, who believe that God, having brought man hither without the assent of his will, is morally bound to take care of him, to provide for him, to support him, and even more than that, to make him positively happy, to give him what is called a good time, and make his life on earth a success from a material point of view by supplying him with creature comforts and conveniences. Seeing that this is notoriously not the fact, and that man, on the average, is not supremely happy, does not get what he strives after, is constantly balked and frustrated and is a creature of great expectations and small results, —many, perceiving this painful fact, have taken refuge in the alternative that either God is not infinitely powerful, or, if so, not infinitely benevolent. Starting out with this bold postulate that a perfectly benevolent Creator must, of necessity, desire, first of all, the happiness of His creatures, many have been driven to the conclusion that God is not really omnipotent, that He is handicapped and obstructed by the materials in which

He works and by the exigencies and inevitabilities of the case. The logic of the situation compels them to sacrifice His practical omnipotence and to say that He cannot do what He would like to do, what it is the free, spontaneous instinct of His gracious nature to do.

Whatever be true or false in this doctrine, it is clear that Christ, in this illustration, takes no account of it, does not recognize it at all as a solution of the problem, but takes an entirely different line, and expounds both God and man under different relations and upon another principle. Indeed, as a rule, Christ is not philosophical or analytic, does not go deeply into the reasons and roots of things, or defend the divine moral government from the objections and aspersions of men; rather does He fall back upon His native authority, His moral intuitions, His sense of reality, and, instead of arguing, announces, states the fact as He sees it to be. This is a characteristic trait of Christ's discourse; He is direct, dogmatic, and final in His method of handling metaphysical and religious questions. Take, as example, the present context: here the whole, perplexed problem of man living on the earth—man and his world—is suddenly opened up. Why is he here? what is the purpose of his existence? how does he

stand related to God—his Maker? how should he feel toward God? what is man's proper posture in relation to God? Evidently it is an immense question. We recognize it at once as one of the old, gray, eternal questions, old as nature, old as the human heart. This is a stone of Sisyphus that generations have rolled in front of them and found no landing place for it.

One man, one school says, "God is morally bound to nourish, protect, and eventually save all His rational creatures from damage and destruction." Others say, "No, this does not plainly appear, save upon certain moral conditions, with which the creature must freely comply." So the battle roars and thunders and volleys between opposing camps. It is an age-long controversy, an outstanding question. What is the end and meaning of life? What are we here for? Does God owe anything to us, or do we owe anything to Him? does man fulfill life and exhaust its significance by enjoying himself, by helping himself, by satisfying his appetites and ambitions, and carving out his own fortune in his own way? or is there more involved in life than that? is it a scene of moral issues? is it an opportunity to discharge a debt man owes to divine laws and to God, as the source and sum of them? Observe, then, that

this is really a serious question, not a surface question, but one that is implicated with the whole action and conduct of human life. In brief, it is a question of who shall be first—man or God?

Undoubtedly the whole tendency of human nature is to make man the standard or unit from which calculations shall be made. For, if anything falls into the life of the average man which he does not like, which crosses his plan or thwarts his wish or interferes with his convenience, or disappoints his hope, directly he is prone to impeach the divine Providence—if, indeed, he believe in a God—as harsh, inconsiderate, even unjust. In other words, our native instinct is to measure and graduate all events and happenings, good fortune and ill fortune, by reference to our own personal preference, to our conception of what would serve our private interest. But evidently this is not the doctrine of Jesus in the parable. Rather does He teach that, totally irrespective of our own selfish gratification and supposed welfare, we are to appeal all questions to a higher tribunal, the will of God, and to decide and act—in every case—agreeably to those ends and aims which are of His very nature. Any one may see, then, that this teaching of Christ is of the most thorough and radical sort, and calculated to revolutionize

his whole plan of life. Because the average human being asks first, "What do I want? what will suit and serve me? what is my interest? what is expedient?" whereas, the right question for him is something quite other than this, and he should rather inquire, "What is my duty? what is the divine requirement of one in my circumstances?"

But let us look more closely into this teaching. Obviously it contains two leading ideas—one, that man's chief business here is to work—that is, to do righteousness, to fulfill moral obligation, to accomplish the will of God, as revealed to him. The other idea is, that having done this, he should wait patiently for the reward and recognition of his toil. But our first and clear duty is work and obedience, loyalty to truth, to the right and the good, and this without any outlook upon ulterior gain or advantage. "Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?" This is the homely imagery under which Christ sets forth the prime truth that man is and ought, first of all, to be a doer of duty.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the principle here laid down—that our part in this

world is primarily the part of a servant, whose function is exhausted in doing promptly, faithfully, thoroughly, what he is told to do. Man is not set down on this planet to be a judge of it, to be a critic or censor of it, either of its natural laws and processes, and its adaptations as a scene of sentient and rational life, or as a platform of Providential purpose and of moral probation, although the speculative intellect leads in this direction. Like the Castilian monarch of whom history makes mention, one imagines that he could have built a better world and one more suited to be the habitation and home of man; but this is not really the question. It does not become men to sit magisterially and judicially, upon the earth and time, as the scene and sphere of their choices and activities.

The parable settles this decisively. Man is under authority, he is under orders, he is properly at the beck and call of Another, he is not the master of his own time, he is at service, he is a hireling, he has to give account of himself. This is the Christian idea. He may be philosopher, naturalist, geologist, biologist, thinker, or practical man of affairs, but whatever he be, this is a secondary rôle, a species under a larger genus. Primarily and chiefly he is here to obey, to

fulfill and complete the great moral ends indicated in his structure and capabilities. The divine commandments, the fashioning of the will, the perfection of his nature, the glory of God—this is man's chief end; for this cause came he into the world. All this is foreshadowed in the text under the image of a servant plowing and feeding cattle in the field.

You see the type of Christ's theology. He makes the divine law, the moral imperative, supreme, and final. There is no hint here of the dignity and divinity of human nature in any such sense as lifts it above the necessity of consulting a higher law than its own caprice or natural preference. The parable does not glorify or canonize man, or in anywise exalt him. It calls him a servant, implying that he has responsibilities, is strictly accountable and must report, at sunset, the work of the day. Thus, by this neat little illustration, Christ cuts away from under human feet the whole ground of merit, of superfluous, extraordinary merit, as though men could acquit themselves in such a grand, successful style, as to lay God under obligation, so to speak, to make Him debtor and mankind His creditor. There is nothing of this in the doctrine of Christ. "Did he thank that

servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not." For what was the servant there, if not to wait and to serve?

Mark how absolutely Christ abolishes the very possibility of men acting in such a way as to surprise God or lay Him under contribution, or make Him debtor to their fidelity or generosity or pains-taking care. Yet this is not the common notion. Human nature is constantly be-praised and bestrewn with flowers and incensed with applause on account of some act that over-passes, by a little, the average experience and action of men. We cry out, "noble," "grand," "heroic," "splendid," over some deed of courage or benevolence or self-sacrifice that startles a community with a shock of grateful surprise, as though something had happened that ought to be published in other worlds and nailed upon the outposts of creation, to attract the gaze of angels.

Thus, a person of large wealth makes a creditable contribution to a good and needy cause, and straightway the fact is blazoned abroad as a princely generosity, a munificent gift. But what is it? Has he touched his capital? No, indeed. Has he impaired his income? Not a bit; he is too shrewd for that. He has only given a thin slice and paring of his superabound-

ing wealth to a hard-bested and struggling cause ; that is the whole of his service. He has simply done his duty. Strictly considered, he deserves no praise, and if he be a good man he knows it ; he considers himself an unprofitable servant ; has only done what it was his duty to do. Or, on a wild night, in mid-Atlantic, the sea boiling like a pot, the wind blowing like blasts of doom, a laboring, disabled vessel, in danger of being engulfed, sights and signals another of its distress. The captain of the stanch craft heaves to and lies beside it all night, and in the gray of morning takes off the imperiled and affrighted passengers. The deed is wired over the civilized world as one of magnificent daring and moral heroism. But what else should he have done ? At bottom, was there really any great merit in not leaving those people to perish in the hungry sea ? He simply did what it was his duty to do. Or, take the case of a young man, the only son of his mother, and she a widow. He is her rod and staff ; he lives to support her, he works to supply her wants, he denies himself much in the way of pleasure and diversion in order to be her companion, and to make her declining years comfortable and happy ; indeed, he has become proverbially famous in his community for filial piety and

fidelity; people quote him, cite his example, hold him up as an ideal of imitation, dilate upon his virtues and his grand singularity among the mass of young men, who are either a heaviness to their parents or else of neutral, indifferent tint. Yet, after all, what has this hypothetical youth done which entitles him to such high ecomiums? Has he done more than his duty? Who should take charge of his desolate, bereaved, lonely parent, if not he? All that he has really accomplished is the observance of the fifth commandment, to a degree of completeness, unusual, exceptional. Carefully considered, he has done no more than discharge a simple, natural obligation and one that would be recognized by an unsophisticated conscience.

Or, suppose the case of a physician, living in a community overtaken by a devastating epidemic. They who are alive and reasonably well have fled and are fleeing the infected town, for fear black death catch and prostrate them; but meanwhile the good and faithful physician stands at his post, keeps cool, calm and clean, observes every hygienic precaution, goes about his business, administering with skill and judgment to the symptoms of the fever-stricken, the doomed and dying, until little by little, and day by day, the

disease shows signs of waning and its cruel grip relaxes. What shall we say of this brave man; has he laid up a fund of extraordinary merit? He has incurred great risk, he has stayed in a poisoned, putrid air, plying his profession, against momentous odds, and without calculation of self-interest; he has certainly been faithful when perhaps many would have been recreant or derelict. But, on the other hand, what is the business of a physician if not to attend the sick? Did he receive his diploma merely to medicate a certain class of trivial ills? was it clearly understood that he should have liberty to abandon the community in case he saw it to be expedient? Looking at the situation closely, did this good man achieve more than his duty by remaining among his people and putting his medical knowledge, experience and skill at their disposal?

The fact is, that in all such instances the reason why men are belauded and held up for admiration as exceptional individuals of rare virtue, courage, fidelity, is because they are truly exceptions to the general rule. It is not because they have actually done more and better than they ought to do, but rather because they have surpassed the ability and achievement of average human nature. For, in truth, we do not expect much from ordinary

human nature. Any one who has lived long has discovered that he cannot rely confidently upon it. It is shifty, selfish, calculating, timid, mean, ungenerous, deceitful—not large, open, noble, ingenuous and true. This is a simple fact which every one has occasion to verify on his passage through the world. And when one here and another there, and a third yonder, transcends the ordinary level and rises unto grand achievement, and does a truly great and noble deed, above the compass and range of average humanity, thus betokening a royal soul, the spectacle is so unusual, so phenomenal, that it jostles us into exclamations of surprise, into shouts of applause. Men are not used to it, they do not see such sights every day, they do not live among saints and heroes, and philanthropists, and patriots, but among common clay, men and women of human passions, frailties and faults, whose whole life is pitched on a low key and actuated by selfish and sinister motives. It is the force of contrast that evokes our admiration; it is the element of novelty and surprise that arrests attention and makes the world cry out over some act of courage, self-denial, fortitude: “Bravo!” “*Euge!*” “Well done, good and faithful servant!” In all such cases the individual has nowise exceeded his

duty and moral obligation, has not done more than a vital conscience and the moral law enjoin, nor put God in debt to him. And the only reason why his public heap praises and rosebuds and compliments upon him or rend the air with cheers is that they have found, at last, something that looks like a man, one who has nobility, breadth, elevation, a trace of royal majesty, and one or two qualities they are accustomed to think of as ideal and really worshipful. It is the comparative rarity and extraordinary character of the phenomenon that startles and arouses and makes us enthusiastic. Let us rid our minds of the notion that we can exceed our duty, that we can be truer, more faithful, more conscientious, more loyal to divine commandments than God requires.

A certain young Jewish nobleman imagined that he was the pure gold of moral rectitude, and ventured, on one occasion, to apprise Jesus of the fact; but it appeared in the sequel and as the result of cross-examination that his extravagant claim was disallowed and that he had not even suspected the spiritual nature and latent implications of the moral law. God does not owe you a farthing of compensation. No man can go to God and say, "Pay me what Thou owest." He has no case, he has no claim; he has not worked

overtime, he has done no more and no better than he should have done, and than could reasonably be expected of him, in his circumstances. Mark this well; it is a doctrine men need to hear and heed. The best you can do, your masterpiece in that line, your highest strain of moral effort, is no more than God requires, hopes for, sets up ahead of you, as the goal toward which you should run. Let us seize this sublime idea of duty, our whole duty, as the very least that can be required. God can ask no less of any moral being than that he should discharge his plain duty. All boasting is excluded. When you have done all, when you have fulfilled all righteousness, you have only done what you ought to do. This is the clear teaching of Christ in the parable. He cuts away beneath our feet all ground of pride and self-gratulation. No man, howsoever laborious, dutiful, conscientious, and faithful to the letter of the commandment, has really enriched God, augmented His resources, revenue, happiness; howsoever wisely he has invested his talent and whatever increment of value has accrued on this account, this has not materially increased the power and glory of God. Man, at the best, is an unprofitable servant—this is the sentence of Christ. And the best, most useful

men and women in the world affirm this decree and perceive it to be true. The noblest and worthiest specimens of our species are the humblest, plume themselves upon nothing they have done, declare themselves to have been simply instruments in the Almighty Hand, take no credit, and assume no superiority.

A strange paradox it is, that the more one accomplishes that is really worth doing, the less it appears to him to be and the more there seems yet remaining to be done. Thus it comes to pass that when persons of active and powerful talent, who have wrought mightily and beneficently in their time, pass away, they count themselves, for the most part, to have been a failure, and their life a disappointment, comparatively abortive and fruitless; because they contrast what they have had a hand in and have actually achieved with the immensity, the continental reach, and magnitude of what yet remains untouched and unattempted. So they seem to themselves to be like coral-insects, building atom by atom, poor little ephemeral creatures that add in their short day but an infinitesimal item and microscopic speck to the slowly rising pile. Yes, the men and women of energy, of insight, of fertility, of execution—the thinkers, the workers—who really

add to the world's intellectual and moral wealth—will be the first to admit that after all they are unprofitable servants; these are they who are clothed with humility and who ascribe all they are and have to the permission of God.

There is another idea contained in the context, and that is the necessity of waiting. It appears that when the servant of the proprietor returned from the field, instead of immediately eating supper, he was bidden to postpone that function until the lord of the estate had first satisfied himself, after which he, in his turn, should partake. Under cover of this familiar figure, Christ clearly teaches that man's part in relation to God is not only to serve, to do the will and work of God in the world, but more than that, not to expect recognition and reward straightway and publicly, as a matter of course and a matter of right. Patient waiting: this is also a lesson of the parable. And probably it is harder for human nature to wait than to work. There is a certain exhilaration about working, getting things done, attaining what one had set out to accomplish and seeing it actually finished and standing a completed whole.

There is a joy in this oftentimes which one does not find in the patience of hope, in quiet waiting for a longed-for consummation. Taking man

as he is made, a restless, hungry, ambitious, discontented creature, full of clamors and cravings and unsatisfied desires—waiting for a *desideratum* is about the hardest thing he can be set to do. Hence it comes to pass that patience is one of the regal qualities of the soul. Patience is truly great. To endure, to wait upon a deferred hope, to stand still until the salvation comes—this is a business that calls for a sublime faith, for grit and steadiness and composure and a brave spirit. It was this splendid quality that made William of Orange, and Washington historic names, and has lifted them into the pantheon of departed and deathless heroes—because among other traits they possessed this Olympian serenity of soul, this power of holding on by a forlorn hope, which yet was to them a virtuality, a sure divination and presentiment of eventual victory. No one can be really great without patience. You must know how to wait, how to accept defeat gracefully, how to bow to the inevitable fact, in sure hope of a better and blessed future. To wait, in a world constituted as this, is quite as important as to work. Indeed, they are probably numerically more, by far, who can work industriously and diligently than can wait contentedly and quietly. Man is hasty, eager, impulsive; he will compress

results; he will sup immediately upon coming from the field; he must have his wages promptly. His money is due as soon as his service is rendered; this is his rule; but it is not God's law in the kingdom of Providence. Quite otherwise. For, if history and human experience, collectively considered, carry any lesson, it is just this: That the pay, the hard cash, does not come directly upon the completion of the work.

All experience confirms this conclusion, that this world is not a scene of exact adjustments and fair compensations. Ask the martyrs, the witnesses for any great, imperiled truth, the patriots, the workers in any field of high enterprise, the inventors, the discoverers, the heroic men and women who have sacrificed themselves and their all in some great interest whether they received an offset and material consideration for all their toil, pain, anxiety and mortification, and they will say: No, not in coin, not in gold, not in houses and lands and fine raiment and chariots, not in praise and pudding; but in the answer of a good conscience, in a consciousness of rectitude, and in the blessed hope of ultimate reward in a day of righteous judgment.

Nothing is more notorious than that the servants of God do not get paid promptly in this

world. The world is not built that way. It is rather built upon the principle announced in the text, "Gird thyself, and serve me, . . . and afterward thou shalt eat and drink." But this does not suit the taste of most men; they want to sup now, when things are savory and smoking. And by consequence it turns out that seeing they cannot do this, but are obliged to wait, many wax weary and fall into ill humor and fret at inequalities of divine Providence, and the hard logic of events, and the mystery of God's ways with men, who, in place of dealing out microscopic justice here and now, often leaves them in the lurch, in suspense, in darkness, in humiliation. This is, at bottom, the reason why you will often see those who a while since were shouting lustily for what they called an eternal principle, suddenly weaken and grow limp and strangely quiet. The fact is they were there for what could be made out of it. They wanted pelf, power, place, patronage, the spoils, and discovering after due trial that these were not available, not ready to be dispensed, their ardor cooled, they became offended and withdrew. It did not suit them to wait; they had not the right grit; they were not true metal; they did not ring true; their motive was cankered at the root.

The world abounds in that type of character, not principled, not ingenuous, not whole, not pure gold; but contrariwise, the supreme dynamic; with such is palpable profit, some prospective benefit or personal promotion or mercenary advantage upon which they have set their cold, keen eye, and which, if it does not shortly fall into their lap, their immense enthusiasm for moral ideas, truth, righteousness, education, justice or what not suddenly collapses and falls flat. These servants cannot wait. They must sup at once. How true to human life is Christ's parable! This thing of waiting takes up pretty much all our time. Yet we can do anything better than that. In fact, we have to wait for everything that has substantive value and intrinsic worth; the best wine comes last. The faculty for waiting is the one most in demand at present. He who can wait longest, most patiently, cheerfully, hopefully, holds the winning card in life's subtle game; he is apt to get what he wants, or if not, he sees the triumph from afar, and rejoices that the prize will fall yet later to others who are working on the same lines and to the same great end.

Verily, this is the virtue required of all of us; and the test that best searches out and settles

one's faith in any principle, doctrine, or policy is this: How long is he willing to work and wait, unrewarded, uncheered by success, yea, reviled, persecuted, in a forlorn minority, yet "bating no jot of heart or hope"? This is the probe that searches deep, and we cannot stand it; we wince and weaken. Oh! we can bawl out glittering platitudes upon public platforms; we can carry the banner in the van, amid throbbing drums and a tempest of cheers; we can vote with the majority; we can publish our opinions when it costs nothing, when it is perfectly safe and quite popular; but to return from the field after a day's plowing and feeding cattle, and then gird one's self to wait—this is a thing of different complexion; this goes to the root of the matter; this declares a man, identifies him, shows him up, and ascertains whether he be a dishonest wind-bag and canting hypocrite, mouth-ing a histrionic part for appearance; a poor, false creature, covered with electro-plating to disguise the base elements in him—or a true man with a vitalized conscience, the courageous, columnar champion of a truth he holds dear and is ready to work for, waiting for its coming in great power and glory;—yea, even to die for it.

Learn a lesson from Christ's parable of the wait-

ing servant. You must not expect much in your day. It does not belong to you to decide upon the date for any great change. It is not for us to know His "times and seasons," "whose way is in the deep and who makes the clouds His chariot," or how long it will take the historic drama of our planet to work itself out. The eternal processes of God's kingdom are slow and secular; they lapse leisurely, the stars burn and burn out, the moons wax and wane, "the great ages roll onward," but still God's purpose tarries, gets itself incarnated in this or that form or institution, and then shatters it as a shackle and impediment and unfit for its use, and migrates into some other shape. The whole web of human history, being interpreted, means simply man waiting upon God, "plowing and feeding cattle and waiting to sup"; waiting for fruition, for rest, for victory, for heaven, for the kingdom of God in some authentic sense. This is our vocation. It is ours to plow, to weed, to sow, to put in the spade and the pick, to tug and toil and groan and sweat, meanwhile not expecting great things, not counting upon ripe results in our time, not calculating by the rules of our human arithmetic the value of our service or the amount of our compensation, but leaving all that to the Master of

the estate. And whosoever does this out of a true and honest heart and with carefulness and fidelity, with him, Jesus says that by and by He shall sit down and sup. The good and faithful servant shall partake of God's supper; he shall be satisfied; he shall be filled.

Oh! the magnanimity and mercy of God. Not that men can do anything to augment the wealth and splendor of the divine nature or make God happier, for the best are inefficient and unprofitable. But notwithstanding your defects and limitations, O laborer! O sufferer! O martyr! O witness for an essential and despised truth! you shall sup by and by; if only you have been "faithful in a few things, you shall be made ruler over many things." Gird yourself and wait, for after you have served you shall sup; after you have suffered, you shall reign.

IV

A NEW YEAR SERMON

IV

A NEW YEAR SERMON

“ And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark :

“ But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night : but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—ZECHARIAH xiv : 6, 7.

By permission of Cyrus, the Jews of the Captivity returned to Judæa in large numbers, although many remained in Babylon. The prophets of that era, some five centuries before Christ, were Haggai and Zechariah, who supported each other and converged their efforts upon the rebuilding of the temple and the revival of the old forms of worship. Glad that a fragment, at least, of their countrymen had escaped out of the fascinations and entanglements of mighty Babylon, those godly men tried to reconcile them to the plain fare and hard work necessary to the rehabilitation of the Jewish state. The oracles that pass under the name of Zechariah had reference to these contemporaneous events, and also opened long vistas into succeeding ages. These latter

being apocalyptic in character—that is, pertaining to the revelation of future and undiscovered events, were naturally unintelligible to those who heard them—probably to the prophet himself—and, indeed, are largely so to us and the modern world who read them now.

The text, in which the prophet throws on his canvas a vision of the great day of Jehovah, a dark day of gloom and terror, clearing away at evening into a blue, cloudless sky, is one of his apocalyptic passages. He foresees looming on the far horizon a notable battle, which will outrank in significance the most decisive and famous fields of the world's history. Marathon, Cannae, Tours, Blenheim, Waterloo, Sedan, Gettysburg—none of them will outshine it, by reason of the gravity and reach of the issues involved. So much, at least, may be collected from the prophet's language: "Behold, I will gather all nations unto Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses spoiled: then shall Jehovah go forth and fight against those nations, and his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives; in that day the light shall not be clear nor dark, neither day nor night, yet at the evening time there shall be light."

Such a description foretokens an unparalleled

state of things. No contest has yet taken place that deserves to be set forth in such tremendous phrase. There have been battles in which precious interests were at stake, and when the destiny of nations and of creeds, and the course of coming history, hung upon the uncertain cast of the die. Ideas, institutions, principles, policies, have sought from age to age the final arbitrament of arms; but no war has been waged that could properly be described as a "gathering of the nations against Jerusalem." Even should you take the language metaphorically as a pen-picture of the conflict between truth and error, righteousness and wrong, even so, that issue has never yet been definitely settled as here predicted by the Hebrew prophet. In every century moral ideas have had to fight with immoral ones; spiritual forces with carnal; new and high conceptions of progress with old, burdensome traditions and customs; pure doctrines with demoralizing and degraded ones; the kingdoms of light and of darkness have been embattled time out of mind, and have rolled their billows of blood over the earth. But there has been nothing quite commensurate with this oracle, "at evening time it shall be light," probably because the world has not yet reached its "evening;" it may be in the early afternoon, possi-

bly in the morning, of its history. In any case, it is obvious that finality has not yet been reached; the battle still smokes and thunders. The world, as it stands, is in a mixed state—neither clear nor dark—it is chaotic, bubbling, fermenting, has not worked itself into proportion and balance and a final form. What the ultimate phase shall be that will precede the incoming of a purer and approximately perfect state of society, such as the optimism of the Hebrew prophets and their inspired sagacity foretold, no one can say. They all touch lightly upon this topic, and not in terms to gratify curiosity. They see the future of the world in a large, dim, ragged way, and throw out curt, abrupt, sibylline sentences about it, of somewhat ambiguous meaning; but it is clear that they actually see something shimmering, glowing, globing up in the cloudy vault of coming time.

This oracle, that passes under the name of Zechariah, is a sample of their style: the prophet catches a glimpse of restless nations mobilizing and moving against Jerusalem in some then coming age. If any one say, this cannot be literally true; Jerusalem will never again be important enough to attract world-wide attention; it is not according to the geographical fitness of things that it should; the answer is, “no man is qualified

to affirm this in a world whose fundamental law is change and a perpetual procession of surprising contrasts." Political complications may conceivably set in that can easily shift the seat of interest from western civilization to the Orient. It would be premature in any one to say what histories are yet to be enacted upon the globe; what continents are to rise out of the undiscovered deep of time; what splendid empires are to shrink and set; and what new and unheard of ones are destined to wheel out of dusk and darkness toward a meridian throne and hold the heavens and rule the earth from shore to shore. Men are sometimes dogmatic and opinionative without warrant of knowledge and experience, so that their confident calculations suffer by comparison with the event.

The simple truth is that men do not know and cannot guess what is brewing, what is shaping, what is coming, what road the long caravan of humanity will take, or in what hemisphere and in what lands the great epic actions will yet be done that shall promote the advancing destinies of the race and manifest the increasing purpose of God. All this lies in the shadow, lies silent on the verge of time, is a subject of political conjecture or of apocalyptic dreaming. For practical use, however, the prevision of the

prophet in the text need not be restricted to any one era or event, howsoever conspicuous and cardinal. In a general way, it announces a truth of universal validity, and is a descriptive mark of every age. Indeed, it is denominative of the whole scheme of things under which we live, not alone that generation which, according to Zechariah, shall see the confederated nations girdling Jerusalem with armies and trenches and blazing camp-fires and bristling steel, but all the ages and generations of man on the earth have been neither clear nor dark.

The last phase of affairs, the last great day of the reigning *regime*, will simply be, in this respect, an epitome and culminating expression of all that has gone before. There never has been a time of the world to which this terse and pithy sentence of the Hebrew prophet was not applicable. It is true not only of the historic evolution of the race, but also in the realm of nature. Nature, as it bears upon moral law and the demonstration of moral truth, is neither "clear nor dark." The physical universe establishes a few great principles, and proves certain things about God, provided one's mind be ready to admit the doctrine of a personal Creator. Power, precision, adaptation, order, wisdom, method, are evinced in the times, veloci-

ties, and punctualities of the sidereal heavens. Sentient life also is maintained on the planet by the virtues of sun, air, and rain, so that each species is supplied with proper food. Nature is not totally dark; nor, on the other hand, is it perfectly clear. It does not speak decisively concerning the eternity of God, His absolute, uncaused, uncommenced existence, else it would not be possible to assign eternity to matter and force. It is a revelation of God, in some aspects yet only the Old Testament so to speak, for it does not tell nearly all nor the best part. The opulent, inexhaustible, infinite God does not arrive at complete self-disclosure in nature; if He did, atheistic materialism could not exist, would have no standing.

A person addicted to the narrow and exclusive study of physics may easily issue out of his investigations a religious sceptic, because he sees only obscure footprints of the Supreme, a tremendous, anonymous, inexorable energy moving on the whole cosmic order with mechanical precision and in an unconscious way. One does not discover in nature a Being who is the sum of all moral perfections. One finds much there that is capricious, incalculable, perplexing. The idea of God as a person, as the prius of all things, as

holy, just, good—cannot be constructed out of natural laws and processes—out of matter, motion and force. There is the same alternation of light and dark in the revolutions of history and in the corporate life of mankind. Take for an example any divine attribute, and it does not get complete vindication in this twilight world. Justice certainly is not swiftly and universally done. God does not interfere to prevent the slaying of His witnesses. He only takes care that the principles are not slain along with their champions; the martyrs have perished, but their doctrines have survived. Monopolies of power and prosperous vulgarity, combinations of unscrupulous men, often hold a long lease and set their nests among the stars, whence it is hard to dislodge them.

One can readily see the dark side if he look at the providential leading of the race. The universal, all-embracing, all-conquering love of God, as the very jewel of His attributes, does not shine conspicuous amid the ignorance, barbarism, squalor, and low, depraved condition of vast populations. Hardly any century but has been filled with alternate hope and despair; hardly any day without a cloud; hardly any invention that has not passed through a probation of suspense and

anxiety. This is the way of God with man, to set him down in a mixed scene, changeful, freakish, now blazing up into something like the light of demonstration—now dying down into vast and awful glooms.

This same analogy holds good in relation to the Bible. Every religious opinion that can get a living comes hither for some prop or presumption in its favor. Sects and doctrines the most contradictory, all repair to the Christian Revelation as an arsenal of arms and ammunition. No other sacred books are susceptible of such latitude of interpretation, of so much inferential theology. I am not aware that Mahomet's Koran, or the holy books of the Hindoos, or the mythology of Hesiod and Homer—which were the Bible of the old classical nations that lived around the Mediterranean—or the precepts of Confucius and the Chinese sages, have been such a bone of contention and apple of discord as the Christian Scriptures. The Calvinist finds his definitions of God and man and the divine moral government there. The Romanist finds his hierarchy and sacramental grace. The Quietist finds his inner light and "silent waiting" and "mystic ecstasy" and intense subjectivity. The Millenarian finds his views touching the Second Advent and

the national restoration of Israel. The literalist and the allegorizer each find support for their methods and conclusions in the Bible.

Critics may allege that this proves too much, hence nothing at all, and is an argument against the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures; but, if so, it is in keeping with all the other wonders of Divine Self-disclosure. It is neither clear nor dark. If conflicting theologies did not pitch their tents upon this field; if the Bible were lifted high above all controversy; if its true sense and intention were perfectly luminous and transparent, this would be totally unlike God's treatment of man and mode of action—in nature and in Providence. But, so far as we can see, God is self-consistent everywhere, and in all places of His dominion. One points his telescope to the skies and his microscope to the microcosm on the leaf or in the drop of water, and says, "I find skill, order, adaptation, here; but not holiness or justice." Thereupon he turns over the leaves of history and reads how the world has rolled through authentic time, out of darkness into light, out of the Orient into the Occident, out of Asia into Europe, out of the stagnation of the East into the energy and adventure of the West. "Oh," he says, "this is great and wonderful, but

not quite satisfactory. I would have made the verdict of history more decisive; I would have made more examples, and given instant emphatic condemnation of the wrong and a triumphant vindication of the right."

Next he opens the Bible and finds that the same analogy reigns there; upon some questions it is day, upon others it is dark. In other words, the disclosure of Deity to mankind is an ascending scale, starting with nature, rising into providential action, and culminating in the gospel; and everywhere there is haziness in the air, clear and solar light on some topics, fog and doubt on others.

But while this is confessedly true, the prophet's oracle is encouraging in that it affirms that the world is headed in the right direction and moving steadily toward the light. His optimism is not of the deistical sort, which declares that whatever is, is right; it is rather a modification of this, a conviction that whatever is in process of becoming—whatever is continuously on the way to be—the ultimate stage, the finality that will be right—it will be light at evening time.

This is a very comfortable doctrine, that whatever appearances may indicate to the contrary, and however dim the outlook for goodness and

truth in the earth may be, the broad tendency is in that direction; the world is revolving through slow secular ages out of darkness into day; out of a crude, sour, astringent state toward an eternity of summer and a golden fruitage—this evidently is the vision of the Hebrew prophet. It is the burden of all true prophecy that the morning must chase the night; that good must overcome evil; that the Christ must cast out Satan.

Moreover, standing to-day on the edge of a vanishing year, it is spontaneous and becoming in one to reflect upon this blessed and cheering fact, that all the dark ages and dispensations that have rolled their firmaments over this world have been unconsciously seeking a clear, placid, splendid sunset, and shall finally ultimate in it, as the only solution that can explain them. The sun must set round and red, and broad and full; there must be "light at evening," else we shall not be able to expound the mystery of sin and man.

This is a great generalization that all the ages of human history and all its civilizations, from the Mongol to the Greek, from the aboriginal man or the paleolithic man, clear up to the summit and highest specimen of the species, and all the ages of stone and iron and lead and

bronze ; of old primeval giants and barbaric kingdoms, that once rejoiced in their rude, uncouth strength, but went out, star after star, all of them, and have been unconsciously groping their way toward something better, a more stable constitution, a city of God, the kingdom of God and of His Christ. This is really the only consideration that can commend or consecrate them, that each of them was a temporary stage, to be torn down as the vast temple rose nearer to its roof and pinnacle. The bell of Judgment rang the curtain down upon them because they were not fit for permanence, were darkness rather than light, held more of evil than of good. And this process must still go forward, the old make way for the new, the lower for the higher, the temporal for the eternal, until at length the great year of Jubilee, the age of prediction, the kingdom of the heavens dawns upon the earth, and that which has so long lain potential becomes the actual. This is the organic tendency of things, although, at any one point of time, men may not see it to be so.

When John Wyclif's ashes were scattered upon the Thames, it did not look as if his Bible could live, but it did. When John Huss was burned, it seemed as though his protestantism had per-

ished also, but it did not. When the splendor of Greece faded out of the sky, the Greek learning still abode in the world, and flamed up later in the revival of letters and in the Greek Testament. Phœnicia passed down the sky, but, in process of time, Spain and England took up the same sea-faring tradition, and did infinitely more for the exploration and colonization of the globe. Italy, the birthplace of the modern spirit, declined from her zenith; but not until she had handed over her treasures, her art, scholarship, science, all her humanities, to Germany, France, and England.

And any contemporary spectator of loud, world-shaking events, who witnessed the winding up of an old and the birth of a new era, a new act in the long historic drama that has been playing on our planet—any such living in a day of stir and strain and horrible confusion and tumult—when perhaps a Scythian barbarism or an army of Goths and Huns, or a French Revolution broke out, might have said, “The world is waxing old and is in its last phase; fierce elements of chaos are racking it to pieces; this ague fit will shake it into ashes.” Yet it has never been so; the earth with man upon it has continued to wheel around its orbit, and has eventually outrun the

gloom and storm and caught the sunlight once more, and sailed into a milder clime and halcyon seas. God has apparently planted a conservative principle, a reparative virtue, a potential seed of salvation in this world. The old ship, though rocked in a monsoon, has finally righted itself, has never been quite engulfed. From age to age, in every century, it has been light at evening. There have been barbaric invasions, but the barbarians have been at length tamed and civilized. There have been plague and pestilence, but it has put men upon cleanliness, ventilation, sanitation, hygiene; there have been cruel wars for religion, for soul-liberty, for conscience and political independence; but the boom of guns has died away, the smoke has cleared out of the sky, and over the battle-graves have spread green pasture land and acres of waving wheat and corn. The blood of martyrs has been like wine poured forth that has strengthened and solidified the Church. Men have trembled for the ark of God—in every period of history some precious interest, some essential principle, some cardinal commandment, some law of duty and safety, has often seemed to be imperiled, almost obliterated; yet after a time the evil has cured itself, a sharp reaction has set in, and the

world has found out that it cannot dispense with decency, order, sobriety, moderation, and justice.

Light has come at evening. The same consolation abides for us who look out upon all the sore evils under the sun. If we are permitted to argue from the past, if there is any light in experience, these are not fixtures, not finalities, but are on the way to judgment and a righteous sentence. Bad men and bad measures, all dishonesties and crimes, all organized, powerful, impregnable iniquities, all wastes, abuses, wrongs, are on the road to correction; or, if they will not submit to that, to doom and downfall, at least, if justice is a pillar of God's cloudy, awful throne. Their demise and disgrace may not come in our day, but they are of a perishable nature and liable to become outdated and outworn, if, indeed, it is a truth that light will come at evening, and the children of light will take the kingdom and the meek inherit the earth.

Observe once more that the same law holds true in personal experience. Zechariah's prediction encourages us to commit ourselves trustfully to the unknown future and to the mercy of God, confident that light will finally unweave the darkness amid which we walk. No serious mind but often has such queries as these spring

up: Is life a dream, a somnambulism, a mirage, a gay bubble glancing on the tide? Or is it a shadow projected by a tremendous reality behind? Such reflections naturally overtake thoughtful and earnest souls as the years slip by and time assesses our goods and chattels and sells us out. What is life? What is time? What is eternity? Whither do I tend? Surely he must be afflicted with incurable levity who does not, now and again, revolve these solemn topics. The bold philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, called Idealism, holds that the whole external world is "empty seeming," the product of mind, has no more connection with reality than a word has with the thing to which it is applied, nothing can be perceived except the ideas of the mind; matter has no existence save as it is perceived by some intelligence, human or divine. This is radical, thorough-going doctrine, and of a lofty kind; it is the contradictory opposite of materialism, and a highly spiritual philosophy. Thinkers in every age have ventured upon ontological speculation. They have inquired: What is being? What is existence? What is this vast, boundless world of eye and ear? What is the ego? What is the non-ego? And they have not been able to reach a unanimous verdict. What is reality? This is

one of the secrets to be opened and broken—in a higher and a future life—for there will be light at evening. It may well be that now in the flesh we are in contact with shadows, echoes, pretexts, forms, but after awhile we shall see, we shall know, we shall touch reality. No doubt, this our temporal ignorance is wisely intended; for if there were no temptation there would be no virtue; if there were no darkness you would not know light; if demonstration reigned in all realms, there would be no room for hope and faith.

If righteousness were not persecuted and jailed and iniquity enthroned, a powerful argument for a future state of adjustment would be wanting. If there were no outstanding mysteries, no intellectual perplexity, there would be no progress, no effort, no struggle. At the same time, while this arrangement seems to be necessary for the education of the human soul, under present limitations, it is not installed as a permanent fixture. You have a title to believe that whatever now frets and troubles you, whatever doubt, suspense, and fear ravage your peace, will finally be cleared up, will be explained by some missing link you cannot now find; light will break. Not only so in some larger, more ample future, but even here it is your right and privilege to move continuously

into the light. Each passing year should leave you a more illuminated soul, more cheerful, more hopeful, more contented, more assured.

We read that the two-pillar doctrines preached by Wesley and Whitefield in words of flame to the dead, deistical eighteenth century were the new birth and assurance; they are equally appropriate to our contemporary age. Assurance, conviction, light, joy; these are of first-rate importance to us, who go pilgrimizing to eternity. You will want more light as you move on into the great dark; and you can have more. What will you do without light at evening? You must have it and you can get it from Him who cries: "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." Each fleeting year may increase the inflow of divine life to your dead soul. Each year may bring a more immediate, continuous and conscious operation of God upon you; only so can you get light, light as evening draws on. It must enter from beyond, from the outer infinite, from the sphere of spirit. By death to self and by entrance into the sublime spirituality of Christ, into His great renunciation and perfect obedience, there will come an opening of God within you, through which light will gradually spread and

shine, and shine more and more; there is no other way to get a religious hope.

If any one complain that life is dark, and the world and death and eternity all dark, frightfully dark; that the fast filling years bring him no relief, no comfort, no message, no meaning, it must be that he has not come into effectual relation with Jesus Christ, has not learned his secret, has no spark of that perpetual inspiration of God, that illuminated and sustained Him, has not come into real sympathy with Him who declared, "I am the resurrection and the life;" for God hath not appointed us unto darkness and death, but unto light and life. This is man's true destiny; this is the indication of his being; this is written in his constitution; this is the true evolution of his nature—to become a spiritual, illuminated, lofty and powerful creature, and move forward evermore out of darkness, narrowness, and limitation into the light of a larger life. Each of our mortal years should see this process hastened and visibly maturing, until at length, at the evening time, the light of a better world shall break upon us.

V

PAUL ABOARD

V.

PAUL ABOARD

“ Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”—ACTS xxvii : 31.

PLUTARCH, in his Lives of illustrious men, says that Julius Cæsar, on a stormy night, crossing a channel in a light, open boat, quieted the alarm of the oarsmen who were ferrying him by telling them, “ Pluck up your courage ; you carry Cæsar.” This great Roman had faith in his destiny. A secret presentiment bade him believe that he was born to achieve a notable career. He was conscious of power, of resource, and had a profound belief in his star. His reported language sets up a striking parallel to the case of the Apostle Paul. Their state of mind was much the same and their words were equivalent in meaning. In both of these extraordinary men a thorough, deep-seated conviction found utterance—that they did not belong to the common herd of indifferent, routinary persons of no significance and who had no particular errand in the world.

This was not egotism nor personal vanity in either of them ; it was a presentiment, a persuasion that they were born to effect something memorable and enduring on earth. This forefeeling has often been a note of forceful men and women. Not infrequently they have had an inkling or subconscious surmise that they were born for some important end, to deliver a telling stroke or act an essential part in the drama of human affairs, and that they were invulnerable until the time was ripe and their hour had come. This has been a trait of large, oracular, and effective natures, and it has naturally operated to relieve them of fear, of anxiety, of doubt, and has endowed them with magnificent courage and composure even in perilous times and when men's hearts were failing them. Unquestionably, it is a source of mighty strength for one to feel that he has a work to do, something of value to accomplish, a chief end ; that he is not a waif, an autumn leaf blown about by the winds, a seaweed tossed by the billow, an idle, oarless boat adrift on the sea ; but that he lives under a providential law and is strictly immortal until the inevitable purpose concerned in his being is exhausted.

This, I suspect, has really been the secret

strength of great souls, has nerved and sustained them and made them swifter than eagles and stronger than lions, in the midst of tumults and distractions. Indeed, every one, great or small, needs something of this kind to give him balance and poise, alacrity and confidence to meet the fierce paradoxes of life. We must live from within. We must be fed out of ourselves. We must be guided by an inner light. We must draw from a secret fountain of strength. We must lay at the base of us certain great beliefs, not merely as articles of a creed, but as vital experiences which shall encourage, inspire, and sustain us. Without this, life is a shabby, second-hand affair, lasting by the mere grace of accidents and lucky hits and fortuitous circumstances, snatching frantically at one windfall and another to keep it alive and afloat, devoid of depth, power, purpose, direction, joy, or any great elemental law or principle.

Paul was one of the great, masculine souls of our species because he had this divination, this strong undercurrent of certitude that he was allied to the God of history and had a part to play in the evolution of a divine plan. At this crisis he had appealed to Cæsar from the prejudice and malice of the Jews, who were bent

upon destroying him, and was on his voyage to Rome. Both the shipmaster and centurion must have been impressed by his commanding bearing, and that a layman in nautical matters should express such decided opinions, without reserve, in so critical a posture of affairs as a shipwreck. But Paul was by instinct a commander; one of those whose presence is a tower of strength, to whom others look and upon whom they lean. There are individuals who inject enthusiasm and hope wherever they move. They have self-possession, self-reliance, address, the rare faculty of infecting the timid and inert with their calmness, positiveness, and equality with the occasion; they are able because they seem to be able, and round such the feeble, frightened, and cowardly gather, as iron-filings are drawn toward a magnet. Paul had the constitutional qualifications of a leader; he was sagacious, bold, and prompt, no grain of indecision in his make-up; a man of strong convictions, and who never faltered in giving them effect.

These qualities are conspicuous on the voyage to Rome. A passenger and a prisoner, it yet does not occur to him to be officious or meddling, to offer his unprofessional opinion even to men who were supposed to understand their craft. With the sure instinct of a great, original man, he

knows that he is right, and hence counsels the ship's officers to lie quiet at Crete during the season of storm. When, at length, they had sailed into the big, black heart of it and into chaotic darkness, and heard the breakers dashing against the rocks, Paul points it out as the vindication of his practical wisdom and seamanship, albeit he was a plain Christian preacher and no professional navigator at all. The Roman centurion was evidently impressed by the robust manhood of his prisoner and his native force of character. No doubt he was conscious of a sentiment of respect, admiration, and secret homage for the elevated qualities of this obscure but singular Jew. He felt the pull upon him of that ineffable somewhat that makes the heart adore in the presence of a great man or a great heroism or a great quality. This appears from the fact that he would not listen to the proposition to kill Paul in order to prevent the escape of the prisoners. Standing at opposite poles from each other, the soldier recognized unusual power, intellectual and moral kingliness, a columnar personality in Paul, and freely accorded him the benefits rightfully challenged by such a character. After all, it is a great advantage to be constructed and put together on large principles—a mighty soul, a

strong, clear, fertile mind, energy, insight, a noble nature, a sound mental and moral organization; these are inestimable goods. You need not set a crown on his head,—that man is a king already; his supremacy is soon acknowledged, the crowd makes way for him, everybody stands out of his light, he requires no scepter, no throne; these he has by birthright, not by tactual succession, but by a divine call. Dr. Johnson, hastily working up a fiction in order to pay his mother's funeral expenses—but that fiction, "Rasselas," or "The Dwellers in the Happy Valley;" John Bunyan, the tinker, occupying his leisure in Bedford jail in producing one of the two immortal works that appeared in the seventeenth century—one of them "Paradise Lost," the other the "Pilgrim's Progress," and many another hero in the strife, all go to show that the vital question respecting any one is not as to his temporal conditions and surroundings, but rather this: What is he fit for? What kind of stuff is he made of? What is the range of his ideas and ambitions?

Thus, too, Paul was an insignificant looking Jew and all his circumstances argued against him; nothing in his position gave him right to a hearing, save the one incontrovertible fact that he knew more about that particular voyage, and the

best way of navigating the Mediterranean for that once, than the whole shipload. A sectary, the apostle of a heretical faith, an accused man bound over to answer before Cæsar's judgment seat, without money, friends, influence, patronage, high connections, he stood forth on the deck amid the howling of the storm, and the heaving of the sea, and the straining and plunging and rattling of the dismantled craft, and all the terrifying concomitants of miserable shipwreck, in the superb composure and majesty of intrepid manhood, telling the affrighted crew that even now, at the eleventh hour, should they act upon his instructions they would at least escape with a whole skin, if not a dry one. It is a fine illustration of the superiority that naturally belongs to capacity, to insight, to breadth of vision. Ordinarily, every man is the best judge in his own calling, and when a cobbler leaves his last he falls into trouble.

But there are also encyclopedic, polylateral minds, who surprise us by their range, versatility, and aptitude. Intellect, clarity of vision, incorruptible, stern integrity, moral courage, a moral will, a high-souled masculine nature, lifted clean above all that is mean, petty, frivolous, deceitful, faith in God and in a divine purpose, surely these are winning qualities, the only armor that

will stand the test of time, of temptation, of peril, and emerge unhurt from fire or flood.

But observe again that the ground of Paul's confidence, under the trying circumstances, was a supernatural suggestion. An angel, a vision of some sort, had accosted him during the night, giving assurance that, as for him, he must stand before Cæsar. Clearly he believed in an invisible world of mind, will and moral agency behind this phenomenal scene of nature. Paul believed that personality and purpose reign over the universe, not chance, and that there is possible communion or commerce between the two spheres, of nature and the supernatural, and that finite man may come into a real relation and conference with God. True, the sea ran high, the storm boomed and crashed round them, the ship was falling to pieces, hope had fled, every face was full of blackness and despair; the only blessed ray that shot across the waste and welter came from that strong, glistening angel whom Paul averred he had seen in the crisis of the peril. But that was enough for him. He believed that man is greater than the thunder, the rain, the lightning, greater than the whole realm of physics; that he is not the sport of blind, impersonal forces, but the instrument of a higher will. Paul believed

that there is something greater than matter or motion or force, a kingdom of moral ideas, a providential law that could not be drowned in the vasty deep or smitten by thunderbolts. And this doctrine of a moral government, an eternal purpose, running like a thread through all ages; this doctrine that all things work together toward the realization of the best policy for the whole creation, this is, at bottom, the saving clause in our case.

Unless this world rests on a transcendental ground, it matters little how soon the euroclydons rise and blow it to bits. If man have no errand to do in this world; if he be simply born to eat up the corn, and to be rolled round with rocks and tombs and trees; if the ideas of God, immortality, duty, righteousness, are a mirage; if there be no holy, omnipotent will at the root of things; if time be not the stage for the historical unfolding of an intelligent divine purpose; if God be not gradually working through the slow secular ages toward finer issues and a larger manifestation of Himself; if earth and man and the whole nature-realm are sprung of protoplasmic slime and have been licked into shape by the eternal, inexorable energy of a blind evolution, instead of being mighty shadows, flung by an ultimate reality,—if

there be no moral meaning implicated in man or nature, then the sun may well burn out and the globe stop on its axle. It is absolutely necessary to take into account the throne of God, the kingdom of God, the eternal purpose of God, in order even to make the world safe to live in, not to speak of any coherent theory of it.

That word of the angel to Paul, "Fear not; thou must be brought before Cæsar," is highly significant in this connection. Most of the ship's company were sailing from Alexandria to Rome upon their own private reasons and for their respective advantage; and, if every soul of them had perished in that driving sea, it is not extravagant to say that the dismal event would not have appreciably affected the interests of the race. But Paul was aboard! Below all the cargo, gains, traffic, hopes, expectations involved in that voyage there lay a vital consideration transcending them all. For the Christian apostle was connected with an order of facts and with an historical development, compared with which the commercial ventures of those traders sailing to Italy were the merest trifle; they did not stand related to subsequent history and to the moral education of mankind; their call to Rome was not in the interest of the new Christian movement, nor in any way linked to the

moral progress of the race. Crew and cargo might all have gone to the slimy bottom of the deep on that howling night without irreparable damage to any precious interest or institute the world knows of. But Christianity was aboard! And there is a wide difference in the dignity, value and excellence both of truths and of men. There are cardinal events, hinges upon which the gates of time turn, and which determine the cast of society and the drift of things. There have been decisive battles in history, of which, had victory perched upon other banners, the civilization, laws, manners, subsequent condition of the world would have been unlike the actual fact. So, too, there have been solitary and singular individuals who have seemed to turn the life of their time into other channels.

This contemporary age of ours is largely if not wholly what it is because of certain powerful personalities, and fruitful, formative periods antecedent to it and prodigiously potent and influential that have made it, under God, what it is. The age of Socrates, and later of Aristotle, in Hellas; the age of Julius Cæsar and Cicero in Rome; the age of Bacon and Descartes, of the sixteenth century in Europe, which witnessed the thawing and loosening of scholasticism and

authority ; the age of Luther and the Protestant Reformers ; the age of Alexander Hamilton and the framers of the American Constitution, and many another age, are specimens of formative, prophetic periods that held the seeds of new civilizations and kingdoms of thought, and of cumulative results not yet worked out. Always it is the moral purpose disclosed in the march and evolution of events that is material. The men and things themselves do not amount to much. The men die and the eras and their contents are rolled up as a garment, but the residual facts left stranded after the tide has ebbed, the new idea started, the fresh impulse given, the new direction in which the currents of human society have set, and the altered opinions, methods, fashions and spirit that come in, this is the supreme interest ; this permanent substratum that underlies the transactions of time is really the significant thing, since it is the unfolding of a divine purpose. Hence Paul saved the ship ! because it was necessary that he should carry the Christian gospel to the mistress of the then known world ; the spiritual life of man was in question. The moral exigencies of the race saved that floundering craft in the Adriatic.

Verily, it is a tremendous truth that the

world stands for the sake of a moral purpose. Groaning in pain, rocking with earthquakes, belching out fire and smoke from volcanic vents, holding within itself in air and in subterranean centers combustibles that could hurl it into the pit of annihilation, the great and gracious God keeps this earth spinning serenely and securely around its orbit, holding terrific energies in leash and under control subject to the gradual out-working of His perfect idea for the children of men. The world with all its plant and scaffolding stands in order that out of the confusion, rubbish and uproar shall arise a building of God, a *civitas Dei*, a golden age of regenerated manhood, a final symphony out of all the harsh preludes and tangled discords of this present rehearsal. As the case now stands the world reminds one of yon straining, dismantled hulk on the stormy Adriatic. Seamed with scars, cursed with sin, drenched with tears and human blood, plowed with battle-furrows, smoking with ruins, crowded with anxious, pallid faces, the earth has been wheeling along through dark, tempestuous, lawless centuries, some of them so rude and boisterous with carnality and crime that, had it not been for this overruling moral purpose; had it not been that Paul was aboard; that God has in

store an immense and magnificent future for the race of man; had it not been for this Christian programme which, when finished, shall vindicate the supreme wisdom and satisfy the highest ideal and challenge the applause of the intelligent creation—there is no reason to suppose that any other consideration would have saved it.

What intrinsic value is there in commerce, trade, banking, coal and gold mining, in politics, philosophy or mechanical invention, in any established fact or fixture, to make it worth while to perpetuate the human family and save the world from sinking? You cannot find firm footing until you alight upon the continent of moral ideas and the supernatural. All that is bad in the world survives on account of what is good. The selfish, the depraved, the destructive, the obstructive, the animalish, all the vicious elements last only because there is something sound and wholesome left. If there were nothing but corruption and decay, the world would fall to pieces. It is because there are a few grains of salt here and there that society holds together. If there were not a moral ingredient, some pure and high feeling, noble ambition, spotless integrity, heroic self-sacrifice, spiritual faith left among sinful men, the crash would surely come.

This imposing materialism and luxurious civilization which men build up and extol will not save society. It is mere splendid rubbish. It is the phosphorescence that glimmers over decaying matter. Apart from character, from faith, from righteousness, from purity, there is no sufficient reason why the world should last twenty-four hours longer. If there be no personal God, no glorious purpose of God, no larger knowledge of God possible, no higher life for the soul, no goal of moral perfection toward which man tends, then what is there in our shops, factories, spindles, turbine-wheels, power-looms, mechanism of business and banking, or in biology, physiology and physics, and the whole mundane machinery, to keep the world standing? If these be the totality of things, if there are no verities behind and beyond them, if virtue, holiness, redemption from the dominion of sin are not indestructible certainties, if there is no sublime advancing purpose of God leading on the race—in one word, if Paul be not aboard—why should this old earth-ship fight any longer with monsoons or labor through the deeps of time?

Observe, further, that although the announcement of the mysterious angel was explicit and Paul's confidence predicated upon it absolute, yet

when the crisis came upon which the whole question of safety hinged, Paul's language was practical and peremptory. In an underhand way the sailors had lowered a life-boat, under pretext of casting anchor, but really as a stratagem to save themselves and abandon the ship. Paul detected the trick, exposed their criminal design, and defeated it. Nevertheless, looking at this incident narrowly, it appears to carry incompatible ingredients,—on the one hand, the absolute assurance of rescue without conditions made to Paul in vision; on the other hand, the imposition, at the last moment, of a very stringent condition, the frustration of the seamen's selfish and cruel programme. It is obvious that here again crops up the ancient and permanent antagonism between the higher and lower spheres of divine and human agency. The unconditional revelation is made to Paul that he shall certainly go to Rome, and he firmly believes and declares that the event shall be as predicted. But the critical point is that his dogmatic theology does not interfere with his practical seamanship when the emergency arises.

I commend Paul's method of dealing with vexed questions in the sphere of religion. His doctrine concerning the nature and attributes

of God, the divine omniscience and veracity, serves as an adamant base upon which to build an unwavering assurance of his personal safety; but mark, he does not push it into an ultraism, a fanaticism, or beat his silly head against rocky mysteries; he listens to the voice of practical reason and declares, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Apart from metaphysical theology and alongside of it, there is also a sphere of second causes and of moral agency and accountability. If the end is foreordained, the means leading up to it are equally necessary. This is the true relation subsisting between the doctrines of revealed religion and the practical duties of life. The doctrines are radically incomprehensible. The nature of God, the mode of His existence and activity, His occupations and enjoyments, His immensity and eternity, directly we attempt to expound these, the mind falls among antinomies and contradictions which will not surrender their secret. It results that our human knowledge is chiefly of conditions, of secondary and efficient causes, of the properties of things, how they act, and how we are to co-operate with them so as to get the best results. It is not a knowledge of what God is, in the whole sweep and amplitude and affluence of His glorious nature, or why He

has made the world as it is, or the mystery of man and of sin on the earth. The knowledge of necessary conditions is our humble sphere, and not a knowledge commensurate with the whole range of being, as when Paul said to the centurion, "If you allow these men to escape, we are lost," notwithstanding my angel and his heavenly message. Hence it is futile for us to pry into arcana and hidden mysteries, or to inquire, Am I of the elect? What shall be the fate of heathen? Are there few or many that shall be saved? Shall I know my friends in Heaven? and much else of the same kind. The right question is, Do I comply with revealed conditions? Do I pray? Do I try daily to come into conscious relation with the Father of spirits through Jesus Christ? Do I abhor that which is evil? What are my tastes, temper, habits, choices? This exhausts our part just now. Our part is to believe, to obey, to do, to live up to the line of our light, to keep open the sluices of moral sensibility, to beat down Satan under our feet, to keep conscience alert and keen and get our horizon widened and rolled back, and meanwhile to leave what lies hopelessly beyond the reaches of our souls to an ampler day.

There is in man the speculative reason and

the practical reason. The one is critical and prying, seeks out final causes and hidden origins, and gets only a moderate satisfaction at present. The other is articulate, peremptory, positive, and says distinctly, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." It does not curiously inquire how prayer affects the mind of God. It says, Ask, seek, knock. It does not inquire why God has chosen to reveal Himself by an incarnation, and by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ? It simply accepts the transcendent fact and acts upon it. Take Paul's practical logic into your life. He knew two things,—one, an inflexible certainty that could not be annulled; the other, a plain, practical duty that must go along with it as its complement. Nor did the two clash. Each stood firm on its own proper ground. So, too, do ye be assured that there is nothing in the mystery of God or in the nature of things to excuse from conscious duty. Duties are ours, even though the doctrines and reasons that underlie them be obscure and unintelligible.

VI

THE VALUE OF THE SOUL

VI

THE VALUE OF THE SOUL

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him ;

“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”—JAMES v : 19, 20.

Two men named James are mentioned in the New Testament, one the son of Zebedee and brother of John, beheaded by Herod Agrippa, a record of which is found in the book of The Acts. The other, also one of the original twelve, and surnamed “the less,” either from his stature or from his age, is called by Apostle Paul, the Lord’s brother. His language is: “After three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother,” a kinsman of some degree. It was probably he who wrote this practical treatise to the dispersed Jewish Christians living outside of Palestine, the first of the seven so-called catholic epistles, because addressed to no particular church, but to the whole

body of Christian believers. In any case he who thus wrote of faith and works to the scattered Christians was a pillar in the young church. Paul found him in charge at Jerusalem on arriving there. He also presided over the first church council with fine wisdom and moderation, and among other services sent forth this tract upon the practical side of religion to the various Christian societies of that age. The tone of his epistle is not distinctly doctrinal; it refers rather to the visible effects of religious principle in the disposition and life of men. He tells his readers what they must do and not so much what God does for them. He lays accent upon personal accountability and effort, and does not discuss at length the theoretic and reasoned parts of religion.

The text which closes his epistle furnishes an admirable sample and summation of his method. Observe there is no reference to supernaturalism or mystery. He does not mention the Holy Ghost; he does not expound the new birth; he looks at the transaction upon the human side, as if it were a service, favor or accommodation which one could grant another, to convert him. Unquestionably there is a permissible sense in which this is true, and by consulting that sense or acceptation

James shows the eminently practical cast of his mind.

Consider first this fact which the Apostle calls error or aberration and wandering from the truth. It may be of two kinds, speculative and doctrinal, or overt, public, and notorious in matters of conduct and decorum. There are intellectual errors and there are open faults and sins, and the one does not necessarily involve the other. This is a sphere where there are wheels within wheels. Error may be of all grades and kinds, from that which eats into the core and is critical and dangerous, to that which is superficial and comparatively indifferent. There is a vast amount of error in the world that is practically harmless. It exists in relation to all subject-matters. It cannot be otherwise in the present state of man's faculties. More than this, it is one of the proofs of God's goodness to our race that the consequences of necessary, invincible ignorance are not always visited upon us in a painful way, and unless this be important in order to secure and protect the larger interests of mankind.

Take as illustration the infancy of any art or science, in which errors must abound. Absurd theories and bungling experiments and divers

misconceptions arise before the true idea and shortest cut are discovered. Meanwhile no one is seriously damaged or delayed by his ignorance and awkwardness. It did not interfere with the happiness of mankind before Kepler and Copernicus to believe that the earth was a flat plane and the sky glass and the stars spangles and the antipodes an impossible thought, an inconceivable thing. Men and women lived happily under the reign of doctrines in geography and astronomy since exploded. So likewise in every branch of knowledge. At first man's efforts are rude and tentative, wild and wide of the mark, but as time rolls in fresh informations this and that is rejected and excluded and replaced by surer methods and truer interpretations. And all the while that men are guessing and blundering and floundering and coming to port gradually, they are ordinarily spared any deplorable, mischievous effects of invincible ignorance. They must err. It is the state of man. He is a trier of conclusions, an explorer, an experimenter, a moral navigator over misty seas into unknown lands. And only in relation to matters where it is absolutely essential that he be right at once and from the start does he receive sharp, instant notification of the fact. For all other knowledge he

waits. If he walk on live coals he is burnt instantaneously and without mercy, for the simple reason that if the whole race were to take to that occupation it would be annihilated. If he pass the hand even inadvertently over a cutting edge, it draws blood; if he take poison in sufficient quantity, he dies. It is necessary for the sake of the species that swift, sure and painful consequences should follow directly and inexorably upon certain acts and omissions, even although they be done in ignorance and by accident. The universal interests of man demand that one and another here and there shall suffer as a monumental example lest the entire race perish through rashness and imprudence. Nature is sometimes a Caiaphas and says it is expedient that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not. But ruling out this class of exceptions, God allows error—dense, opaque, stupid, slow-paced error—to take possession of the human mind and only gradually to settle as sediment at the bottom. Moreover, what is true in the sphere of natural knowledge is also true in respect of religious doctrines and ideas.

Here, too, there is a wide margin open to innocent and venial error and such as the moral

instinct cannot persuade itself to be highly blameworthy. Thus men may differ touching certain speculative positions in theology without incurring, so far as is revealed, awful peril or immedicable hurt. They may differ as to the apostolic constitution of the church—was it prelacy or presbytery? Should the church be governed by bishops or by elders? They may differ as to the philosophy and range of the atonement—was it designed equally for all or specifically for some, and how does it operate to pardon human sin? They may differ in regard to the mode in which man became a sinner—was it by direct imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity or by way of natural law and natural consequence? They may differ as to the interpretation of 1 Peter 3 : 19, and as to what really happened during the interim between the death and resurrection of Jesus. Did he actually preach to spirits in hades, the dead of the pre-Christian ages? Did he publish the gospel of redemption through the dark and spectral kingdom of departed spirits and carry salvation to imprisoned souls? So, too, in regard to the whole question of restitution—shall all souls be ultimately restored, or shall some prove incurable and incorrigible, and perish? Just as in the previous case of natural knowledge, so here

there must be error, taking man as he is, with his limitations, his ignorance and prejudice.

Probably James did not contemplate intellectual or theoretic opinion or doctrinal heresy at all in urging the conversion of sinners. It is perfectly true that doctrine lies at the base of practice, in a general way, and yet one may hold error upon a speculative point, where the light of heaven does not shine full and clear and where much remains to be said upon both sides, without involving any serious defection in the region of conduct, without lowering the moral tone, or implying any desperate hostility to God and goodness. It is rather at the critical point where loose and corrupt doctrine empties, debouches into corresponding evil practice, that the text grapples.

✓ Where any one's doctrinal fallacy finds its way into the sphere of action and habitually taints and poisons that, then in an eminent sense he becomes a sinner. Or apart from this and without any doctrinal theology, one may sin, one may err from the truth, carried along by the force of undisciplined passions; or again one may hold sound opinions without the moral will to give them systematic effect, so that in practice his conduct discredits his ossified orthodoxy. This is by no means uncommon.

The picture in the text is presumably that of a person who from any cause has wandered from the path of order and rectitude and from the ideal of the gospel. Because there is a definite style of life, a set or ply of the disposition, a certain view-point, a general spirit and broad drift characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is perfectly distinct and unmistakable, so that it is not difficult to see or to say whether one errs from it. It is not so much a question of intellectual heresy that is here mooted, or some high theme of metaphysical theology which men have not sufficient data to settle dogmatically yet awhile, but the picture is that of one who knows more of the truth than he tries to do, who goes astray from it, who leads a poor, mean, shambling, guilty life and is in danger of making shipwreck of himself and of being swamped and stranded, from whatever cause, and the apostle James says, if you can help such, can influence him, can draw him out of the vortex and whirlpool, it may be the saving of a soul from death.

Consider further that the text credits men with the singular power of converting others. This is not the usual way of conceiving the matter. The general impression, supported by biblical sanction, is that the soul of man must

be turned and tuned and made responsive and melodious under the touch of almighty power; the hearts of men are in the hands of God. Of course, this is the final fact about it and the last analysis of the matter, but meanwhile divine and human agency are often interactive, so that the inception of religion in the soul may not infrequently be traced to some action, word, incident or circumstance lying open to view. Now James with his genius for the palpable and practical lays hold of the proximate cause, the occasional cause which may originate a Christian experience and lifts that into prominence. Hence he speaks of converting sinners as though it were a perfectly feasible thing. He looks upon the phenomenon from the lower, natural side of secondary causes, and in that view his phrase is undoubtedly justifiable. It is certainly true that one may be the instrument by whom the whole spirit and total tendency of a fellow-being shall be reversed and revolutionized; this is a splendid possibility. You may convert a sinner from the error of his way. The Spirit of God may take a man into temporary partnership with Himself and allow him to cooperate in an effectual manner and toward permanent and blessed results. There is such a power as personal influence—a dark, secret, inscrutable

thing. How, when, or where it may operate or whom it may affect is not matter for prediction. Only this is known, that there is power lodged in sincerity, in moral courage, in moral convictions, in personal example, in persuasion. One needs to handle these things skillfully, for they are delicate, keen-edged tools, and one requires fine wisdom and manifest sincerity to wield them ; but there can be no question that many a human being has been deeply and permanently influenced by the spirit, example, companionship, and by the word in season of some one who lived for finer issues and on a higher plane. No one knows when he does incalculable good or harm. This is a great mystery. Out of some little act or omission immeasurable consequences may proceed. Your high courage, your unselfishness, at a critical moment may fling a splendid energy into others. Your word of interest or remonstrance with a blotched, ulcerated bondslave of evil habit may win him to decency and honor. Your silent and steady example may operate powerfully upon those who witness it. Your mere inquiry of one whether he be an attendant upon church service may bring him into wholesome and helpful surroundings. A judiciously phrased opinion concerning the inevitable tendency of a person's course may turn him

from the rocks upon which his craft is heading and where he will shortly strike and go down. You may speak a timely word that shall put one upon thinking about his case and which shall issue in the passing away of old things and the incoming of a new dynasty of motives and principles.

True, it is quite possible to cast one's pearls before swine. An earnest, sincere soul may do harm by intemperate and indiscreet action. Nothing can take the place of common sense, tact, judgment, a knowledge of men, times, seasons and proprieties. But with this keen instinct one may do good—may impart a true impulse, may plant a counsel or suggestion that shall swell, germinate, fructify like a seed—"a handful of corn may wave like Lebanon." Verily a great practical truth is this of St. James', that a man may co-operate with God, and that not necessarily with bluster and flourish of trumpets, hunting for a choice spot to set his lever, seeking for a large, conspicuous place as the seat of his operations, and whence he can make elaborate attempts, but simply by the wise use of casual, unexpected, wayside opportunities, we may be coworkers with God. No one can say when he shall strike his sturdiest strokes. No one can say what God may wing like an arrow to

its mark and what shall fall short and flat. The main point is sincerity, earnestness. Do not vex your soul about results. Do not draw up programmes; seize and use the opportunity as it comes.

Another remark opened by the text amounts to this, that the work of moral influence is far grander than we suspect. Whoever succeeds on this high field saves a soul from death. Here is a powerful argument, yet one we cannot properly appraise. For what is the soul? Is the soul of man matter raised to its highest power and destined to relapse again into dust? Or is it a unique, supernatural somewhat, an immortal property or entity, sojourning here for a season and hence emigrating into other latitudes to clothe itself afresh with an organism better suited to the new climate and surroundings? We cannot define the human spirit. We only know it is that within each one which authorizes him to say I. Man alone can say I. He has self-consciousness, personal identity, the faculty of comparison and inference, conscience and a rational will. He can say I, I will, I choose, I think, I am. This is his strange prerogative. Brutes cannot rise above the course of nature, but man can; he can take possession of nature and utilize it. Planted in nature, so far as

concerns the body, by the force of intelligence, self-determination and rational motives he may rise above the nature-realm of physics and direct and control it in his own interest and for his own ends.

This spiritual energy, this outfit of mental and moral faculty, this principle of eternity is the in-breathing of the Almighty, and is compendiously called the soul. It is a depth that no lead and line has yet sounded. Men have sounded the sea and measured the velocity of light and the diameter of the earth; they can calculate the orbit of comets and weigh the stars; but they have not guessed the secret of man's soul. They think its shekinah or center somewhere in the brain and nervous system, but they have not found it yet. It eludes all research. There is a gulf between the brain and the thinker, across which no bridge has been flung so that one may cross from the one to the other. The physics of thought is inscrutable. We only know certain of the goings forth, exercises and attributes of the soul. It is a sort of bird of paradise, of splendid plumage, but caged, wired and barred by mortality, and that throbs and flutters and hopes and wonders and rejoices. The Bible does not define the human soul. It simply looks upon man as a creature capable of a career.

It looks upon human possibility as a wondrous seed that has life in itself, a thing of tremendous vitality, a rough, incrustated diamond, that may be cleansed and polished and set to flash forever in the heavens. It looks upon the imperial endowments of man, his insatiable cravings and unquenchable aspirations and all that is as yet potential and small, as capable of fulfillment, of larger life, as being shackled now, but one day to be enfranchised and let soar and roam.

The Christian religion deals in grand ideas; too grand for our present limitations. Tourists who climb to the summits of the Alps, toiling through the thin air, sometimes sink on the snow and stare in silence at the white peaks and domes and the sea of clouds stretching to the horizon. And is there no majesty in the gospel, too,—no Mont Blanc, no Matterhorn, no Monte Rosa, no long ranges, no lofty summits, no shining pinnacles? Can you take in these Christian ideas, any better than the stately panoramas of the natural world? Can you define the soul and immortality? Can you tell what it means to save a soul from death? What is the death of the soul? Is it extinction, the suspension of consciousness and all mental activity, the going-out of conscious life as a candle flickers and

dies in the socket? Is it a perpetual swoon and torpor of the faculties? Or is it an ever-during life at a low pulse, in a morally debilitated and corrupt condition, in a dark, indurated, obstinate, incurable opposition to God and goodness? What is the death of a soul? Who shall expound such a mystery? Who can venture upon more than his own private interpretation? Who knows enough to affirm dogmatically concerning such a catastrophe? Verily one would need to take the wings of the morning and fly through eternity in search of materials to elucidate so dark a theme as this.

Even an inspired apostle does not define or describe or dilate; he simply throws out the idea as a vivid, lurid reality—a dead soul! A lost soul! Without expounding, he simply leaves it floating before the imagination a vague, nameless horror. And probably in this he sets a wise example. It is sufficient for us to know that a man may lose his career, his destiny, and fail of his chief end; the subject does not call for minute particulars. That the human spirit may fail of achieving its true purpose and fall short of the mark; that the powers of mind and affection and all that fits it to expatiate in the upper firmament of God's love and to discover the secrets of the

universe, and to enter upon the companionships of an immortal world, may be balked and frustrated and fall down into a deep of darkness and confusion, and become a byword and a hissing, a thing of shame and contempt—surely this is bad enough. There is no need to pile up a massive, apocalyptic imagery to describe so dismal a catastrophe as the death of a soul. Just let it stand as James states it; that will do, that is enough. To attempt more we should have to draw upon our imagination, in default of facts and of actual knowledge, whereas the Bible simply authorizes this solemn truth, that a soul may utterly, ignominiously fail of its supreme end and proper destiny, and become a wrecked and ruined creature.

Surely the ideas connected with religion transcend all others in mysteriousness and sublimity. You may say you do not believe them, but that is a separate matter. Here they are, clear-cut, definite, intelligible, coherent. The throne of God, the soul of man, a life that never dies, moral ruin, an eternal progress in the elements of knowledge, holiness, power, joy, the necessity of divine approbation and of divine help—these are a few of the items that make up religion, and where will you match them for magnitude and grandeur? They dwarf all secular interests.

Moreover, this is the strength of the apostle's argument, that one should exert whatever moral influence he possesses on behalf of men, inasmuch as it is possible he may save a soul from death; he may set some stumbling, shambling foot on a path that shall wax wider and brighter until it lose itself in an eternal day. Is this not a great work? Think of it. One prodigal reclaimed, one frivolous, reckless creature arrested and impressed and made to feel that it is not the whole of life to live. Is this not the highest style of success—to save a soul from death; to meet again even one amid the countless nations of the saved, who shall rise up to call you blessed; who shall say, "You led me to eternal life"? Would that not be an immense, unspeakable thing to befall you or me? Can you conceive of a greater ovation? Hence I emphasize the power of moral influence as the most remunerative power we have.

After all, the best service you can render any one is not to make him rich or famous or even learned, but to instruct and stimulate his rational and religious nature. For this, if at all he is to be saved—this is the salvable part of him; the rest is comparative rubbish. So that if they who come into contact with you somehow receive the impression that you believe in God, in duty, in

redemption, in purity, in prayer, in moral accountability, in judgment to come—if these ideas shine through your life and make themselves felt, no one may calculate, arithmetic has no logarithms to compute, the possible results of such an influence. It is tidal. It may heave and break upon a hundred shores. It may bless souls who know nothing of its origin and impulse. People are apt to belittle this mystery of moral influence; nevertheless it is one of the grand, silent, effectual forces that bear upon the education of the human spirit.

If you have accomplished no more than winning a profane swearer from his oaths or a drunkard from his wine-cups; if you have mellowed the prejudices of a strong, implacable hater or refined a coarse, sensual, sullen nature; if you have made any slight impression upon a strongly entrenched vice or mean disposition; if by the subtle contagion of your better example, or by a golden word at a fit time, any one to whom you have access has had the eyes of the mind opened and been beckoned forward to higher thinking and nobler living, such an exploit takes rank with the capture of a city or the discovery of a continent. Columbus really did not do any greater deed than that, measured by the standards that prevail in the

kingdom of the heavens. And while selfish and sensual men may imagine that praying and preaching is a small business, Christianity makes it the chief part of its errand to affirm that such attempts upon man's spiritual nature are infinitely more significant than the din of the street and the agitations of the caucus and the noisy clatter of this mechanical world, and that if it were not for man's religious potentialities his capacity to know and enjoy God and to come into practical sympathy with Him, it would not have been worth while to carpet a globe like this, arrange its sceneries, and hang its starlights, and marshall its epochs, and ordain its seasons, and kindle sun and moon to give it light, and bid its centuries file past crowded with wars, migrations, tumults, civilizations, creeds and a ceaseless flux of changes, simply to afford a soulless monkey a chance to play his fantastic tricks.

Hence it follows that whatsoever bears upon man's moral life is highly significant. Any impulse or motive drawn from a supernal sphere and applicable to human condition is always in order. If the Christian ideal be not true, it does not much matter how we live or what becomes of us; but if Jesus Christ be indeed the bearer of an authentic message from the unseen to our mortal

race, then it follows that man does not live by bread alone, by his animal nature, by his worldly ambitions, by pride, by selfishness, by sensations, but that the imperial endowment about him is the spiritual life, the moral sentiment and presentiment, and his inborn affinity with an order of facts and realities that lie beyond sense, which he cannot strictly verify, but of which he feels the pull and has a divination. If you can do anything to vivify this; if you can fan this spark and make it flame; if you can deepen this suspicion; if you can cause any one to feel that he is a son of God, although a prodigal son, that he is a crown prince in tatters, that he is a child at school, far from his father's house, getting his tuition; if you can cause any one to live under the dominion of such great convictions, this will be the finest stroke you can do.

You need not envy Alexander or Napoleon. You need not care to sit down with kings under canopies and diadems—it will be enough to save a soul from death. But mark this *caveat*,—in order to do that, it is important that one feel the power of the truth he commends to others. It should command the homage of his own nature. Paul seems to teach that God may use a man for what he is worth, without his being worth much after

all. "My converts," he says, "may enter into life, while I may be a castaway." You can be useful, in a way, without deep convictions. Strange to say, one may be the instrument of the moral recovery of another without thereby certifying to his own sincerity or genuineness. Let us look well to ourselves. Let us light a candle and search ourselves. Every one of us must give account of himself unto God.

VII

A THANKSGIVING SERMON

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A THANKSGIVING SERMON

“And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

“There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”—LUKE xvii : 17, 18.

LEPROSY is described as a cutaneous disease, beginning with crusts and scabs upon the skin, thence extending to the tissues and joints, until the frame falls to pieces by a wasting gangrene. It was not an uncommon disorder in the East in the time of Christ and always. One afflicted by this loathsome disease was unfitted for social intercourse, both on account of the hideous disfigurements, the seams, cracks, and ulcers it wrought, and also by reason of its infectious character. It is, therefore, a significant statement that these men “stood afar off”; this is a stroke of truth and nature, and precisely what lepers would do. They did not intrude into the presence of others without due notice; they knew they were a shunned and isolated class and regarded with both pity and disgust.

In keeping with the general principle, or to illustrate the proverb that misery loves company, and to indemnify themselves possibly for the social ostracism and loneliness incident to their condition, ten of these unfortunate persons, according to Mark's narrative, had found each other and made common cause and common stock. They traversed the country, passing from village to village and picking up any windfall of good fortune that might betide. And one day they fell in with Jesus, the prophet of Galilee, in one of His missionary tours. By some sign or rumor they recognized Him as the man who had been eminently successful in the treatment of divers diseases, and invoked His benevolent interference on their behalf, careful, however, to measure their distance and not to approach nearer than custom and propriety would allow.

"Master, have mercy on us," they cried eagerly, with hearty accord. Whereupon Jesus signified that He did not propose any abrupt break with Judaism, by His direction, "Go show yourselves to the priest." This was a provision of the Levitical law, that a cleansed leper must be inspected and passed by a priest before he could return to citizenship or participate in the religious worship and solemnities of the church. He must

receive a clean bill of health from the proper official—the Jewish priest.

In compliance with this ancient and prescriptive usage Jesus said to these men, "Go, show yourselves to the priest." This was equivalent to an assurance that they would find themselves cleansed by the time they reached him. Otherwise he could do nothing for them; he could not sprinkle them with the bunch of cedar, scarlet and hyssop, nor pontificate on their behalf according to the ritual provided for such occasions. They must be clean before he could certify the fact. And so the affair actually eventuated; "as they went, they were cleansed."

Then one of them, conscious of the change that had passed upon him and full of gratitude to his Healer, retraced his steps to make public recognition of the wonderful and rapid cure, and finding his Benefactor fell down at His feet with fervent thanksgiving. Seeing him, Jesus recollected that there were ten in the same bad plight, and directly broke out in the plaintive appeal, "Where are the nine? Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this alien?" For he was a Samaritan.

The teaching of the incident lies on the surface. It means that man is prone to forget his benefits

and mercies, and lays more stress upon what he has not than upon what he has. It is our human tendency to take our blessings for granted and as a matter of course. Man seems to look upon all good things, pleasurable sensations, comforts, even luxuries, as his birthright, upon which he has a natural inalienable claim, giving him just ground for complaint if he does not receive them. A stroke of good fortune, an agreeable surprise, any *desideratum*, creates only a transient ripple and leaves but a dim impression; instead of being thankful for it as a sheer gratuity, an extra dividend, the individual only finds in it a reason why he should receive more of the same kind and oftener.

This is one of the standing objections and discouragements to almsgiving. You give a dole—a coin of money—to some broken, ragged applicant, to tide him over a crisis, and before many days he returns upon you again; should you decline, alleging that you have done all for him that you intend to do, all that goes for nothing. You must keep on giving if you expect the well-spring of his gratitude to keep on gushing. Or it may be you are in a position to grant promotion or a larger wage to some one; you decide to do so; he gets the advancement and its accompanying

perquisites; after a while a place still higher up falls vacant. He then wants that, but for sufficient reasons you pass him by and fill the vacancy with another candidate. Again your former benefit is forgotten, falls dead, does not count, is water spilled on the ground. Human nature is so constituted for the most part that if once you begin, you must continue to help it, else the stream of thanksgiving will run scant and shallow, and finally stagnate and dry up altogether. Gratitude is a rare exotic; small and narrow souls are not equal to the effort. If we philosophize upon the fact, it is owing, of course, to that radical trait of our nature, selfishness. Man is a colossal egoist; selfishness is the base of him. He imagines that nothing is too good for him; that he has a natural right to everything worth having; that he receives no more than he deserves; and that he is often unfairly dealt with by the overruling Providence. This is a general impression. Men feel that they have a natural claim upon God, that He shall make them happy and contented, and failing this, they are prone to grumble, to impeach the divine moral government, and to become critical and even resentful.

This attitude, if we may analyze it, undoubtedly results from the instinct of self-esteem and self-

aggrandizement, which is a fundamental note of our nature. Men do not generally ask What warrant had I to expect this good, this gift, this largess? what virtue or quality in me establishes a perpetual claim upon it? what reason had I to suppose that it would last? This question does not occur to the average man; he takes it for granted, with the air and mien of one who has been rifled of his rights and goods, if any curtailment or shrinkage takes place.

For substance it is the story of Jesus and the lepers. Nine of them, as the effect of his order, found themselves suddenly white and clean, and they thought no more about it. They went each about his business; they took it as a matter of course. What use in a recovered leper thanking God when he had only come by his own and returned to his normal state of health, and when lepers were the exception? Why should he not have a clean skin instead of a scabbed one? Who had a better right than he to sit at table, to join in its pleasures and convivialities, to frequent synagogue and temple, and to enjoy life? Could any good reason be assigned why a leper should be cooped up and debarred entrance, among his fellows, and not stand upon equal terms with other people? The nine seem to have reasoned

in this manner—all except the Samaritan. Moreover, it is genuine human reasoning, precisely the same which most men indulge in. It was the opinion of nine lepers out of ten, and it is the opinion of nine tenths of humanity still, that they have a clear and perfect title to all the natural good that comes along. Let the Supreme Providence take a human being and set him down in the midst of dishes, lounges, perfumes, conservatories, equipages, large dividends, a paradise of splendor and profusion, and then begin to cancel this and that, to cut off this superfluity and that supply, and wipe out another asset, and he or she will be a very remarkable and rare person who does not frown and complain, but maintains a cheerful mood, even although not seriously disabled. True, his roses did not bloom so luxuriantly, and he was disappointed in his pear trees ; he had like to have lost his hothouse by fire on a cold night during the winter ; and his fast and favorite horse fell lame ; a few minor misfortunes befell which did not really infringe the substance of his property, yet he imagines they have seriously undermined his grounds for thanksgiving. The truth is, the individual has accustomed himself to a fixed scale of living and to certain fixed, unalterable conditions which have become essential to his

happiness, and the consequence is that any limitation or restriction, even in the matter of some artificial and superfluous want, cannot be entertained with composure and is regarded as a grievance.

I suppose the truth lies about here : that man living on the earth has good reason to expect food, raiment, shelter, the necessaries of life. It is fair to suppose that the benevolent Power who brought him here would not leave him unprovided with the essential things ; but beyond this, it would be hard to show that any creature has an indisputable claim upon the Creator for superfluities. Is God unkind to Eskimos and Hottentots, herding together in soot and squalor, in skins and feathers ? No ; their lives are doubtless^{*} contented and happy ; their environment matches their tastes and state of culture. The fact that God has disclosed higher purpose in relation to some than to others does not impugn the divine benevolence, if all have what is suited to their capacity and need. This general tendency to take our good things, our extras, for granted, is the feature rebuked by Christ in His query, "Where are the nine ?" What cause could even those unhappy lepers show why they ought certainly to be healed under the government of a merciful

Creator? Is it not plain that had any such argument existed Christ would not have expressed surprise at their ingratitude? One is not expected to be profusely thankful for what he has a clear right to have and to hold. Evidently the whole matter of thanksgiving is settled upon its true basis by this remark of Jesus to the grateful Samaritan. So that if any one is disposed to say he has nothing to thank God for, then thank God that you are not a leper—a blistered, disfigured, offensive leper! Undoubtedly this is the teaching of the incident. Thank God that you are not suffering from evils that you could readily imagine, and concerning which you can show no sound reason why they have not overtaken you.

Take nothing for granted: this is the doctrine inculcated by Christ's interview with the lepers. Do not count confidently upon any creature good. Do not conclude that if quails fall in the desert—once in a while—they are intended as a permanent substitute for manna. Do not fail to recognize that men have no absolute claim upon any commodity or comfort, under present arrangements, in such a sense that they can justly impeach the divine administration should it be withdrawn. Remember that God calls upon us to be thankful that we are not lepers!—thankful for negative im-

munities as well as for positive blessings ; thankful for what we have escaped as well as for what we enjoy. Probably this is not popular doctrine ; and yet it is a direct inference from the surprise of Jesus upon the return of the Samaritan—"Where are the nine?" As if He had said: "Do they think that the goodness of God is under obligation to cure them? Do they imagine that the universe is tributary to their well-being? Is there any reason in the nature of things why they must get well? Where are they? Where are the nine? The conclusion is obvious. Man is a helpless, dependent creature; proud as he is, he is a pensioner upon divine bounty; he has nothing which he does not receive; and his true and proper attitude is one of humility and gratitude, not only upon high occasions, but as an habitual spirit and permanent state of mind. Doubtless we all lose sight of this fact and of the inexorable conditions of our case. We expect too much. We demand too much. So true is this that when we experience no signal demonstration of divine favor, nothing out of the common, no remarkable deliverance, no splendid success, no cheering tidings, no answer to an earnest prayer, long and vainly hoped for, directly we fall to moping and mumbling that we have nothing to be thankful

for. Nevertheless, "Where are the nine?" inquires Jesus. Why shall we not thank God for common mercies, for daily supplies from His storehouse, which because of their periodical occurrence fall round our feet unheeded and are classed as matters of course,—like the punctual and unfailing appointments of nature. "Where are the nine?"

Consider further that if there be deadlock, dislocation, disaster anywhere, if one's private affairs are not in a satisfactory condition, if business and money are out of joint, this is largely man's fault rather than God's ordinance. For the most part men pull down their troubles upon their own heads. They live unwisely, imprudently, recklessly. From time to time they run into a belt of storms and a low barometer; depressions, failures, bankruptcies come; but why? The land is full of coal, copper, iron, oil, and the gold and the silver sleep beneath the ground awaiting the miner; the cotton grows as luxuriant as ever. The corn, the wheat, the barley, the grass, the cereals nod and sway in the sunshine and the breeze. The cattle are fattening upon the prairies and skipping upon the hills. The sea is full of fish and the atmosphere of oxygen. The land is not poor; there is always plenty. Where then is

the trouble? The trouble, the sin, lies with the people.

We talk of hard times, bad times ; it is not the times that are bad, it is the men. The times would never be bad if it were not for those who make them what they are. It is human nature ; human instincts, impulses, interests ; it is human selfishness, extravagance, folly and fraud, that make most of the trouble. It is the human creature himself, with his lusts of all kinds, who makes the times good or bad, hard or easy. That large, vague, impersonal generality called society is the prime mover in all mundane changes. He makes the mischief, he creates the panics, he makes money tight or free, he gluts the market and anon raises prices, he produces more than the demand can consume, and suddenly the tide turns, the market ceases, the bubble bursts, his goods are on his hands and he is out of pocket ; the hard times did not suspend him,—he suspended himself. The world is running at a high velocity. The extension of mechanical industries, the range and power and complicity of machinery, the discoveries in chemistry, the utilizing of forces and agents not known fifty years ago, the wide outlook opened to enterprise and adventure, the multiplied inventions and implements, and the specialization of

work with a view to greater completeness and perfection—all these have conspired to stimulate speculation, activity, expenditure, so that many have rolled up quick and colossal fortunes, and the infection has spread and is spreading; people are grown impatient with small profits and minor transactions.

So we see now and then glittering and gorgeous bubbles, looking like pavilions of oriental wealth and splendor, floated down the stream, one bursting here, another yonder, and collapsing at different points. Some grand panacea or patent world-regenerator, or neat little design for making something out of nothing that had begotten high expectations, suddenly goes to pieces, because forsooth the times are bad. Oh, no! it is not the times; it is the silly people who do not count the cost, who do not pause to consider whether the game is worth the chase, who will be rich at all hazards and costs. If any profitable source of revenue opens up, or article of merchandise becomes suddenly lucrative, behold the multitude that rushes in, in numbers large enough to swamp it. Whatever the particular sensation or rage, be it the cultivation of a species of rose or a variety of peach or grape, or the prospectus of a gold mine or oil well, candidates

eager to exploit it multiply out of all proportion to their likelihood of success. In the last analysis it is the love of money, the hunger for gold, the eager pursuit of a purely economic prosperity, that throws the monetary machinery out of gear, and begets want of confidence, hesitation, timidity, stagnation.

Hence, when you hear that times are bad there is only one fit reply, only one prescription—make men better, and begin with yourself. You and I, and such as we are, make up society, the world, the times. They will not be permanently better until we improve. The economic laws are right. The mechanical forces are right. The chemical changes that proceed in plant and animal are conducted properly. The sun and moon attend punctually to their business and rise and set on time. All the natural uniformities hold on without defect. The ox knows his owner, the ass his master's crib. The inorganic kingdom and the vegetable and the animal worlds beneath our feet are all sworn to keep the peace. We cannot go to any of these and complain about the currency, the tariff, taxation, the shrinkage of values; poverty, pauperism, crime; they have no responsibility in the premises. We must knock at the gate of that large, indeterminate, anonymous body

called human society,—mankind,—and ask him why he has been pushing on so fast as to trample on moral laws ; why he is so extravagant and dissipated ; why he allows organized dishonesty to pile up municipal indebtedness ; why he allows alcoholic poison to circulate and run down like a river ; why he desecrates the Sabbath and forsakes the sanctuary ; why he has not more virtue, more moral courage, more economic prudence, more morality, more reverence, more of the fear of God.

I say you must go to selfish, covetous men, and ask them why they have practically abolished God and set up their own image instead, if you would discover the true rationale of the times. We talk about them often as if they were an objective reality, at war with our interests and checkmating our moves ; but this is mere rhetoric. The times, good or bad, are ourselves. They are what human passions make them. They are a mirror of sheer human nature ; of human ambition, greed, sensuality ; of the antagonisms, jealousies, and rivalries of mankind. So that if any one be disposed to say at any time that he cannot thank God because the days are evil and the times out of joint at bottom, this is only tantamount to saying that he is extremely sorry he and the rest are

such a shabby set of sinners ; so corrupt, slippery, unreliable, untrue.

Alas ! for our curses and complaints over the distributions of divine Providence ; the sorrows that afflict us are mostly the fruit of our own devices. Could we return to sound principles, abstinence, moderation, modest ambitions, frugality, honesty, hard work, slow and gradual accumulations, a robust, incorruptible virtue, a live conscience, moral obedience to divine laws ; then methinks every day would be a thanksgiving day. But as the case stands men are bitten with a rabies for large figures, large profits, fabulous transactions, ultra-enormous incomes. Since the fall of the Roman empire it is doubtful whether there has been such an age of frank, unblushing hedonism and materialism as this present in which we are living. The great peril of our time is not the saloon, nor is it the brothel ; it is covetousness, the lust for gold, for wealth and the primacy and power wealth gives, and the luxurious appetites and insatiable love of pleasure it gratifies. This is the dominant danger. It buys legislatures ; it is the father of corrupt politics and practices and of official jobbery ; it enriches the promoters of lucrative schemes at the expense of a confiding and helpless public ; it is at the bottom of pretty much

all the slippery sophistry and tricky shifts, the wire-pulling and whispering on the back-stairs side of politics, that is constantly going on, of which now and then only a hint and echo transpire above the decent surface of things.

Yea, verily, if the times are evil, the world out of joint, and the outlook sombre and gloomy, let us put the responsibility where it belongs. God is good, nature is beneficent, food plenty, the harvest abundant, plethoric; nothing has gone badly wrong but the human will, the human heart, human affections. Hence, I exhort you, give glory to God. He has done all that is possible to make us contented and happy; if we are not so, it is on account of our own perversity and blind blundering, or that of some one else. Thank God for personal and private blessings and for immunity from troubles that might easily have overtaken you; for the nameless, unnoticed circumstances of your lot not considered worth mentioning. Thank God that the conflict of ages between good and evil, light and darkness, is ever coming to a fresh eruption, and is still going on with favorable omens that the good shall one day overcome the evil. Thank God for the spread of Christian truth, and that you live in an age of tumultuous fermentation, of revolution and change that is

gradually casting up a way for the kingdom of God and of His Christ. Be thankful that you live not in a dreary mill-horse age, but in one when the world seems ripening, when great ideas, great expectations, great activities have taken possession of men, and no one is greatly surprised at anything that happens. For man is no longer looking back to the old Edens, to aromatic Egypt, and grim old Babylon and Persia, with their colossal winged bulls and mysterious sphinxes and flying dragons; those vanquished kingdoms and hoary civilizations of the Nile, the Tigris, and the Ganges; or to the now silent oracles of Jupiter Ammon and Apollo. We have transcended that point of view altogether.

The world is looking forward to fruitful discoveries, to fresh disclosures of truth, to a land of promise and of peace, of which the milk and honey and Eshcol clusters of Canaan were typical; to the realization of a more perfect equilibrium and order of society. True, things are not so far advanced as the best would like them; there is yet much to be desired, but a beginning has been made. Truth, right, justice, love, great aspirations and ideals have been planted in the world, and a type of divine manhood has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ that can never be

obliterated or forgotten. Shall we not then return with the Samaritan stranger and give glory to God? Shall we not be profoundly thankful for the regularity of the seasons, for the former and latter rain, for the bounty of the furrow, for household and family mercies, for personal preservations and deliverances? And lifting our eyes and looking abroad upon the harvest field of the world and the slow and painful evolution of man through the long travail of ages,—for man is the only growing and developing creature on earth,—shall we not thank God for the germination and gradual growth of His idea for our race, for His increasing purpose, more and more filling out its orb, for the progressive ripening of history, for the opening doors of Christian activity and usefulness, for the spread of the gospel? Go home then and be thankful. Think not upon what you have not got, but rather remember what you have. Face the future with trust and courage. Take your part in the mighty stir of our time; lend a willing hand to whatever has a scent of good and a savor of salvation in it. Serve your generation according to the will of God, and so make ready for the harvest of the world and the endless thanksgiving in heaven.

VIII

THE COMING TEMPLE

VIII

THE COMING TEMPLE

“ And I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”—REVELATION xxi : 22.

BETWEEN the death of Nero and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, the Apocalypse probably should be dated ; internal evidence locates it about 68 or 70 of the Christian era. It was a time of loud explosions ; on every breeze were wars and rumors of wars ; the horizon was black with storms and the ground shook under the shock of armies ; the Romans were closing round Jerusalem besides being engaged in conflict with the Parthians beyond the Euphrates ; uproar and disorder, loud crashes and sharp cries as of a tottering world were heard on every hand ; and these phenomena are reflected on the pages of John's Apocalypse. Men were in a high-strung and feverish condition, and especially the Christians of that age, for there can be little doubt that they lived in daily expectation of the second coming of Christ and the visible inauguration of His kingdom, which would put a

full stop to all the wild tumult and mighty tossings of the time, unwheel the chariots, break the iron mace of war, snap the bows and quiet the obstreperous blast of trumpets, and bring in Messiah's reign of righteousness and peace.

It is clear to any reader of the Apocalypse that the age in which it was written was a troubled, uproarious one; the staggering world seemed nodding toward downfall; lurid lights and awful glooms chased each other over the scene; and it seemed as if the barbaric splendor of mighty Rome would be quenched in blood and all noises soon hushed by the Prince of Peace: so, at least, thought the Christians. They themselves had passed through the fires of persecution, for mention is made of those who had suffered on account of their fidelity to the gospel. The first five Roman Emperors were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero: these, the seer says, had gone; and as matter of fact the young church had seen a martyr age under two or three of them. Nero committed suicide in A. D. 68. Vespasian took the purple in 69, and Jerusalem fell in 70. Evidently to the Christian soul it was a horrible time. The idolatrous homage to the emperors is broadly hinted in the phrase, "the worship of the beast and his image," and perhaps Nero is meant. John borrows

largely, to all appearance, from the colossal, cloudy imagery of the Book of Daniel in order to set forth the symptoms and movements of that stormy age. Yet it is not necessary to suppose that the Apocalypse was exhausted by the events and revolutions of that period, and that tracts of it may not yet await fulfillment in the evening time of the present world and in connection with the setting up of Christ's kingdom on earth. Prophecy is large and elastic, and susceptible of more than one application. We do not know how much of John's revelation is still unfulfilled. Time alone can declare that.

One feature of the composition, however, is plainly observable : that like all the Hebrew prophets, this one too is radiant with hope ; across the stormy sea of his century John sees light, an illimitable expanse of blue, the red hues of a glorious day that should ride the heavens for a thousand years. Judaism was a religion of hope ; all the prophets were hopeful, nay, confident ; they were sanguine optimists, sure that God would finish what He had begun, and would never leave the world like a cake not turned. John is of the same mind ; in this respect he is a thorough-bred Jew, and agrees heartily with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and all the rest. And in this connection, speaking of

the future and of a more perfect humanity, he mentions the absence of the Jerusalem temple, as if to point out a contrast between the apparatus of religious worship then in operation and a nobler worship, a higher, more stable order of things, which he clearly foresaw, in which there should be no slain beasts, no altar, no officiating priest, no ceremonial days, no temple with its portico and Gentile court and gate for proselytes. None of that externalism familiar to the Jewish mind would then be needed, for "the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple of it."

Clearly the language is prophecy. But whether the seer alludes to the heavenly world and sphere of angel and deity—that estate of spiritual perfection which we conceive as lying beyond time—or to a civilization one day to be set up on this planet during the predicted reign of universal righteousness, commonly called the millenium, is not clear. Both views have their advocates, and the only arbiter will be the fact when it arrives. Men cannot agree touching the obvious dogmatic teachings of the Bible; how much less concerning prophecy, which is by its nature vast and vaporous. The Hebrew prophets probably saw the developments of the future as one sees objects in a dream. They took no note

of time or order or exact sequence ; details were not marshaled with scrupulous care ; the ground was not staked off like a meadow or lot by stiff lines of demarcation ; the great features stood out in bold relief and clear as sunlight, but the rest lay in shadow, and the prophet did not see distinctly beyond the main interest and the cardinal facts. Hence the ambiguous, misty character of the prophetic Scriptures. Facts are set side by side and seen in immediate juxtaposition, which in point of time are separated by long intervals. Christ describes the siege and sack of Jerusalem and the end of the gospel dispensation among the Gentiles in the same breath, sliding out of the one into the other without premising that they were two totally distinct histories, divided by centuries, so that it has puzzled commentators to interpret him. This is a characteristic of prophecy. It is not a sun-picture or photograph, hitting off the exact expression, the brow, the lip, the nostril, the dimple on the cheek ; it is rather a sketch in crayon, a rough draft, in which things are indicated by a daub here and a dash there ; by heavy or light shading as the case may be.

Such being the genius of prophecy, it is not easy to exhaust it or tie it down to any one intention. For the idea of it is not to write history before-

hand, but rather to show the broad drift and trend of the world, the trunk-lines along which it moves and the chief terminals and landings to which mankind in their journeyings shall come. This end has been sufficiently answered. The old barbaric kingdoms, with their Tyrian purple, their colossal bulls done in brass, their pyramids, their ivory palaces, their silken pavilions and scepters of gold, have sunk below the horizon, as it was foreseen they would. Jacob, Balaam, Moses, Isaiah, Amos, and other divinely sagacious men perceived dimly that more was to break forth out of God's providence than their eyes had seen. They beheld new stars climbing the sky; they saw stones starting from the mountain side and rolling through the earth, accumulating volume and momentum and crushing the effete things which they struck; they saw gleaming scepters arising out of obscure tribes, and universal dominion passing from the Tigris and the Nile to unborn nations; they saw barbarous peoples holding forth imploring hands for a teaching Levite and for a new law; beyond the bow and spear and battle they saw that in the evening time of the world there would be light and peace. They beheld a greater prophet than any who had visited them, an invincible captain, a universal

king, a finer race, and a better society settled on more stable foundations. Those old Hebrew seers threw out their jagged, disjointed sentences and strong, impassioned words at the finalities of human history. They probably did not see all the niceties and *nuances* of the situation, but seized with sure forecast the essential items and practical ultimates. They give the net result. They say that the sun will set clear, stormy as the long day may have been. They deal in final destinies and eventual settlements. The Bible is full of this prophetic element. It abounds in the Old Testament. It carried the ethical element in Judaism, insisting upon the spirituality of religion as distinguished from ceremonialism. It was thus a bright candle in a dark, weltering world, raying forth comfort and hope. Moreover, the New Testament is full of prophecy. The miracles of Jesus are prophecies, His words are largely prophetic, even when primarily intended for the purpose of instruction; His resurrection from among the dead is the most significant, stupendous prophecy of all time.

The apostles also take up the same strain and flash light upon the undiscovered future. Listen to John, how his imagination wings away into a coming future. He beholds splen-

did cities, he hears the thunder of mighty orchestras, he sees streets paved with gold, a new social order, a new civic life, a new worship, a new civilization rising out of the decay of old fixtures. When, where, how, is not distinctly stated; only this much,—he sees that the radical, universal change is to have human nature as its material and basis; living either here on a renovated earth, or in another sphere, or perhaps in both.

Among other characteristics of the new order he declares there shall be no temple there. Let down in vision amid that strange scenery and all its furniture and appliances, he looked round to ascertain through what methods and institutions the new life of man would express itself. Was it to be like the old Jerusalem, Rome, or Babylon, or any of the old-world capitals,—of solid masonry and a maze of buildings? And the one thing that struck him most forcibly was this, that he found no Solomon's or Herod's temple, no Aaronite priest, no ephod, no miter, no processions, no curling incense there. What does this signify? What but this, that the era is coming in the education of man when the soul will be ripe for a fuller, more voluminous revelation of God, and of the truths which concern Him;

and when, by consequence, the current modes of conception, of statement, of formal expression and of consecrated usage will fall away as inadequate or superfluous, because the moral reason of man shall have come closer to reality and be readier to apprehend it.

I remark in view of this prophecy that the arrangements of this present world are only relatively good and are not designed to be permanent. Whatever they be,—either secular or sacred,—they stand related to man's present faculties and needs as these now exist, not as they may be modified hereafter. Human life on this planet is not a stable fixture, an absolute, abiding thing. It is a running stream winding through successive landscapes and latitudes of opinion and custom. Incessant and insensible changes are evermore set up. The instrument, method, statement which suits one period will undergo alteration later, and possibly be replaced later still by something that better satisfies the hunger that is in the air and the evils that cry for a remedy.

Hence come all the experiments of history,—its revolutions, colonizations, battles, literatures, inventions. They testify to the restlessness of the human spirit and to the growing mind of

man, that the human mind is not a sponge, a clam, a moss on the rock, a sluggish thing of low organization and vitality, but active, dynamic, progressive. All the changes that take place in human society are a reflex of changes in the sphere of mind and of the steady flux of human thought. So true is this that the men and achievements of other times which we pronounce memorable and heroic would probably have been impracticable and abortive had they been attempted earlier, and would be impossible in our own contemporary age. Luther, Calvin, Hildebrand, Thomas of Aquina, Loyola, Peter the hermit, were fortunate in the time of day at which they lived, and probably could not make so deep a mark upon the popular imagination now; the impulse they gave to the world has carried it far beyond their reach. They are great and potent where they stand and in relation to the issues of their times. But set them down in the Broadways and crowded marts of the world as it now is, and it would directly appear that there has been a silent drift since their date; the temper of civilized man has changed; the conditions of society are different; standards of judgment, canons of taste, and topics of human thought have all shifted. Men are now asking other questions and seeking a

solution for other problems than such as agitated earlier ages. This cannot be helped,—it is the nature of mind ; there is nothing absolutely fixed. If the idea or truth remain essentially intact, the mold is shattered ; it is put into other words, illustrated by new information, argued upon different grounds.

Thus, if the name of monarchy is preserved, it becomes constitutional monarchy—that is, parliamentary government—government by discussion. If the ideas of God, eternity, retribution, heaven and hell abide, they pass, perhaps, out of gross, material imagery into more refined, idealized modes of representation. If the idea of human fellowship springs up, it transcends after a while the boundaries of the tribe or clan, and embraces a nation, later the earth ; becomes more and more altruistic, setting up commerce and growing catholic and humanitarian. These expansions and contractions are constantly going forward. An age of metaphysics and scholastic theology makes way for one of maritime discovery. A century of moral ideas and of religious wars and social reforms is followed by a dreary, mill-horse age of dull work, of money-getting and physical comfort. The ultimate secret,—why history unfolds in its observed order,—is beyond

our analysis. Only this seems clear, that nothing is fixed save the mind and its capacities and cravings.

John gives voice to this great fact of the advance of man from stage to stage, when, speaking of some future era, he says that there was no temple there. And if one could imagine himself a literal Methuselah, living a thousand years, a contemporary of ages, he would have occasion to observe how true that is, and by what insensible steps the race of man has passed through successive phases of organization and experience. As he walked down past the world with its crowded centuries and histories, an exclamation of surprise would escape him now and then upon failing to find what he conceived to be deeply radicated and permanent. He would see venerable institutions passing under the hammer; doctrines, usages, laws, industrial systems, philosophies of life and of the universe all showing signs of decrepitude, things apparently made of rock, iron and adamant, and rooted as the everlasting hills, dissolving in a thaw and passing away in vapor. Standing in the midst of one century he would say, "I saw a universal empire bidding fair to flourish down to the last syllable of time; but a little later I looked, and lo! the nations

were casting lots for its vesture and dividing the spoils." Standing amid another century, he would say, "I saw a universal church, a supreme pontiff, one Christian commonwealth, and I thought that Hildebrand and Innocent would hold undisputed power till the end of time; but I looked again, and the tiara was tarnished, the peoples had revolted, the Reformation had come." Standing amid another century, his word would be, "I saw absolutism, irresponsible personal government in full flower, in the person of a Charles or a Louis; but I looked again, and what a ferment; the air was electric, the earth shook, the rain descended and the floods came and beat upon the lofty towers of pride, and a cry went up, Babylon the great is fallen!" The Democracy had come.

Let some Methuselah travel down the centuries and watch their changes, the exits and the entrances, and surely every little while he would exclaim, "I saw no temple"; "I saw the new constantly transcending the old"; "I saw that all things were in motion and that passing away was written upon the world and its contents"; "I saw human thought poured from vessel to vessel and human nature taking on different vestures." It seems to be the fact that thus far man has attained

unto nothing which is more than relatively good and serviceable. The world is like an old garret, filled with belated furniture, hair trunks, ancient andirons, grotesque bonnets and fans, wheezy clocks, faded pictures and screens, chordless harps, outlandish apparel, forgotten literatures, dusty antiquities, and discarded rubbish. How much has been left behind! how much spoiled wheat and cumbrous baggage has been thrown overboard on the long voyage! how much has served its day and fallen asleep! how much once indispensable has been shelved and is gathering green-mold! "I saw no temple therein."

What a tremendous truth it is! The things that are seen are temporal. The great world has its sunsets as well as the solar day, and there have already been many of them. It has its seasons like the year, its budding spring times and its gorgeous autumns. It has its tides like the sea, high-water mark and low-water mark. It has its phases like the moon, now full, now sickle-shaped, now gibbous. It changes with man. It bespeaks his character. It betrays his bias. All its processes reflect his preference. Whatever disappears does so because, on the whole, man does not like it. Whatever arrives comes to answer some human call. If anything drops out, it is not sorely

needed; its power has waned, its necessity is no longer apparent, or it can be re-fashioned to suit the new exigency; the wine can be poured into new and stouter skins that can bear the ferment and tension better.

But John's vision has another aspect and application. As already stated, it aptly describes the collective experience of the race thus far migrating perpetually out of one civilization and social order into a succeeding; but there is more in it than that, for it seems to teach that the soul of man is destined to come into nearer relation to the living God, the Supreme Reality. This expectation and high destiny are expressed under a figure, "no temple,"—that is to say, that man's knowledge of God and of the universe is on the way to more subtle refinements and a clearer definition. It is practically the same idea that burst upon Paul. "Now we see in a mirror, darkly; then face to face. Now I know in part." A magnificent prospect it is, that the infinite God and the moral problems of this unintelligible world and of existence as a whole, shall take on new shapes, divulge new meanings. Man at present is densely ignorant touching the highest topics of human thought, including his own possibilities. He apprehends all religious truth through the medium

of crude, inadequate definitions and material symbols. The supreme realities loom upon us big, vague, dim, as through a thick fog; we catch a glimpse of them, but do not see them as they are. Relative to the ideas of God, of spiritual perfection and of eternal life, man is an Eskimo, dwelling among icebergs and polar cold and the twilight air of a frozen zone; but according to Christian prophecy he is yet to dwell near the equator, in a tropical, aromatic, soft summer land and under the vertical splendor of divine truths; he is to revolve in a larger orbit and nearer the throne of God. If so, it would seem to follow that while the Bible, the church, the frame and constitution of nature, the course of Providence, all the appointments of this present state, are unquestionably commensurate with the requirements of man as he now stands; yet a crisis is coming, an epoch will dawn, when this may not be quite so true, because he shall be furnished with a more powerful organism, with a more sensitive nerve, with finer fiber and a larger cerebral capacity so to speak, and more rapid and intuitive perceptions and greater receptivity, and by reason of this his increased volume of being shall be able to receive and use what is now incomprehensible.

“I saw no temple therein.” Why not? Probably

because there was no longer need for one; I can think of no better reason. It appears to be a prophecy of the yet undeveloped and potential life of man's soul, under some future, inconceivable conditions which await him, when God shall make himself more audible and articulate than now, at least to those who wait for Him. John's predictive vision, then, seems to foreshadow a radical change in those forms and statements in which religious ideas are now couched—no temple. Doubtless many of the old battle-grimed banners will be lowered, many tattered flags will be furled, many old war-drums will cease to throb, many watch-words and shibboleths will fall empty and meaningless, many vestments, rituals, pompous sacerdotalisms, and considerable dogmatic theology, mayhap, will shrivel up and go to pieces in that day when the Lord God Almighty shall become the temple of a redeemed race. Much that now carries the air of supreme importance may then take a secondary rank; "the last shall be first, and the first last." And to this dogma and to that form or ceremony it may be said, "Friend, go up higher," or "Friend, give this man place."

Indeed, it is impossible to gauge the dimensions and range of this enigmatic sentence, "I saw no temple therein." If Columbus' discovery of Amer-

ica and the exploits of the fifteenth century navigators revolutionized geography; if the discovery of the circulation of the blood made an epoch in medicine; if the discovery of planetary motion altered the position of the earth among the family of worlds; if steam and the electric wire annihilate space and time; if these minor revelations, like a sunrise, have wakened mankind to new views and interpretations, how much more that high day when God shall manifest Himself and open His universe more freely to man; when there shall be no need of a temple or of the symbolism, metaphor, and apparatus by means of which eternal things are now mediated. And if any one ask, "Shall not my favorite theology hold good? Will there be no Bible, no church, no altar, no song, no sacrament in that holy empire of restored humanity, whenever and wherever it may arise?" Possibly; but if so, not what befits this present scene, and man at his present stage of knowledge and hampered by his stringent limitations. "I saw no temple therein," says the rapt seer of the Apocalypse. It must mean something, and what else can it mean than this, that a vast organic change is yet to pass upon human nature, rendering obsolete and antiquated much that is now indispensable and useful.

Verily this is one of the spacious and splendid prophecies of the gospel that man is destined to know more about God, about the true, the beautiful, and the good, about the mysterious universe, that he is marching toward,—a larger and finer brain, a more cunning hand, a purer heart, and a concord of more harmonious faculties. He is like a mariner on a tedious voyage; the stale biscuits will answer until he has cast anchor and gone ashore to eat the mellow fruits of the land.

Something like this seems to be the teaching of John's vision,—that, as the final outcome of present arrangements and after they have done their work, there will be a revelation of God to man, compared to which this earthly life is a dream, a twilight. A personal and living Providence will then no longer be called a great Perhaps, and the immortality of the soul will have become an axiom, the power and essential superiority of spirit will become manifest, rapid intuitions will take the place of tardy logic, probability will ripen into proof, and great truths, now disputed and doubtful, will have become as sure as sensation. Prayer, it may be, will take different expression, praise will be different, worship, adoration, will migrate into other forms, all religious exercises may pass into another phase and take on another

tone and complexion when God and the Lamb are become the temple of the ransomed race. When, where, how, on this material globe, or in some other firmament of immensity,—these particulars are not given. It is prophecy—dim, glimmering, inorganic, shapeless, afloat in vacancy, steeped in silence, fringed with splendor.

The Bible from Genesis to the Apocalypse rumbles all through with some unspeakable, tremendous, far-off event; it is like a promissory note that has not yet matured; it is like a fruit tree in springtime, full of eyes, swelling buds and opening blossoms, all ripening toward autumn. Here and yonder it flings up a Nebo, a Hermon—a beetling crag or high headland, from which one may look out and away toward the sunset of time as we know it; when man will be ripe and ready for an unveiling of the Godhead and for a breaking of secrets that had not previously been possible, and the symbol will give place to reality.

If this be at all a correct rendering, what a mere nursery filled with the clack and cries of nurses and children is the Christian church, compared to the adult, spiritual and future state of redeemed men! Christian doctrine, too, say the best of it, how inadequate and unsatisfactory, how many ravelled edges! Surely our creeds must be but

angles of the truth, fractional parts, bearing the same relation to unseen reals that the debtor's fifty or sixty cents on the dollar bears to what he actually owes. All we can do yet a while is to take the likeliest materials at hand, and frame the most logical, coherent, moral, and satisfying conception of God and His requirements of which we are capable. Use what you have; believe the gospel delivered to you; take to heart its great promise and prophecy and live by it; this is the time for faith, for patience, for watching. We know enough to answer the present distress. God may not utter any more truth concerning Himself yet a while. Go live by what is revealed in Jesus Christ; it is more than enough. He has power to forgive and to sanctify souls; He is the way of life; do His commandments, live in His spirit, trust in His powerful blood. Forms, creeds, rituals come and go; no human theology can adequately translate eternal things; no form of worship, whether highly ornate and ceremonial or of the simple, silent sort, can lead one into the Holy of holies; but we can do the will of God, we can hope in His mercy, we can work righteousness, we can act upon our best impulses, we can make articles of faith and forms of worship crutches to lead to a higher landing and to immense horizons; we

can believe, obey, and glorify God. We can name the name of Christ and become His disciples. This is enough now; this is all that is possible now.

All life is progress from lower to higher, from accident to essence, from symbol to reality. As man moves forward, this and that drops away, superfluties are discarded, and substantial values are kept. "I saw no temple therein"; "They need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light." It is the same truth in a different phrase. Life is in its best sense an everlasting progress and ascension, along the course of which this and that falls aside outworn, preposterous, puerile, as the soul waxes in power and reaches a higher altitude and draws nigh unto God. Meantime we need the sun and the moon and the temple. Systems and creeds, forms and ceremonies,—these are fixtures of the present time; use them for what they are worth, get all the good out of them they contain, and grow in grace.

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