One Generation to Another

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To Harris, Louise and Helen,
Three Delightful Children.

Preface

WITHOUT faith in Jesus Christ, the reading of the Old Testament is most depressing; for it becomes a book without a purpose, and a history without a consummation. What happens to the story without faith in Jesus, the Jews have told us in the frigid legalism of the Pharisee or the artificial writings of apocalyptic dreamers.

But if read as a part of the revelation of Jesus Christ it becomes one of the most fascinating books in the world. Is it hazardous to say that from this point of view it is more interesting than the New Testament? In the one we seem to be in a church, silenced by the awful sense of the Divine Presence; but in the other we are out under the stars, in vast open spaces, and with people of like passions with ourselves. It is the book *par excellence* of the spiritual imagination, the playground of the enfranchised soul. At least I have always found it so, and offer these studies as modest examples of its unfailing and appealing attraction.

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H. E. K.

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PART I

THE MAKING OF A GREAT TRADITION

I

RELIGION IN TWO WORLDS

"Jacob went his way, and the angels of God met him."
—GENESIS 32: 1.

JACOB'S story is easily remembered for two reasons. In the first place his life had been split in two by a great experience. Like Paul, and Augustine and Luther, his career was a contrast between before and after. The Jabbok experience was the outstanding epoch of his life. In the second place the critical phases are associated with places: with Bethel, Haran, the Jabbok, Shechem and Bethel again. Follow him around this circle and you get to know him thoroughly.

Jacob's story is an example of the Divine re-making of a self-made man. As is usual with such men, his greatest misfortunes came from early successes. His first venture was his bargain with Esau. That transaction revealed two extraordinary capacities. In the first place it taught Jacob that he actually believed in a spiritual and intangible world. He wanted the birthright because it was a symbol of power in a spiritual domain. He was willing to make sacrifices to obtain it because it assured him compensations in the future. In the second place the ease with which he obtained it revealed his power over men. He enjoyed playing with Esau; and why should he not? That is what Esaus are for. The discovery of these capacities, so early in his

career, led to a struggle from which he was not released until he was an old and broken man. The conflict was manifest from the beginning. Jacob was not one of those who take up an adventure on impulse, and abandon it so soon as it becomes difficult; but once to have chosen his objectives he would press towards them with a relentless enthusiasm which nothing could alter. This resolute man never let go of an enterprise, until he obtained what he wanted.

Of course he had to leave home, and his mother sent him on a vacation into Haran, and on his way he had his first Bethel experience. There is something paradoxical about this. Here is a man who should have been very much ashamed of himself; at least it would have been becoming to have suffered from insomnia, but instead of worrying about his sins, he falls asleep like an innocent child and dreams of angels! The reason is that he was young; and the young can pass from one stage of experience to another without a sense of contradiction. It is only after maturity that men find it impossible. Jacob's dream indicates that in spite of his misdeeds the spiritual aspect of his character was still in the ascendant. His shameful deception of Esau was incidental.

His stay in Haran, at first intended to be brief, lengthened out into a period of twenty years; during which he showed himself patient, industrious, and obedient. Disappointment did not depress him, even when he had to wait fourteen years for the woman that he loved. He was successful from the outset; everything he touched turned into money. He began to get rich, and as his fortune grew, the master passion to control this world became dominant. He did not abandon his spiritual ambitions, but deferred their realisation to

a more convenient season. First he proposes to accumulate a competence, and then, richly laden with this world's goods, he will return to the old land and take up the rôle of religious leader. As his wealth increased he came to love it, not for its own sake, but as the symbol of power. He devised all kinds of arts and wiles for adding to his income; and appears to have had no misgivings whatever about his future. Take him, all in all, he was a resourceful man with the acquisitive faculty strongly developed.

At this point a bit of humour comes into the story. Jacob made a great impression on his father-in-law. Laban was an Old Testament By-Ends. He did not care for religion himself, but he liked to have a religious man in his family. When Jacob expressed a wish to return home, Laban remonstrated after this fashion: "Tarry with me, yet awhile, for I have learned from experience that God blesses everyone who has any dealings with you." Curiously enough, Laban shrewdly suspected that Jacob was systematically defrauding him, but for the life of him he could find nothing tangible upon which to base a complaint. When, however, after a particularly mendacious transaction, Jacob set out on his return, Laban discovered the trick and pursued him, saying, "I have got him now, and I propose to make him rue it." But Jacob greeted him with such protestations of injured innocence that the old fellow was made to feel that he had done something highly indelicate, and after a profuse apology sent him away with his blessing: "May the Lord watch between thee and me when we are absent one from the other."

Had Jacob lived in our day he would have been a pragmatist, because the pragmatist believes that the

true is the useful. If a lie, for instance, is useful, that is, useful to you, then it is all right. If you are a philosopher there is no harm in it at all, but if you have no philosophy then, of course, you are just an ordinary liar and sinner. Jacob was a pragmatist and Laban soon realised that he was no match for a philosopher. Jacob is the kind of man we get to know in modern business. Had he lived in our day he would have been a captain of industry, a trust magnate; active, if he chose, in politics, but always and everywhere successful.

His homecoming fitted in with the insurgent demands of his spiritual ambitions. He had reached the place where his problem was not how to make money, but how to use it to the best advantage. Other interests demanded attention, chiefly the one which although long deferred, had never been forgotten. I mean his spiritual ambitions. He is returning to the old land to assume the rôle of religious leader; he is going to realise on his first investment and gain control of the spiritual inheritance. He is returning not as a prodigal ready to make compensation for his wrong doing, to do what he can to adjust his differences with Esau. Having the assurance and arrogance of the self-made man, he betrays no misgivings whatsoever. And this is the way he reasons: "Managing birthrights, and controlling spiritual movements are precisely the same as growing flocks and herds. It ought to be as easy to realise on the spiritual investment, as it has been to manipulate such small people as Esau and Laban." Worldly success had demonstrated the value of certain principles of action; why then should they not be as useful in one sphere as in another? This is a very popular view today. There are many successful men who imagine that because they can make a tin pan

better than their neighbours, they are quite capable of directing a church. Such men as a rule are self-made, half-educated and profoundly ignorant of the problems they seek to solve. We know that these modern Jacobs are mistaken, but we also know that it will take something more than human to make them realise it.

This was Jacob's state of mind. He sees no contradiction between the spiritual estate he now proposes to manage, and the principles and moral compromises that have led to his success. He is prepared to give liberally, shall we say to the causes of religion, but not one penny for restitution. He will not confess that he has wronged his brother. He does not propose to tolerate any criticism of his business methods, or admit any want of capacity for spiritual leadership. If conscience should trouble him, he could silence it by saying: " Mv present successes have cancelled past obligations."

This immense self-satisfaction enabled him to greet without surprise the escort of angels who met him on the way. Why should not such a man be welcomed by a heavenly reception committee? He did not learn until later that the angels had been sent to bring him to the judgment seat of God.

We are here on familiar ground. I recently came upon a book entitled: *A Memorandum of the Conduct of Universities by Business Men,* and I could wish that someone would write another entitled *A Memorandum of the Conduct of Churches by Business Men.* For the greatest single asset of and most formidable hindrance to the organised Church today is the influence of business men of the Jacob type on the conduct of religious enterprises. These self-made, arrogant, half-educated, successful men who imagine that the only methods needed for the direction of the spiritual estate are those

proved profitable in the world of business are doing more than any other influence to retard the progress of religion in these times. They are Jacobs who have had the misfortune to escape a Jabbok experience. Jacob is returning to assume the rôle of religious director. He is going to reorganise the Church, to put religion on the map, or to borrow the slogan of ecclesiastical Babbitts to show the ministers how to "sell religion." He is going to do many up-to-date things in the land; branch out socially, enter politics, reform morals, adjust differences between God's people and their heathen neighbours, and generally show everyone how to be successful on strictly modern lines. And had he lived in our day he would have been surrounded with an everlasting clatter of typewriters, filing cabinets, dictaphones, adding-machines and all the rest of the mind-distracting devices of modern business.

God needs this man, has always needed him. His experience is valuable, not only for what it may become, but just now as a shining example of "how not to do it." But before Jacob can be of any use he must be smashed to bits and remoulded on an entirely different scale. The average man, however, can do nothing with him. You cannot control him by organisation because he can beat you at it. You cannot argue with him because he is impervious to reason. You cannot frighten him with spiritual reality because he knows nothing about it; neither can you advise him because he will not stand still long enough to know what you are about. The only thing to do is to hand him over to the strong arm of Providence. The angels were there to see to that, and it is to be regretted that they do not visit us oftener; for the modern Church is full of men who need this sort of discipline. Still, most of them get it in

some fashion before they are well out of the "Roaring Forties."

Go into any gathering of middle-aged business men, for choice a luncheon club, and what do you see? There they are, fat, baldheaded, prosperous and discontented; exploited by clever phrase makers, holding their slender stock of worldly wisdom in pre-digested slogans or what they have of religious belief in shop-worn shibboleths; puzzled as to their terminal facilities and yet vaguely wondering what has happened to their program of life. These men have great capacities, are potentially on the side of religion, but until their intellectual outlook is altered by some serious form of spiritual discipline they are apt to hinder rather than to help the churches they support. What they should pray for is a Jabbok experience.

Jacob reaches the Jabbok, which formed a critical stage in his life. The Jabbok was an insignificant little brook; its importance lay in the fact that it was the border line of the Holy Land. He was at the very threshold of his religious career, the stage of his later adventures and exploits. And as soon as he reached this line this was his thought, "What are the forces prepared to dispute with me the carrying out of my mission?" They were all reduced to one—Esau. Esau had been over there for twenty years, growing in a fashion as Jacob had grown. He had probably been nourishing his grudge. What about Esau and his disposition? Was he going to dispute his entrance into the land? If so, how could he make him his friend, or, at any rate, how could he render him harmless? He sent scouts to view the land, and they came back with terror-stricken faces with the news, "We saw Esau out there with four hundred men." Four hundred men

meant clubs and bludgeons and broken heads, and that was something Jacob did not want to be mixed up in.

Now see what Jacob did. He prayed. The man had a gift at prayer. And that prayer of Jacob is one of the greatest bargaining arguments in the Bible. He reminds the Almighty of the women and the children, the little babies. He does not say, "O Lord, I am responsible for exposing these women and children and babies to this man's anger"; but reminds the Lord that He must especially remember that there are children and women and babies in that crowd, and therefore He must take care of them, and poor humble Jacob, who is just nothing but a worm, you know. But all the time the man's mind is not so much on what God is going to do as what he himself is going to do with Esau.

Then comes his idea. He divides his group into two bands, saying, "If they get hold of one, the other will escape." Then he sat down and reasoned thus—and this is the way the strong man enjoys manipulating small personalities:—"Small men like Esau are susceptible to two very powerful temptations: they are vain and they are avaricious. Appeal to a little man's vanity and avarice, and in most cases you can do anything you want with him"; which is perfectly true. So what does he do? He picks out of his flocks and herds the choicest types of every animal he has. He divides them up into a number of bands. Here they are, fat and sleek and well fed; highly favoured and most appealing, they must have been. He puts at the head of each a group of men, and says, "String yourselves out along the road; keep a sufficient distance between each group so that only one can be seen at a time." At the head of each he places ambassadors, who will come into the

presence of Esau, and when Esau says with an exclamation of surprise, "What does all this mean?" they are to say, "These are for my lord Esau from his servant Jacob, who is coming along just behind."

Imagine the scene. Here is Esau with his band of four hundred men. He has been nourishing a grudge against Jacob for twenty years; he is just as poor, tattered and hungry as ever. He has not got along at all. It is the same old shiftless Esau. And there come up over the brow of the hill the droves of cattle. Esau has never seen anything like that in his flocks and herds. He has never had as many cattle in all his life. And he asks, "Where in the world do you come from?" And they reply, "It is for my lord Esau, from his servant Jacob, who is just behind." And before he can get over the surprise of that, another drove comes over the hill, then another and still another. Well, it was not in that sort of human nature to resist such an attack.

Jacob never took the trouble to inquire how the thing was going to work. He knew it would work absolutely. So what does he do? The first thing as the shadows lengthen into the night, is to send his women and children across the Jabbok into the disputed territory. Then he sits down beside the brook: the night comes and the stars and the mystic charm of the dumb yet speaking silence that only the desert knows. He sits there and enjoys the fruits of victory before the battle is fought.

You know the story, that is, the Divine side; but every Divine story has a human side. If God had struggled with Esau until the end of time, Esau never would have known what it meant. He would have mistaken God for a ghost. But Jacob was a different per-

sonality. There was a subtle change taking place in the man's conception of life, even while he sat trying to enjoy his victory; because of that, he saw what God meant in the struggle.

The first thing that happens is this: He had the experience that Isaiah mentions in a beautiful but unfamiliar verse, "The twilight that I desired hath been turned into trembling unto me." There was an Oriental, who looked forward through the heat and burden of the day to the twilight hour, when he could go to the roof of his house and sit in the deepening shadows and be alone and meditate, as we say, the pleasant thoughts. He desired the twilight hour, yet when the hour came it was turned into trembling unto him, because the thoughts were of an unpleasant character. Now that is what happened to Jacob. I can imagine him sitting there watching the stars wheeling in their courses, and thinking of great schemes, and how he was going to grasp this higher and this better thing he had been dreaming of for twenty years, and what it was going to mean to his family; thinking of his social position, the satisfaction of his religious aspirations, the realisation of his earthly ambition. And then gradually there began to bite into his soul the malady of critical self-reflection; and he was overcome, for the first time, by a nameless dread of existence. He found himself unsure. He began to doubt his conception of life. He reasoned: "I have flocks and herds and earthly position, but after all is this the prize of life? These things have no permanence; they are but parts of the phantasmagoria of the world, the changing and shifting scenery of the external; they have no significance for my inner life. Perhaps, after all, with my scheming and bargaining I have missed the big thing."

And then he began to feel self-accusation. He began to feel that somehow or other his whole past was crooked, and that his success was the visible symbol of godlessness, his own unfitness to live.

You cannot always say to the soul what the fool in the parable said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease." And so it was with Jacob. He could not be content with that feeling. His soul could not eat flocks and herds; it wanted something else. He did not know what, but as he thought of it he began to feel the emptiness and bitterness of success; and then came self-accusation, the strange inaptitude of this hitherto competent nature. But he said to himself: "This is morbid; this is folly. I will shake it off."

You can see him rising, girding up his loins, grasping his staff, and plunging into the brook. Then down out of the shadow land above him came the great arm of the unseen guardian of the land, and there you see him struggling and fighting. If he had been weak he would have quit right there, but he struggled and struggled until the dawn; and then there broke into his consciousness a feeling that "This is God. This is the meaning of the birthright. Who would have thought it? That thing I cheated Esau out of. This thing that grips and punches and crushes and breaks and disappoints and shakes me all to bits, this thing is God that has hold of me. Oh, oh! Life, how bitter thou art! How disappointing thou art! Thou art to me a deception and a snare! The birthright! And those angels, those angels that I thought were taking me to my throne, were leading me to the judgment seat of God. What a life it is!"

Then came the feeling: "I will see this thing through to the bitter end. If this is God, I will find out Who

He is, what He is, and I will know it to the depths of its meaning." And he said: "I will not let thee go until thou dost tell me thy name. What is thy nature? What is the nature of my life in relation to thine? 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.'"

It is an unusual lack of insight, I think, to regard that as an illustration of prayer. It is not prayer at all. It is something intensely elementary. It is one of those great struggles of a strong, first-class nature to get at the secret of existence. He would go to the bottom of the thing, and he knew that he could not do it without loss. And when he found himself, having learned the secret by name, falling out of the arms of his antagonist, his thigh was broken, and he was a maimed man for the rest of his life.

Now stand for a moment with his family. They had been out all night; and the women had had trying thoughts. They did not know what would happen. "Where is Jacob? Where is the master?" said the servants. And they look down the road, and see this prematurely old man. His beard is splotched with slime; his garments are dirty and trailing in the dust; his staff is broken, and the man is dragging his leg as if it were paralysed. Can this be Jacob?

How I have wished for a Jabbok experience for the splendid, successful men who are running our churches; only unhappily they travel now by airplane over the Jabbok, and ofttimes miss the guardian of the land.

How did this thing influence Jacob's subsequent life? One would think that a man who had had an experience like that would never have any more struggles, but would go on from glory to glory and from star to star. But that is not the way life works at all. A vision of God never does away with the necessity of struggle to

realise it. And Jacob's experience was the beginning of a series of struggles more intense, and in some respects more disappointing, than anything he had ever had in his life.

Jacob said, "I am going to Bethel." And as he said it he heard God saying the same thing. Now what did he mean by that? It is this: He wanted to visit the haunts of early vision. He wanted to begin his new life in the place where he had first known its sanctities. Cowper confesses this natural longing:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

He started for Bethel, but as he went through Shechem its fertile fields aroused his businesslike capacity, and he said: "Look at these fields. Was there ever anything like this in Haran? How the sheep will grow out here! We need not be in such a great hurry to get to Bethel. We have plenty of time. We will just stop here awhile and graze our flocks and herds." There you are. The influence of a lifetime habit cannot be suspended by a single religious experience. God does not treat us in that easy way. Now you see the old bargaining Jacob coming to the front temporarily. Jabbok dropped into the background again. They settled down, grazed their herds; and of course they were successful. But there were other things in Shechem and that vicinity that were quite different from anything Jacob had met with. His children were getting to the years where they begin to be interested in the world, and the world begins to take part in their education. And Dinah had a disastrous social experience that involved Jacob in a

broken heart and in a bitter struggle with the inhabitants of the land.

That is one of the bitterest things in modern life. When I see successful men moving heaven and earth to make money, and putting further off into the future their religious responsibility, allowing family worship and private prayer to go out of their homes, and even letting the blessing go; and these handsome, delicately nurtured women moving heaven and earth to give their daughters a social career, and thinking more of that than of their souls' salvation, dwelling in Shechem in the tents of wickedness, and all the time saying, "Some of these days we are going to Bethel," I cannot help thinking of this bitter truth of life. It is easy to give our vices to our children; we rarely give them our virtues, and we never give them our visions. What did Dinah know about Jabbok, that midnight struggle? Not a thing. And the inexperienced girl got into terrible trouble in Shechem. It led to war and murder and blood and lust.

Then Jacob said: "Now look here, Rachel, I am going to Bethel by the straightest road. Let us take an inventory of our possessions and see if we cannot lighten our baggage, get rid of a lot of useless impedimenta and take up our pilgrim life." And the first thing he discovered was that he had strange gods in his baggage. Those strange gods got over the Jabbok, they got by the vision. There were bags of strange gods, and Jacob did not know it until he made up his mind to go to Bethel, and it had to be the ruin of a daughter to make him realise it.

Jacob said: "We will get rid of these strange gods. We will get back to the law and the testimony. We will put our feet on the unshakable certainties we know

to be true." Then he said: "Put on clean garments. They are the symbols of our changed life." Some of us do not resemble pilgrims. No man ever went in a parlour car to Bethel, never. There is only one way to go, and that is usually on foot, sometimes on your knees. But he was going to Bethel.

I wonder if Jacob was disappointed with his Bethel. We usually are because while we can restore old relations we can never repeat old emotions. This was vividly impressed on my mind by a visit to the scene of my boyhood in the south. I had been taken to an old plantation; and among the slave quarters, still standing, had been built a children's play house. The chief support of the building was a railroad spike driven into the logs. Upon my return after thirty-five years I wandered over into the old slave quarters. The roof had fallen in, while weeds and grass were growing through the rotting floor. The old faces were gone these many years, but the railroad spike was still there in the log walls. As I looked at it the playhouse of my boyhood seemed to grow out of the walls. I saw the young faces and heard the happy voices again. The old relations were restored, but I could not repeat the old emotions. They were gone for ever.

We come to our Bethels, the dear places where first we knew life's sanctities; sometimes finding God's message in the tears and misfortunes of our children. We have long lost the power of feeling as once we did in the morning of our pilgrimage, but we can restore the old relations, and learn from bitter experience that life is spiritual. After much wayfaring, God brings us through fire and water to the large place of the soul, and we find our kingdom when we have lost ourselves.

II

ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."—II KINGS 2:9-10.

A RECENT writer has said that "no one thing in the history of the world has had more effect than the natural overlapping of the generations. This fact is so simple that it is hardly ever expressly mentioned, but for the reflective mind it is the very essence of the whole philosophy of life." It is inevitable that an organisation like the Church should be influenced by the tidal forces of society. A boat is not unsafe because it rises and falls with the tide, but only when it drifts. If the Church's anchor holds, it may change with social changes without detriment to its influences. In idea it is Divine, but its form is necessarily human. On that account, the important question is: How are we of the present generation to transmit our great inheritance of tradition and belief and custom to coming generations? It is this problem that makes the story of Elijah and Elisha of surpassing importance.

Elijah was one of those mysterious personalities,

who suddenly appears in an epoch, unheralded and unknown, with a sense of Divine authority. He was called to save Israel from religious ruin in an age when as a result of Ahab's marriage with Jezebel, foreign superstitions threatened extinction of the true faith. The nation was divided into three groups. At one extreme were the godly people, at the other the heathen folk, while between them, a large group of waverers halted between two opinions, now for Jehovah, and now for Baal. Elijah was a root-and-branch sort of a man, who said to his generation: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" and summoned them to the top of Carmel for a decisive test, in which for the moment he was successful.

Then follows the familiar story of his flight. But it is a mistake to assume that this was due to fear of Jezebel. The true explanation is that the prophet realised it would be inexpedient at that time to come to an open collision with the queen; and his flight at the outset was a genuine retreat to victory. He was not running from an angry woman, but going back to Mount Sinai to get a bigger club. He wanted better munitions and more powerful guns, and was going to the central manufactory, that great mountain encircled with fire and smoke where God had once spoken so decisively to His people. But he broke down on the way, grew weary of his adventure and desired to surrender his responsibility.

The causes of his discouragement are two: his loneliness and limited conception of Divine activity. When he complained about being left alone with his stupendous burden, God reminded him of the presence in Israel of seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. As a leader it was his business to find out

who were on the Lord's side, and organise them in such a way as to promote his aims. But he seems never to have thought much about co-operation, nor to have desired the assistance of anybody. He was in a certain sense self-centered, a man who imagined himself indispensable to the Divine purpose, and it was only after his breakdown, that he became aware of his bitter loneliness. This was increased by his mistaken conception of the Divine activity. Elijah believed in a fiat God, who came into the universe in destructive and catastrophic ways. When he remembered the dramatic climax of his prophetical ministry on Mount Carmel, it seemed as if his view were justified; but this terrible reverse, this unexpected anti-climax had seriously disturbed his faith. He thought that because he failed, God had failed. Then the Lord took him under the shadow of the great mountain and opened his mind to a larger conception. God was not in the storm, nor the earthquake, nor the thunder, nor the lightning, but strangely enough He was in the still, small voice. This voice reminded the discouraged prophet that God had other ways than those of destruction of emphasising His presence in the world.

In his *French Revolution* Carlyle makes some striking comments on history. He says that history is not the record of the doings, but of the misdoings of men. The destructive forces of life are usually the noisy forces, while the constructive forces, the forces that build, are the quiet, modest forces. And history as men usually write it, is very largely a story of war and disaster. If you could take the noise out of the world you would put most newspapers out of business. It is the noisy things as a rule that get themselves into print. But who has ever written an adequate story of

the constructive force of love? Elijah reasoned: God is power, therefore power must destroy that which is unlike itself in spectacular ways. This line of reasoning seemed to be effective on Carmel, but something happened to it when the prophet faced the wrath of Jezebel. That is why the Almighty revealed the other side of His providence to his lonely and discouraged servant. At the close of the vision, he was told to anoint a certain man as his successor, by which God gently reminds him that his work was over.

The reason for the change is this: times change but men do not always change with them. This is one of the hardest truths to accept. It is often a bitter disappointment for a devoted servant to realise that he has outlived his usefulness. But we can see that the times had changed, that Israel needed a different kind of leader; for the work to be done now was no longer destructive but constructive. God wanted a man of irenic spirit, of a very different type. By this means God reminded Elijah that there are no indispensable men.

The choice fell on a young farmer named Elisha. The young man was greatly impressed with the communication of the prophet. Yet there is a touch of humour about the story, for Elijah behaved all through it as much as to say, "Young man, it is true that God has appointed you to be my successor, but you need not be in such a great hurry to get into my shoes." On this account the prophet kept him for a considerable time in a state of pupilage and subordination.

The contrast in the mission of these men will further bring out the differences in their temperament. The work of Elijah had been dramatic and episodic. The work of Elisha was constant and commonplace. Elijah,

if you estimate his mission in terms of activity, probably occupied a very small place in the thought and life of his country. He came and went like a flash of lightning; but Elisha lived for fifty years in the most intimate contact with the people. The home of Elijah was in the desert; the home of Elisha in the towns and cities. He was a patron and encourager of education and the organiser, as we would say, of the activities of the Church.

Our interest is in how the great responsibility was transmitted from one man to another. As I have said, Elijah found Elisha in the field and told what he was to do, but for a long time kept him in a state of subordination. The hour, however, of the old man's translation was approaching. During the period of pupilage Elisha proved his constancy by the way, in spite of enormous difficulties, he had persisted in following his master. Elijah was testing the merits of the young man, for if you read the story accurately, you will see that as they moved from village to village Elijah would turn and say, "You had better stop here, Elisha, for I am going on yonder a little further." To this the young man would reply, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And every now and then the young man would meet a group of theological students, and they would say: "Don't you know that your master is going to be taken away today?" And to them Elisha would reply: "Yes, I know it; hold your peace." Wherever he met with discouragement he persisted in following. During this trying period the old man seems not to have helped him much, or to have told him of what he was expected to do. Finally, however, they reached the critical period, that place in the wilderness where the translation was immi-

nent, and there the old man turned around to his young follower and shot this question at him: "What do you want, anyhow, young man? What really are you after? Ask it quickly before I am taken from you forever."

I think this was a critical moment in his experience. Such a moment comes to all of us when we are obliged to reveal the quality of our minds in the things we actually ask for. Elisha might have replied: "Make my work easier. You have had a tempestuous career with Ahab and Jezebel. Make my work easier." Or, he might have said: "Give me such an endowment of wisdom as shall enable me to triumph over my enemies." He might have asked for many things that were useful in themselves, but this is what he said: "Give me a double portion of thy spirit."

The old man looked at him a moment with kindling eyes: "Aha! you are a pretty keen young man after all. That is a very, very good thing you have asked for, but I am not sure you are worthy of it. You are asking a hard thing, but if you have spiritual insight enough to understand the meaning of my translation, then you shall have it; but if not, you shall not have it."

Presently the great translation took place. And as Elijah looked down from the flaming chariot into the eager face of his disciple, he realised that he fully comprehended its meaning. He threw down his mantle upon the young man and disappeared. Elisha took it up, smote the waters and went through them, put it about his shoulders, and when he returned to the inquisitive sons of the prophets, they said, "The mantle of Elijah has fallen upon Elisha," and they did him reverence there.

This is a great story, superlatively great as an illustration of the power of spiritual insight. Elisha was about to undertake a very commonplace, undramatic sort of task. No opportunities would be afforded him to be so decisive a factor in his time as his predecessor had been; yet he seemed to feel that this commonplace, routine work of construction required a double portion of the valiant spirit that his master had had, and it was for this alone that he asked.

This brings out two very important reflections concerning the way responsibility may be transmitted from one generation to another. Perhaps I can make it clear by putting it in the form of questions. First, what is the gift the younger generation should ask from the older generation? And secondly, what is the test of fitness for having it? If we can answer these questions, we need have no anxiety about the Church of God.

What, then, is the gift the younger generation should ask of their fathers? I think there is some confusion as to the relation of one generation to another. Some errors about this matter seem to follow the human race through the centuries. Take, for example, the popular error that wisdom can be transmitted from one generation to another. This is a very old delusion. The proof of it is the range and extent of what is known as proverbial wisdom. A facetious modern writer once remarked that "Solomon could not keep the Proverbs, so he wrote them." And when our fathers talk to us in proverbial strain, they are simply telling us in quotable ways the things they wish they had done; and we have a right to ask if they could not do them, how in the world can they expect us to do them? We cannot transmit our wisdom, or our experience to our children.

Yet in spite of this much time is wasted in the effort to do it. The old generation comes to the new with words of authority demanding, it would seem at times, a passive and uncritical acceptance of all that the older generation offers. This leads to a two-fold misunderstanding: one concerns methods of work; the other forms of truth.

Let us take this case. Suppose Elijah, when Elisha asked him for advice as to how to carry on his work, had said, "Young man, adopt my method, or you shall not have my blessing. Go back to Samaria, gather the people about you and call down fire from heaven and burn up your enemies; destroy them root and branch." You can see that this is the very reason why God was withdrawing the older prophet from his labours. God wanted a constructor and builder. He wanted a man of irenic spirit.

Or suppose Elijah had said, "You must take my limited conception of God. God works only by fits and starts. He is in the thunder, He is in the lightning, He is in the earthquakes, He is in the upheavals. His methods are all destructive." Again you see he would have left the still, small voice entirely out of account, and his servant would have been unable to succeed in a generation that needed an entirely different conception of God.

But Elijah was a wise man. He did not offer the young man anything. He simply asked him, "What do *you* want?" and made him the judge of the thing, leaving him to draw the inference from his association with himself.

Now there is a great deal to be said about methods of work. Every leader of God's people knows how easily they excite themselves over trifles. Some are

ready to dispute over such things as the length or shortness of a man's ecclesiastical garments, or quarrel about whether you shall have a prayer before or after the offering, whether you shall stand or sit during the singing. The standard of value for this type of mind is what has once been done must always be done. Such minds are unable to see that times change and methods must change with them.

It is a graver matter still when you come to the forms of truth, what we are to believe and how we are to believe it. We ought at least to recognise this: that while the truth of God in essence is the same through all generations, there must needs be various shades of light thrown on each phase of life in each generation, and the Church would have beggared itself long ago had it discarded what each generation had to give. It is apparent here that the conception of God was growing in Elijah's time. The old destructive idea was gradually giving way before a more winsome and constructive idea as symbolised by the still, small voice. It is this necessity of finding forms of truth to meet the needs of each generation that causes so much friction between the old and young. Sometimes we do not know how to recognise the difficulty in the minds of our children. But after all is said and done each one must do his own thinking about religion, and there comes a time in the young life when the necessities of its growth will compel it to stand without the shadow of the father's influence.

Mary learned this lesson from her Son when she found Him in Jerusalem, and said, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"; and He replied, "Wist ye not I must be about my Father's business?" Even at the early age of twelve Jesus was standing without

the mother's shadow and perplexing her loving heart with an attitude that she could not understand.

But we may as well recognise it, that one of the great losses of the present-day Church is the loss of control of the active intelligence of the people. Multitudes stray by the doors of our churches and are putting the fertility and vitality of mind which used to go into the comprehension of the Word of God and the true ends of life into activities and forms of expression that have little or no connection with organised religion. Some of the most acute minds that we know rarely go inside of a church, or if they do, they do not expect to be intellectually aroused. The reason perhaps from our side is that we are not teaching the people anything about religion. Might this not mean that the older generation, even with the best intentions, has been unable to market its religious wares?

I am pleading for tolerance, sympathy and generosity of mind toward coming generations. We must change our Elijah spirit. You cannot hand down to a succeeding generation even in undisturbed times the particular way in which you hold your religious convictions. You must respect each man's individual rights and let him work out his own salvation, helping him meanwhile all you can with tolerance, patience and sympathy.

We cannot transmit our methods or the fixed ways in which we hold our convictions. What we can do is to impart a double portion of our spirit. By spirit I mean an essential, invariable and conscientious way of living, something that controls and gives quality and meaning to a man's whole experience. A mature follower of Christ always puts an original interpretation on Christ. Find that unifying and connecting element

in each detail of a man's life, and you have discovered the man's spirit. The thing that Elisha asked for, that which the younger generation should ask of the older generation, was a double portion of the right spirit.

May I venture to point out one or two things by way of analysis of what that spirit is? I begin with the human end of it. You find in the men of the older generation an intense and unshakable belief in the primacy of the inner sanctities of life; that is to say, they believe that the object of life is the cultivation of personal holiness. In striking contrast to this mode you have the visible aspect of the modern Church, an aggregation of noisy activities. The Church is full of committeemen and organisers of religious enterprises. They are substituting external activities which deal with the material side of life, for the pursuit of the inner sanctity of character,—that quality which has ever been a distinctive mark of a disciple,—holiness.

Our fathers were not like that. They were not as widely informed as modern men are, but they did know and strive after personal holiness which is the fruit of obedience to Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that without holiness men cannot see God. The older generation had this original quality in their piety and if you had asked them the source of it they would have replied that they obtained it through the redemptive and atoning mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had no illusions about human perfections. They were not in love with half-and-half measures of salvation; but they believed, sincerely believed, that they had been cleansed and forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He had made the pursuit of holiness the supreme activity of life. As John puts it, "Every man that hath this hope

in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." And what is that hope in essence but this—that one shall see and become like Him? Follow this into its remoter implications and you will see that the pursuit of holiness is inspired by an experimental acquaintance with the redeeming love of Christ. That is why the older generation took such pains to think out its conception of religion and to organise its knowledge in the form of stable, unchanging convictions.

Now, faith is sometimes emotion and always an energy. But, inevitably, if it is to be real it must also be a conception of thought. It must be stabilised with ideas, for the ideas that men hold about religion are the hooks of their faith. They are the connecting links of a man's activities, they are the organised relationships between a man's words and a man's promises, and between a man's promises and his inner desire. Hence the older generation was full of convictions nourished on Holy Scripture. They loved the Bible. They read it because they believed in the Word of God, and they were usually able to give a reason unto them that asked it for the hope that was in them. I think this is the finest and best thing that the world has ever produced. It is upon such convictions that Jesus Christ has founded His Church, and it has been that spirit which has kept alive Christian ideals even unto this day.

Some of us who have known the disturbances of our modern world find that one of the potent causes of our present faith is the influence the older generation had over our minds in the formative periods of our career. It is because we have known good men that we are helped to believe in the authority and desirableness of the good life, and when the younger generation, however disturbed intellectually, seriously seeks a

double portion of the spirit of the older generation it will find in that endowment one of the most effective measures of saving itself from impressionism and intellectual instability that often ends in failure. It is discouraging to note the present tendency to substitute an impressionistic life for a conviction life. Some people treat their minds religiously as if they were of no more consequence than waste-baskets. If you could look into them they would be found to be full of scraps, a little here and a little there, but nowhere is there organisation, nowhere is there living connection between their thoughts and their experiences. Some depend on brilliant ministers, others on social relations, while others follow the habits formed in godly homes; but as for having a living conviction about Christ or putting an original interpretation upon Christ, it simply is not there.

That is why I believe that the greatest single need of the present day is a double portion of the spirit of the older generation. We are living in a brilliant and versatile age, more in love with motion than it is interested in ends and terminal facilities. The necessity for character building, for the formation of habits that produce capable, dependable servants of the community and of the Church, is not only a commonplace and familiar business, but it is a terribly slow business. Nothing has more perplexed us in recent years than the prevalence among the churches of an idea that you can produce character and form habits by large, spectacular, mass-movements. Such enterprises for example as was familiar in this country a few years ago under the name of "The World in Boston," designed to teach people to believe in foreign missions by a big circus, a kind of fair of three weeks' duration. Imagine Paul,

or Luther, or David Livingstone trying to interest people in foreign missions in this fashion! We succeeded only in interesting a great many of our young people in the theatrical profession. Perhaps the modern Church has learned something from its folly. Still there are some people like Solomon's fool, if you put them in a mortar you could not beat the folly out of them. But it seems to me, in view of the fact that nearly all of the novel methods have been tried and found wanting, that we are now about to return to the old undramatic, unspectacular business of character construction through the labourious process of Christian education.

How, then, are we going to prove our fitness for this? A great gift cannot be entrusted to men unless you know what they are going to do with it. I think the whole of this fitness is summed up in the words "spiritual receptivity." Here, on the one hand, was Elisha and on the other Elijah, caught up immediately into a flaming chariot. The young man saw something more than the translation of a great saint. He saw God in the experience. He also realised the transmission of responsibility when the mantle of the old man touched his young shoulders. He knew that he was ordained and set apart. What is this, then, but receptivity, an openness of mind, a sensitiveness of consciousness that constrains one to be obedient to the heavenly vision? This has been one of the difficulties of our day. The minds of many are like a dusty, country road. Nothing can grow there because the sensitive surfaces have been destroyed. This want of receptivity and appreciation is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the failure of the sons and daughters of godly parents to profit by their religious inheritance. How

often we come upon this grim fact of people who are wallowing in the perfumed slime of an æsthetic culture while their parents were caught up in the splendour and glow of a consecrated life. To have descended from godly ancsetors and then spend your active life in planning business enterprises, or in moving heaven and earth to obtain a questionable social position, and to be indifferent to the finer adventures of life, is indeed a tragedy far too common in these crowded times. Well, indeed, would it be for us to consider the kind of fathers and mothers we had; to remember before it is too late that we, too, are responsible for transmitting intact that glorious heritage to generations yet unborn.

When I think of one place in this country, the fruit of a great Christian life, and of the extraordinary influence that is still exercised by one who was wise enough to receive the responsibility, and that today, although Dwight L. Moody is in glory, his work is going on, and that thousands of souls all over the world have been the beneficiaries of the Northfield influence, I have the utmost confidence in affirming that the supreme need of this generation is a double portion of the spirit of the generation that has passed. It seems to me that a clear call for personal consecration comes to us from this story.

I spent the last month of his life with the late John Sparhawk Jones and for many days we walked the sands of Gloucester and talked about the Church, and in the last conversation I had with him he turned abruptly upon me and said: "Young man, when I think of the confusion of this time and the perplexity of the Church, I am glad that my race is almost run." Reflecting upon this later in the light of his sudden translation, a saying of Herodotus came to me. A king one

day asked an old retainer to do a certain thing, and the retainer replied: "I am too old to move and stir, O King. Let one of the younger men do these things." That is what the older generation is saying to the younger generation: "Let one of the younger men here do these things."

This is a clear call to all who are ambitious to assist in the transmission of the ancient inheritance from one generation to another. We have the right to choose methods suitable to the time; we are obliged to clothe religion in our own intellectual conceptions, but to make the transfer effective, we must have a double portion of the ancestral spirit, in order that those who follow after may say of us as was said in the days of old: "The mantle of Elijah has fallen upon Elisha."

III

THE WITHERED GOURD OR THE DYING WORLD

"And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it to grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night; and should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"—JONAH 4: 10-11.

THE Book of Jonah is clearly a didactic piece of writing, a tract for the times, in the form of a prophetic parable, and is associated, as is the Book of Job, with an historic character by the name of Jonah. Its purpose was to teach something to the Church of that day about its duty; and the message is contained in three conceptions.

1. It emphasises God's universal purpose to give salvation to the Gentiles. There is nothing that more strongly appeals to the historic imagination when guided by faith than to watch the light break successively upon each century as the story of God's goodness is unfolded in the Old Testament. One after another the obstacles clear away until the splendour of the Divine purpose to redeem the world breaks upon our minds in full-orbed significance. That is the meaning of Jonah's story. The Book tells us that God ordered a certain man to preach salvation to a great Gentile city. Paul called this a mystery, a divine secret

revealed only in New Testament times. Still the Old Testament, especially the latter part of it, is full of intimations of this character.

2. The Gentile world, in a more or less conscious way, was susceptible to the reception of the message. The preacher goes to Nineveh, and Nineveh repents and turns to God. This would seem to indicate that the writer was living in an age when Gentile peoples were becoming more and more susceptible to new impressions, and, on that account, were offering a fertile field for missionary activities. And anyone that knows something of the effect of Alexander's conquests and the attitude at that time of Gentile peoples towards religious, moral and philosophic questions, must realise the extraordinary appropriateness of that conception. We might also venture to say that the Book of Jonah was written in part for the benefit of God-fearing Gentiles before New Testament times. For the greater part of converts to Christianity, in the time of Christ, came from the class of devout heathen clustering around the Jewish synagogue, who believed profoundly in ethical monotheism. Of such were the Greeks who came to Philip the Apostle, saying, " Sir, we would see Jesus." Cornelius, Lydia, the seller of purple, and many other famous and lovable names in the Acts of the Apostles, also belonged to this type. From this point of view the Book of Jonah reaches across the centuries toward the coming of the Lord, with a promise of fulfillment in rich and historic demonstrations of the Divine purpose to save the world

3. The extraordinary unwillingness of the trustees of God's grace to give salvation to the world. The attitude of Jonah is the attitude of an aristocratic, thoroughly orthodox and highly traditionalised Jew of

his time. That, unhappily, is characteristic of the Jewish people in all periods of their existence. Their prophets were lonely men, and even in the centuries of extraordinary receptivity in Gentile peoples they were laying the foundations for those unhappy divisions which in our Lord's time, as Sadduceeism and Pharisaism, did so much to destroy His influence over His own people. This same exclusive tendency developed the unfortunate influence in the early church known as the Judaising movement. Jonah is the father of all narrow-minded, ecclesiastical persons who are unwilling to fulfill the responsibility of their charge even though they know beyond any doubt precisely what God wants them to do. I propose, then, to tell his story in four stages:

I. Jonah's Commission and the Reason Why He Was Unwilling to Fulfill It. He was sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, the oppressor of God's people for more than two hundred years, and all the righteous hatred of those ill-used folk was concentrated upon that abhorred and abominable name. What the word "Germany" meant to a Belgian or a Serbian during the Great War, the word "Nineveh" signified to a devout Jew. This rancorous and righteous indignation, the fear and abhorrence of the mysterious power of evil in the world, were concentrated in that portentous name, and when Nineveh was destroyed, and you can read of it in the prophecy of Nahum, all the hot-hearted wrath of that ancient people was expressed in their joy over its destruction.

On the face of it Jonah's commission was one that an orthodox Jew would have been very glad to carry out. God said: "Go and cry unto Nineveh for its sins are great"; and on the surface the mission was one of

condemnation. Had Jonah really believed that condemnation was the Lord's intention and that he was being sent, not only as the representative of Jehovah, but as the authoritative spokesman of the Jewish Church to tell the hated Gentile city that forty days should elapse and then should come chaos and destruction, he would have fulfilled his mission with extraordinary enthusiasm. But he had his doubts when the command came. He said, "I know the disposition of God. His heart is broader than it ought to be. He is far more tenderly concerned about these people than He has a right to be. I suspect that He has ulterior objects in this adventure and I do not like the idea at all." Then he bethought himself, still influenced by the ancient delusion of a tribal God, "I will slip away quietly and get out of His jurisdiction and avoid the unpleasant task." But after an adventurous sea voyage he comes back and decides the only safe thing to do is to carry out the commission.

Now the thing that bothered the man was that he knew the purposes of God were merciful. Even then, it was beginning to dawn upon the mind of the orthodox Jew that God's heart was wonderfully kind; that the essence of religion was the offer of mercy, not the threat of judgment. He did his best to avoid committing himself to the doubtful position.

This was one of the reasons why the Pharisees were unable to understand Jesus; it was also one of the reasons why the Jewish Christians made so much trouble for Paul on Gentile territory. They did not like the idea of offering salvation unto Gentile peoples in these uncanonical and unecclesiastical ways. Had Jonah been commissioned to go to Nineveh to offer salvation on terms of becoming proselytes to the Jewish

religion, it is easy to imagine what a satisfying conception that would have been to Jewish ecclesiastic pride. Picture it to your mind. Here is the proud Gentile king, his courtiers, lords and great captains, his men and women of high position, all coming in solemn procession, in sackcloth and ashes, across the Mesopotamian desert, over the very road the people of God had been dragged by their heathen oppressors, to Mount Zion to become proselytes to the Jewish law, with Jonah and his ecclesiastical associates standing at the door of the temple to examine them touching their fitness for membership in the Jewish church. It would have been a most delightful thing. But that was not the commission at all. There was nothing said about coming to Jerusalem, nor about becoming proselytes. The Jew was not even mentioned. All his traditions were quietly set aside and he was told to inform the people they were to be saved on terms of repentance alone.

That was the thing that troubled the Jewish Christians in Paul's day. You know how much trouble they made for him in the beginning of his missionary activity, particularly in the Church at Antioch, where certain nameless disciples preached salvation to Gentiles on simple terms of faith and repentance. You will remember how Peter wavered and could not make up his mind if the thing were right or not. And even Cornelius was regarded as an exceptional case, and when Peter reported his advent into the Church he was reminded not to let it happen again lest, haply, worse things befall them. They could not believe that giving salvation on such simple, elementary terms was regular. It was not, as some religious persons say, done decently and in order. That is why Jonah felt so keenly about

the whole business. Yet he went because, forsooth, he could not do anything else.

II. Jonah's Disappointment with His Success. No matter how the man felt, he did some mighty good preaching in Nineveh, and the whole community from the king down is said to have turned to God. This did not surprise Jonah very much, but it did keenly disappoint him. Jonah is the only preacher on record who ever made a great success a ground for complaint. We have heard a great deal about the failure of people to become Christians and many are discouraged because of the lack of fruit. But here is a man who brought a whole city to God, and on that account is full of complaints. And this is what he says: "Was not this exactly my thought while I was yet in my own country? I suspected this thing from the very start. I realise that God's heart is bigger than my heart; but all the same I do not propose to sympathise with this adventure." And so he became very angry.

Jonah's anger was rooted in jealousy. Compare him a moment with Elijah. Elijah was discouraged and wanted to die because he was jealous on account of God. He was very unhappy because the people did not turn to God. But Jonah is jealous of God. He is jealous of God's interest in the Gentiles He feels that God is not true to His first love, and so he is in a very bad and painful frame of mind. The Almighty forces on him the great question: "Are you willing by personal service to carry the message of salvation to Nineveh? Is your heart right with My heart?" I think Jonah gave a decidedly negative answer.

There was ground, as I have indicated, on which such a commission would have been very delightful to Jonah. If it had been a commission, the fulfillment of

which would have satisfied Jewish pride and met Jewish ecclesiastical pretensions, it would have been all right. But this is the point: a man may praise and greatly admire in an ideal form a conception of life, which he is most unwilling to realise in concrete and practical ways. Think of the great speeches on liberty that have been made in all ages by the ruling class, and compare their enthusiasm for liberty with the extraordinary reluctance to give freedom to the very classes whose enfranchisement seemed to stimulate their eloquent faculties to a maximum degree. It is a very difficult thing, indeed, to apply in concrete and practical ways principles that are easily admired and praised so long as they are kept in abstract form.

Take the question of the evangelisation of the world, or that of city missions, the bringing in of the foreign population, the carrying of the Gospel to the poor and needy. It is easy to get an aristocratic and well-dressed congregation excited over this matter; and if its application be limited to the contribution of money, or the sending of somebody else among these people, they are ready to do it. But if some of these poorly dressed and humble folk happen to get in their pews on Sunday morning, there is usually a great to-do. They seem to feel that there is something wrong with the world when the people begin to come to church, though all the time they are talking about the freedom of the Gospel, and inviting everybody to come. Jonah was very much in this frame of mind, and there is hardly anything so stubborn; there is hardly any attitude that yields so slowly as one that has transformed its principles into prejudices, and fixed its ingrained and organised selfishness upon a religious foundation.

There is the story of the old Scotchwoman, a strict

Sabbatarian, whose minister was being taken to task by her for his seemingly lax interpretation of the Scripture on that point, and he said: "But, my good woman, didn't you know that the Blessed Saviour authorised the disciples to go into the field on the Sabbath Day and pluck corn that they might feed themselves?"

She replied, "Aye, Dominie, I ken all aboot that, and I never thought any the better of Him for it."

This is the way Jonah reasoned. "God may get these Gentile people into the Church any way He likes, but so far as I am concerned I am going to wash my hands of the whole business." There are many people in our churches of the same mind. I have known fashionable folk leave churches because the poor people were coming in. The odour of the people in the house of God is better than the odour of incense, but it has never been popular. That was the trouble with Jonah. His religious experience, modes of thought, and habits of life, had become so attached to a lot of transitory things that he did not want anybody in his church who could not adjust himself to his particular standard, and for that reason he did not propose to sympathise with this extraordinary missionary adventure.

III. Jonah's Retirement, and the Symbolism of the Gourd. When a man determines to make himself uncomfortable he can generally succeed. Jonah reasoned after this fashion: "My ministry is done, I have finished all that the Lord commanded me to do. I am not at all in sympathy with a plan which I suspected from the beginning. I propose, therefore, to separate myself from the matter and withdraw from the city." Now why do you suppose he went over and sat on a hill overlooking the town? I think he did it because he

hoped the Ninevites would change their minds. This wholesale repentance was a pretty big contract; they might lapse, and if they did, then the Lord would be compelled to come around to Jonah's point of view. The man was marking time until he could bring the Almighty's plan into harmony with his idea of how things ought to work. At any rate, he did not want anybody to have any illusions about his relations to this vast movement. So far as he was concerned, he was through, hence he goes out and sits on a hillside, and the gourd grows up around him.

What is the meaning of the gourd? It is a symbol. It is a symbol of creature comforts, because the gourd served a useful purpose in sheltering the prophet from the heat of the sun, and it also gave him a nice, cool place to sleep. And yet what we get here is an illustration of how a man may quickly lose his sense of perspective; how a scheme of values will get itself reversed because of selfishness. Jonah took great discontent in the salvation of a city a great deal larger than his insignificant hill-town of Jerusalem. It did not content him at all; it angered him every time he thought of Nineveh. But when he thought of the gourd he took great content in it. Do not let that slip over your minds, but rather let it go straight into your hearts—*he took great content in the gourd.*

What is the gourd but a symbol of all those lesser interests in life, those private hobbies, those curiously camouflaged prejudices that we sometimes call our principles, those obsolete or gradually lessening traditions which we cling to in face of the expanding glory of God's grace? We lose our interest in the big things, and become intensely absorbed and contented with the gourd.

Take the Pharisee. The founders of the sect, beginning with Ezra, were probably the holiest men in the world at that time, and their attitude during the Maccabean period is greatly to be commended. They were the first martyrs for faith. A nobler, finer group of believers has never lived on the face of the earth. And yet see what their successors became in the time of our Lord! They were tithing anise, mint and cummin, and neglecting the weightier matters of the law. If you have read Dr. Glover's little book, *The Jesus of History,* you will remember his caustic, brilliant comment on the saying of our Lord, they " strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Look at the thing for a moment. Here is your Pharisee busy polishing his cup, polishing away every speck of dust, until it shines so that he can see his likeness in it. And he says to himself: " My neighbour must understand that I am a very diligent and industrious man and I take the best of care of my silver. I never allow anything that contaminates me or corrupts me or makes me unclean." And then a gnat lights on the rim of the cup. He says: " This won't do at all. I have got to do the thing over again, because the gnat has made it ceremonially unclean." And he works away to get the stain off. Then along comes a camel and he swallows the thing, legs, humps and all, and does not even know it. That is our Saviour's way of showing how values get reversed and how great things are lost sight of in the little things. So Jonah took great content in the gourd.

This is the way of the world. It is very marked, even in great men; all of us lesser folk are often guilty of yielding to the temptation. When we cannot have our way we go out from an institution which we ought with all earnestness be supporting, to sit down and wait

for its disappearance or destruction, simply because we are not allowed to run it. In the meantime we take great pleasure in gourds.

There are many people, I fear, who are disappointed with the Church. I do not mean unbelievers; I refer to sincere but narrow-minded believers. Narrowness is the first infirmity of an ignoble mind. If you are capable of sustained narrowness, it is the evidence of the smallness of your nature. And yet this is very common in orthodox circles. Sometimes a person comes to the minister and says: "My dear brother, I find it impossible to remain in your church. I do not agree with the behaviour of your official board. I do not like your methods or organisation. I find the visible Church has lost the approval of God and I propose to leave it." Now what does he do? He goes over and sits down on some imaginary hill, there he is; and the first thing you know he has got him a sign, and usually there is a lot of Scripture texts on it, but what I always read on the sign is: "This man is taking great content in the gourd."

The gourd may be the symbol of interests which while they may be of some importance are still of a subordinate nature. If you look into the wallet of any denomination you will find many withered gourds—subordinate truths, overemphasised truths, contentious about things that are no longer vital, things that keep us from being one in spirit, from believing in the sincerity of our brethren and from getting help and inspiration from all the good people in the world—all because of these withered gourds. When you go into your wallet for the bread of life to feed the hungry, what is the trouble with it? It is full of bits of withered gourds, and the people do not like it and will not

eat it. These things may just be carried along with us, but they are so much impedimenta retarding our progress toward the "house not made with hands."

IV. Jonah Brought Face to Face with This Tremendous and Dramatic Conclusion: Which is more important, the withered gourd or the dying world?

One night not long after while Jonah was dreaming pleasantly of a day when Nineveh should backslide, a worm crawled out of the ground and began to gnaw at the root of the gourd, and when the sun came out the gourd began to wither. Jonah's head got hot and began to ache, and then his heart got hot and he began to get mad, and this is what he said: "I wish I were dead now—more than ever. I am very, very angry."

And the Lord said, "What is the matter, Jonah?"

"I am angry even unto death."

"Why?"

"Because of the death You have meted out to this gourd."

"Indeed!" said the Lord. "And are you to be angry for a gourd, a thing that grew in a night and died in a night, for which you did not labour, and over which even a worm has power; and shall I not have mercy on great Nineveh, this blind, mole-like, struggling city of mine, whose life is linked to My life, and whose heartaches and yearnings I have long understood?"

The writer, you see, was a good literary craftsman. He does not close the Book like a tract. One reason people do not read tracts is because there is nothing left to the imagination, there is too much detail in them. The people who write tracts profess to know too much about the things they are describing. The writer of this Book does not tell us what happened to Jonah, but

you can at once conclude that if he did not repent he must have been an apostate.

"Shall I not have mercy on great Nineveh, that great shadow-haunted city?" Some of you have seen Raphael's *Sistine Madonna.* When you first looked at it you noted the face of the Madonna and Child, and then as your eye wanders over the background it breaks up into its constituent elements and is literally alive with baby faces that are looking at you out of the shadow. And that is the way here. You look at the face of Jonah and at the face of God, and then you see back of them this strange mixture of baby faces and grown faces, these Ninevites, this dying world of God's. "Shall I not have mercy on great Nineveh?"

What is the lesson for the modern Church? This Book shows the relation of the life force of God's grace to the traditional moulds of its expression. Now, Judaism was a mould; the life force was the divine purpose to redeem the world, and anyone who studies the Bible will realise that the force of God must inevitably expand as the world becomes accessible to its influence, so that a time must come when either the traditional moulds must expand with it, or break to pieces and allow the life force to strike out an order for itself and re-establish new traditions. There was no reason, humanly speaking, why Judaism should not have expanded along with it. But this book appears to have been written by a man standing on the frontiers of a new world, looking down the stream of centuries in anticipation of events shortly to come to pass, to show us how, at a critical moment in the history of that people, the ecclesiastical mould had hardened and become brittle, and how the life force pressing more and more into the mould broke it asunder and swept with

torrential force out upon the world creating a new order of tradition for itself. *That* is the teaching of the Book of Jonah, and *that* is the meaning of this tremendous contrast.

The important thing is the life force of God. The mould must expand with the life force until it is fitted to interpret still further the glory of the Lord. Our Saviour said that God did not put new wine into old bottles. This is the lesson of the Book. The new wine was the wine of this constantly expanding life force. The old bottles were the traditional moulds of Judaism that would not expand with it. It was inevitable, therefore, that the moulds should break in order that the life force might be free for a larger expansion. And what you see in the Book of Jonah is the life force of Divine grace breaking through the ecclesiastical mould in order that it might reach out and overtake the growing receptivity in the heathen world round about.

God's purpose is always the same, but the modes of its manifestation must necessarily change, and we must change with them or break. I offer here in conclusion one or two reflections.

Many are troubled and confused today about the status of Protestantism. Protestantism is a mode of expression of the life force of God. It is not very old in the history of the world. We are troubled about it, probably, because we are beginning to feel that it reflects too conclusively a social system that is gradually but surely yielding to something entirely different. We belong, so far as our forbears are concerned, to an individualistic society. We are rapidly evolving into a collectivist society. Now an individualistic society is one that can bring down from past centuries its traditions and conceptions more or less intact and put them

behind the individual in the form of conventions that have the force of Divine law for members of the group. We are able to speak of the God of our fathers. We have our ecclesiastical family trees, and the knowledge that we have descended from a good religious stock is an additional element in the stability of our character. We have a great interest in the past. We still cherish the illusion that the Puritans were the finest type of Protestant, and are still living more or less under the domination of a Puritan conception of morality and practice.

But do you realise that one of the merits of an individualistic society long continuing, is respect for tradition, while a collectivist society, which is the result of an expanding movement and the infiltration of different races, is a society that does not care a rap for tradition? It has no conception of the past, and attempts to begin all things *de novo,* and if we are to impress the vitality of our message upon the masses in the present day, we must do it by putting emphasis on the life force rather than on the traditional modes of expression that are still current in restricted religious circles.

This crisis which is now brought upon the Modern Church is manifest in the great epochs in which the world has suddenly expanded in new directions. Consider the extraordinary enlargement of life when Alexander knocked the world to pieces, letting the East and West get together, and all the old traditions and ancient sanctions were temporarily set aside. Men found themselves floating in a great sea, glad to find a plank here and there that might carry them through to safety. It was in such a time that the practical and almost religious philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism were born. It was a time when the Gentile world,

under the influence of the Greek language and the spread of Greek culture, was brought into violent collision in the first place, and then almost into the relation of disciple and master to the Jewish Church itself. It was in that time that the Book of Jonah probably originated. At any rate it was such a time the Book anticipated. It found the Jewish Church unwilling to expand, incapable of understanding the great movements confronting it; so when the Lord came He found but a moribund and broken church, still holding obsolete traditions, instead of possessing a vital faith ready to welcome the fulfilment of the ancient promise and recognise Him as Lord.

One reason for the rapid expansion of Christianity in the first and second centuries of our era was the extraordinary receptivity of the heathen mind. The preachers of the gospel found little encouragement in Palestine, but so soon as they passed out into the wider domain of Asia Minor and Europe they met with an enthusiastic reception. The Palestinian Jew was tradition bound, but the Gentile through the political upheavals and intellectual struggles of his immediate past had been made free. And in this free mental soil the good seed found an eager hospitality.

The Reformation was an inevitable effect of the Renaisance. The revival of learning, the discovery of America, and the awakening of the scientific spirit greatly expanded man's conception of the world, and brought him in a receptive mood face to face with great issues.

I do not like to speak in superlatives, and whatever may be said, must be discounted somewhat because we are very close to our own period; but as I understand the historic contrast here alluded to, I can see nothing

comparable to these times. We are standing at the place where the traditional conceptions of the past have come in conflict with the extraordinary intellectual and political activity of the present. We are living in an age of efflorescence such as the world has never known. In my Canadian camp on the shore of Lake Huron I have, when the season was late, seen this thing—the swarming of the lake fly. During the day the bush was silent, but so soon as the sun was set, a humming and buzzing would begin all over the forest. It sounded like the coming of a storm. And then slowly but surely there would rise above the edge of the bush great, swarming clouds of lake flies, millions of them. You could hear their humming and buzzing all around you, and yonder across the lake you could see them hovering over the islands, these swarming clouds of lake flies. Whether you looked to the east or the west or the north or the south you saw this fermenting, swarming mass of winged desire seeking some larger mode of self-realisation. This is the world we look upon today. The masses are in a state of profound unrest and confusion. You hear the buzzing and the humming of many peoples, like the sound of rushing waters; multitudes in the valley of decision, seeking through changes in government larger modes of self-expression. People are turning from obsolete and unworkable traditions, scorning ancient symbols, despising the stabilising influences of an historical and connected knowledge, and endeavouring to begin life *de novo* and yet with an incredible hunger for something that will give them confidence in the unseen things of life.

Here we stand with our all-conquering Christ, Whose power is as demonstrable today as in the first century. We have the Bread of God to feed every hun-

gry multitude; with ideas to co-ordinate and stabilise their political and economic passions; with conceptions of social order, moral purity and spiritual aspiration which no other religion and no combination of philosophies can ever give them. What are we going to do with this power? Are we going to face this concentrated need with dull and stupid minds, foolishly contending about withered gourds; or put our faith in the living power of the Divine Spirit, and with the courage of conviction and the patience of a God-disciplined life, thrust ourselves into this yeasty ferment with the only message that can satisfy the hunger of our day? We have never lived in such terribly searching times. We shall never again live in such a superlatively great time.

PART II

THE EDUCATION OF MOSES

IV

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE DESERT

"Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian."—EXODUS 2: 15.

MOSES' great career began with a mistake, and in spite of its remoteness, the story of that mistake is strikingly familiar. What it was and what it led to it is our purpose here to tell.

Few men have had a more romantic life. He was a child of an enslaved people, who by a singular providential arrangement was brought into the family of the reigning monarch and became the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He grew to manhood amid the luxury and splendour of an Oriental court, and for a long period was willing to take his ease. But there came a time when he grew discontented. He felt that this was not living but mere existence. Idleness displeased him, and he wished for a career. He wanted to live and work and have a share in the big things. He was unhappy and restless because he did not know how to get out of his gilded cage.

And many young Americans are feeling this same discontent. Young people are idealists; in a vague sort of way they desire to share in what is great, noble, unselfish; their discontents are often protests against idleness and ease, a passionate longing for a share in the world's work. They are like Browning's Christian. They do not wish to be

" * * left in God's contempt apart,*
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize."

Such a life would be a cruel distortion of destiny. When young people feel the shame of this life, often planned by foolish parents, their discontent increases until they begin to look about them for a way of breaking out of Pharaoh's court and escaping the paddock life.

This was Moses' feeling—how to escape the paddock life—when he took that momentous walk which led to his temporary undoing. He looked about him that day with open eyes. He had often seen this thing, an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave, and probably had stifled any feelings of sympathy by saying to himself that if slaves will not work they must be punished, else how get the world's work done? Perhaps he congratulated himself on being fortunate enough to escape being reared as a Hebrew. He was a child of destiny, and known as a prince. But that morning such reflections did not please him. He was looking on that sight with other eyes, eyes opened by his discontent. He looked upon his brethren and considered their burdens. His brethren? That was a new thought, and for the first time in his life he felt that their burdens were his burdens. What had he ever done to earn his bread? What had he contributed to the world's work? Why should he live by the toil of others, and spend his days in idleness while other men, his brothers—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh—were beaten by taskmasters? This was the beginning of responsibility, the moment when he came of age, when he felt himself a full grown man.

And this, too, is common in our time. There are few

finer moments in life that that of the beginning of responsibility. At such a time a man forms the deliberate and passionate determination to get out of Pharaoh's court, to escape at any cost the shame of the paddock life. And it is one of the best indications of the moral health of these times that multitudes of well favoured people are beginning to awake to their responsibility for the social and spiritual condition of men. The burden of all, our brethren, is felt to be our burden. Why, after all, should there be idlers and burden bearers under the same social system?

Moses felt this keenly, and it was an ennobling feeling; only he made a serious mistake in going about the business, and that mistake opens up an interesting line of reflection. His mistake was this: He assumed that a sudden birth of social passion automatically equipped him with power for social leadership. He supposed that to feel that a thing ought to be done was the same thing as to have power to accomplish it effectively. This false social system was responsible for two evils: On the one hand it fostered idlers like himself; and on the other hand burden bearers like his brethren. The thing to be done then was to destroy the social system. Here stands the Egyptian taskmaster, the visible symbol of the evil thing. Then kill the Egyptian, and the thing is done. By so doing he thinks he will end the oppression of his brethren, and gain power to lead them to a better social condition. He just took it for granted that a man without actual knowledge of human nature and with no experience of practical life could in a moment of social enthusiasm acquire leadership in the world's affairs. It is a common mistake, and he was soon bitterly aware of it.

Shortly after this impulsive action he endeavours to

interfere in a matter between his brethren, and then learns that he has no power to influence them. "Who made you a judge over us?" they asked. Furthermore, his crime is known to Pharaoh. He had not considered this before, but now he realises that he not only lacks power to help his brethren, but that he must leave the country, perhaps forever, and abandon any hope of ever influencing his people. Hence he flees, a broken and discouraged young man, far from the haunts of the world, and loses himself in the heart of the desert of Midian.

This, too, is quite familiar. The moral idealism and social passion of this time are profoundly interesting. In some respects we are living in the greatest era of human history. This feeling of responsibility for our brothers under all conditions of existence is one of the finest characteristics of our age. The land is full of adventurers, many of them young, who are but lately escaped from Pharaoh's court, who still remember the vanity and futility of the paddock life, whose interest in the social problem is profoundly suggestive. For the first time in their lives they are feeling the invigoration of responsibility. The experience is novel, glorious, heroic. Nothing could tempt them back to the old life. They have definitely broken with their idle past; they despise the paddock and long for the arena. But they usually make the same mistake that Moses made. They confound the birth of social passion with equipment for social leadership. Few wish to follow, to learn, to gain power through discipline; most of them wish to lead. They do not know how to wait. And this is the more impressive because many of these young idealists are full of religious zeal. Like Moses, they are going about the business of solving some of

the most complex problems in an unreflective and passionate way.

We all feel the prevailing discontent. It is everywhere. People are dissatisfied and restless without knowing why. But the discontent of the time is not that of a decaying and disenchanted aristocracy, but rather that of an adolescent and adventurous democracy. Such discontent is usually a sign of progress. But this form of discontent more than any other kind needs discipline. Of itself it lacks balance, caution, and sanity. It lives in passionate feelings rather than in constructive intellectual conceptions; it is fruitful of vast mistake and final futility, unless it is sobered by real knowledge and experience. Young America is no more fit for leadership in this business of world emancipation than was Moses before his desert experience.

It is worth while to consider more in detail some of the prevailing misconceptions of the problem before us. The presence of such misconceptions shows the necessity of the desert discipline.

1. A misconception of education. We usually act on the supposition that if we tell the people what they ought to do they will do it. Moses thought so. He assumed if he told his brethren what they should do they would do it. But had Moses ever stopped to ask whether he knew what ought to be done? Had he ever considered whether he knew what was meant by right? Did he know the temper and problems of his time? Did he understand human nature as it is? What real equipment had he? A profound discontent with an aimless life, and a rather vague feeling of responsibility for others—this and nothing more. He was less fitted to help those Jews than the humblest slave among them.

Yet in this restless democracy of ours, where every man is striving for personal significance, the idea seems to prevail that, in a multitude of meetings and campaigns for publicity upon all sorts of subjects, the good thing needed to be done will be done. Year by year, hosts of beardless boys are pouring out of Pharaoh's court, with the perfume of the paddock life still upon their garments, who are telling the big world what it ought to do to be saved, with never a suspicion of their unfitness and incompetence Need they then be surprised that the world turns upon them and asks: "Who made you a judge over us?"

Nothing more painfully illustrates the evil of this misconception than the amazing publicity now given to sex matters, the exploitation of the social evil, the discussion of such subjects in mixed assemblies, and the even more questionable practice of moving picture delineations and dramatic performances, the idea being that to expose the evil is to destroy it, that people need only to be told what is right in order to get them to do right. How little such people know of human nature, how poorly acquainted they are with the human problem. No one will deny that a wise treatment of such subjects in the light of real knowledge will do good; but the haste and utter incompetence of this propaganda, as it is usually carried on, are fruitful of a vast corruption of society. The very worst attempt to suppress vice is to turn it over to undisciplined minds.

2. A misconception of legislation. The stubborn refusal of human nature to do right, when it knows what right is, leads to the idea that it must be helped to right ways by the aid of legislation. The favourite theme of our democracy is freedom. Freedom is what all men wish for, some attain, and few deserve. Free-

dom is not the gift of democracy, but the goal and possible achievement of democracy; and yet how can freedom better show itself, men think, than in the making of laws; and when the law is supposed to be an expression of the sovereign will of the people will it not correct all evils and encourage all good things? At any rate we seem to think so.

That law is a power in itself is a favourite delusion of democracy, and this delusion has never had more influence than here in America. We act upon the assumption that to get a law on the statute books is the same thing as to get it enforced. And what is our favourite method of procedure? First we get the law passed, then we elect a man to enforce the law, then we organise voluntary associations—civic leagues, reform associations, and the like—to force the man we have elected to enforce the law. Then when we are convinced that even this is going to fail, we get together in the exercise of our freedom and protest. Then we embody our protest in another law. And so the amusing process begins where it started. This is movement without progress, the merry-go-round of American legislation.

3. A misconception of the Church. Many are beginning to question the efficacy of the legislative program. They are beginning to suspect that, after all, public sentiment is the power behind the law, and that it will require something more potent than education to develop sentiment in favour of righteousness, and so now society is turning more than in former times to the Church and demanding what it is going to do about the matter. If it be the custodian of the Divine law and the keeper of the conscience why does it not get about the business of setting the world right? Why does it

not get down into the ruck of things and kill that brutal Egyptian?

This demand is usually made from the wrong point of view. The adventurer is too much in a hurry to ask what the Church is doing and has done about the matter. He is so poorly informed on the real trouble that he can learn little from the fundamental testimony of the Church. He does not know that where there is no vision the people perish; where there is no abiding faith in authority, man lacks power to arrest the downward tendency of the race. Instead of setting himself to understand that by the Gospel the Church is putting into human nature a new power, he insists that the Church in its membership and influence align itself with his favourite party, organisation, or movement; it may be some socialistic program, it may be some reform organisation, it may be some wild scheme for bringing to pass an immediate Utopia. And if the Church will not do this, then the Church must go.

The question of questions among such poorly informed people is an economic rather than a spiritual question. They seek to change environment rather than regenerate human nature. The demand is usually limited to a division of the inheritance. Again we hear the words: "Speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." They forget perchance that covetousness in the heart may explain the economic situation far better than this superficial diagnosis.

People who fall under the evil influence of these misconceptions are not confined to outsiders, but such misapprehensions are very common among people within the Church. While the Gospel is working with causes such enthusiasts expend their energies on effects and the study of symptoms. Moses did not realise the religious

aspect of the question he was dealing with. He thought only of a social revolution—kill the Egyptian and the thing is done—forgetting that the real bondage of these people was the bondage of sin, the bondage of ignorance of God. The fatal lack of our time is ignorance of God.

Strip off the veneer of social and religious talk and you will find underneath that the ruling principle of the age is largely one of material values, of disputes about the division of the inheritance. The young adventurer does not know that he is facing a deep and organic spiritual disease and that he is more in need of a sound theology than of a perfect social theory.

But Moses' mistake was not fatal. When he slew the Egyptian he was on the way to the burning bush; but between those two events lay the long years of desert discipline, and that is the outstanding value of the story for our time. We, too, may be on the way to the burning bush, but we shall never understand the vision, nor solve the problem of human betterment until we, like Moses, have experienced the discipline of the desert.

George Gissing says: "More than half a century of existence has taught me that most of the wrong and folly which darken earth is due to those who cannot possess their souls in patience, that most of the good which saves mankind from destruction comes of life that is led in thoughtful stillness."

Ah, yes, and how little do we know how to appreciate the life that is led in "thoughtful stillness." To us who live most in the moving mass such a life is one of stagnation, of seeming idleness; and yet until we can appreciate such a life as this, a life of prayer and faith and quiet confidence in God how shall we understand Him who "shall not strive nor cry, and whose voice is

not heard in the streets." Jesus never liked noise. He did His best work in stillness, in quiet. And He can never work a change in us while our hearts are like a noisy street, full of haste, selfishness, and earthly discontent.

Perhaps no man ever seeks the desert. He is usually driven into it; and if our humiliating failures, our painful reactions, our bitter disappointments do nothing else for us, they may become fruitful of great good if they drive us from the glare and glitter and noise of the modern world into the quiet and stillness of the desert. There at any rate we may go apart from the crowd and take a just prospect of things; and perhaps we, too, may light upon a bush that is not consumed, and renew our hope and revive our faith and come back to the haunts of men with a Gospel powerful enough to compel the big world to stop—and listen to God.

V

THE GLORY IN THE DESERT

"And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."—EXODUS 3: 3-5.

THE end of discipline is illumination. First comes the flight from Egypt, then the long, dull years in Midian, and then,—the burning bush. To read this story aright, we must cease to think of it as a hero tale of long ago, and take it as an example of how a man found his God.

To think of it in this way is to discern certain points of contact with our own lives. In the first place, up to this point the life of Moses had been full of ups and downs. Beginning as the reputed son of Pharaoh's daughter; brought up in the luxury and magnificence of an Oriental court, he had, by virtue of a generous though mistaken action, been driven into the wilderness where he had followed the humble calling of a shepherd. To descend from the position of a prince to that of an obscure herdman was a great descent. To most men this would seem the end of a career. All romance, poetry and mystery appeared to have departed from life. The high expectations of youth had not been real-

ised. All hopes seemed to have ended in that dreary desert experience.

In the second place, we who look back on the story can see another feature of immense significance. God was interested in this man's experience, although for the moment he did not know it. Providence was directing his movements, and this desert experience, this apparent anti-climax was only a transition stage on the way to the fulfillment of a great career. And these two features are common to all of us, although we are apt to stress the first more than the second. To every man who has fully matured, life seems to be made of perplexities. He is sometimes up, and sometimes down, but mostly down. No matter how high the promise of our youth, eventually we find ourselves in a desert where the right way seems lost. We gradually drop our illusions, abandon our enthusiasms, and put off the stately robes of the prince with which we adorned our early manhood, to clothe ourselves in the common dress of the unromantic toiler. When we allow such thoughts too much influence, we accept ourselves at our lowest valuation. It was this common tendency that led to the invention of the Scotch proverb: "Born a man and died a grocer."

But even our lives have another aspect, although it may not be clear. We, too, like Moses, are controlled by an overruling providence. A little retrospective thought will show this, and in spite of the eccentric aspect of our movements we are bound to admit that there is a governing principle revealed in them which is working towards an orderly and rational end. Even the dullest life at times is illuminated by the sense of something great impending; some crisis, some apocalyptic event which shall change the face of the land-

scape and open fresh vistas of opportunity. Such an event happened to Moses. The time came when he must come to close quarters with God; and the awakening came, as it usually does, in the very midst of his commonplace world. Caring for his flock in a remote part of the wilderness, he is suddenly attracted by a burning bush.

The first impression made on Moses was that here in the commonplace surroundings of the wilderness was something unfamiliar, and unusual. It was not an uncommon sight to see a fire burning in the desert. It might be the camp-fire of a neighbouring shepherd, or the evidence of some wandering tribe. It might be the sign of a friend or an enemy, but in either case there was nothing uncommon or noteworthy in this. Such a sight met with the usual reactions, and was dismissed from the mind. But there was something peculiar about this; it was not that the bush was burning, but that it was unconsumed. The fire burned, but the bush was not destroyed. Passing like the tongues of angry serpents through the foliage of the bush, yet neither diminishing its bulk, nor destroying the beauty thereof, it was this that attracted the attention of Moses to a sight otherwise quite commonplace and familiar. It was this that led him to ask: Why is this? As he pondered the mystery he determined to investigate it. You may regard this as a miracle, a wonder if you like, and I shall not deny it; but all the same, the point is that this unusual thing happened in the midst of a commonplace experience.

And what happened to Moses then, happens to us now. Life and the world viewed from the outside look commonplace, unromantic and familiar. But there is at the same time, for those who can see it, an undying

fire in the world. There is a living flame of life and love and glory, feeding upon human interest, belief, and ambition; a fire that surrounds the human personality, blesses and enriches human relations, and yet, and here is the remarkable thing, so far from consuming men, it revives them, renews them, and keeps them tremendously alive. If you ask an explanation of this wonder, they have their reason. They will tell you that they have found a Saviour; like Peter's friends, they will be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them by saying they have sanctified Christ in their hearts as Lord; and that in spite of ups and downs, in spite of changes and decay, this gracious fire which burns within their hearts, neither tires nor wearies, but actually renews and strengthens. Every disciple of Jesus Christ, no matter in what dreary place he lives, is a burning bush. If one doubt the truth of this let him read history.

First, you discern the presence in this world of a fire that consumes and wastes; the fire of lust and greed and sin. This is the fire that you see playing amid the ruins of empires and civilisations. It burns the tissues of the body, it sears the surfaces of the mind, it consumes the vitality of the spirit. Men acknowledge the truth of this when history is allowed to become the record of noise, and destruction and waste. It is upon the doings of this fire that the daily press lives, for what men call news is simply the roaring and crackling of the flames that burn and consume. But look more intently upon the same world and you see another fire burning, an undying fire of faith, love and loyalty, flaming up in the face of saints and martyrs, illuminating the preaching of prophets and apostles, and burning with a steady glow in the face of Jesus Christ.

It is the fire that burns but does not consume; it is upon this living flame that religion, the Church and the peace of the soul immortal depend for their existence; and it is from the presence of this mysterious fire in human history that the spiritual hopes of mankind derive their justification. As that flame broke out and illuminated the desert experience of Moses, so today it is the life of God in man's soul as the assurance of the presence in this fantastic world of material forces of something which does not disappoint, and in which we may confide.

When Moses realised this, he turned aside to see the great sight, why the bush was not consumed. That is to say, the perception of the mysterious features of this familiar sight moved him to investigate, to inquire, to act. God is always looking for the man who asks How? When a man takes life seriously enough to ask the reasons of things, God is ready to grant him his desire. Moses wanted to know why the bush was not consumed. That is our point of contact with spiritual reality today. All about us I seem to see the evidences of this undying fire. Here is something that cheers and encourages; something that comforts and strengthens; something that cleanses the soul of its waste, and gives peace and assurance to troubled hearts. What is the meaning of this blessedness of family life; this sacramental love of women and little children; the illuminating power of the Holy Scriptures, and the invigorating influence of religious fellowship? There is something in the world that has opened heaven to homesick souls; something that teaches stammering tongues to speak plainly, something that breaks the prison doors of the heart and releases man's pent up thoughts in prayer and praise; something that illuminates the path of life;

what is this? Everywhere do I seem to feel the hospitable heat of this tremendous fire; it glows upon the altar of loyal hearts, it flames up in the sterling faith of men; and the invariable thing is that nowhere is the fire going out. Neither does it waste nor hurt that upon which it feeds. And when I feel this about me, I can but say to my spirit: follow this fire. Search and inquire what it may mean to you. Question it until it gives up its secret.

This is God's way of drawing men. He does not approach us with a theory of fire, burdened with abstract speculations, but He lights the fire in human hearts; He makes it break out in the wilderness and challenges us to turn aside and see why the bush is not consumed. This is the essence of faith, for faith at heart is adventure. It is intellectual curiosity inspired by the desperate need of cold hearts in search of warmth, and lonely souls in need of companionship. That is why the appeal of Jesus is essentially a challenge to our thinking powers, for Jesus can mean nothing to indifferent natures. He is always looking for the man who is willing to say—"How?" Jesus is most real to living minds; to minds that have the courage of intellectual curiosity. Had Moses not turned aside to see, he had missed everything. Had he said: This is just another fire, some wandering shepherd, with whom I have no concern; or had he reasoned, What have I to do with this? My life is over and done with. There will never be any change in this drab outlook upon the wilderness. I am just a commonplace herdman and need expect no surprises, then, I say, Moses had missed everything. But the man at heart was keenly alive; he was intellectually curious, because he was spiritually sensitive,

and when he turned aside to see, something happened to him.

God spoke to him in a language that he could understand. The mystery of the bush yielded something of its meaning, and he heard a voice speaking to him, a familiar voice, yet strangely new. What an awakening moment this was. He knew all about Abraham and the patriarchs, and the covenant promises made long ago to his people. It was a determination to identify himself with the promises and the chosen people, that had been the cause of his exile. Down in Egypt he had been taught the history of his people, for his mother had seen to that; but now in the long wandering in the wilderness this had seemed an old, old, story. What hope had he of wonders in this dreary place, when he had heard no great voices even amid the luxury of Pharaoh's court? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the hope and joy of his race had these many years been silent and would speak no more; and suddenly, as if by a miracle, God speaks to him out of the bush, calls him by name, and under the spell of that Voice his whole history passed before him: his exile, his heartache, his disillusionment, his pain and his longing, and above all the feeling that had steadied him through the whole of the discipline that this simply could not be the end. Somewhere and somehow God must break in on his soul. And this is what happened to him, when the Voice called him by name.

Let us not miss the significance of this, for a man's name stands for the lonely mystery of individuality. We have all felt it, this isolation in the midst of the crowd. There is something incommunicable about each of us. To be a person, shut in with our own thoughts,

only partially knowing ourselves, and yet feeling something rising within us that demands expression. We are strangers, dear outsiders, even to those who love us. It is not our worst, but often our very best that we cannot express. We have no language nor speech to tell it, yet until it is told we can have no peace. And now this voice of God, calling Moses by name, enfolding him in the deep mystery of existence, making him aware that at the heart of the universe there was a Friend, understanding and compassionate, who had even in that long desert obscurity never forgotten him. It was the great moment when the man found his God, when the old traditions, the ancient hopes awoke into life and revealed at their center a Person, a Friend. It is this all men seek. To confess that you are lonely and friendless; that this attractive outside world is for the spirit a waterless desert, and then suddenly to come upon a fire burning in the wilderness; and question it because you want peace and compassion and forgiveness, is to have God speak to you out of the bush, this, I say, is the moment of your being understood. It is the way man finds his God. There are deep, sweet mysteries in the heart of the rose, but they have no power of realisation until the winds of the spring whisper to them, and the gracious kindness of the summer sun warms them into life. It is then the rose opens and unfolds. What the sun and wind are to the rose, the undying fire is to man's heart. We do not suspect what capacities are hidden within these pent up lives, so cold and cheerless and lonely in the desert, until the gracious heats of this tremendous fire kindle them into hopes and ambitions; but we must take the initiative, draw nigh and question the bush why it is not consumed. This Moses did; and when God spoke to him,

two things happened: the birth of reverence and the expansion of life's meaning.

Moses was told to remove his shoes, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. That is the first radical change in the human spirit, when a man finds his God. It is to realise the sanctity of the common life. Still it required a strong measure of faith to believe this about the wilderness. How could this lonely region, a place of dreary toil and unrelieved monotony, take on the character of sacredness? Yet in his old age Moses confessed the glory in the desert when he spoke of the "goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush." This acknowledgment, the strength of a patient following, is the confirmation of an experience which had taught him that no incident of man's pilgrimage can be common or unclean where God dwells. It was communion with God, and his capacity for participating in that fellowship that transformed the desert.

It is the passionate desire of the human heart to have a sacred place; a place of retirement into which the noisy world cannot come. The finest elements of spiritual experience cannot bear too much exposure. There is peril in the glare, the spirit shrinks from the "garish day." We all have our reticences and reserves, for no man can show the whole of himself to another. This often develops the habit of introspection, wherein the mind wearily turns over its contents, until the whole becomes shop worn, like a counter of delicate fabrics at the end of a bargain day. Introspection increases loneliness, but also arouses the need for disclosure. The whole world is in search of a good listener. That is why man wants a sacred place; a place where the spirit may disclose its secrets without fear of misunderstand-

ing. When one finds in this closet life the opportunity for communion with a sympathetic and understanding nature, introspection is changed into confession, and the spirit eases itself of its burden. That is what Moses found here. We need not inquire too curiously into his heavy thoughts during the long exile in the wilderness, but note that in the dreary and lonely place One came to him in whom he could confide, and thus the desert blossomed as a rose, and the open spaces which once gave no shelter to the sensitive spirit became a sanctuary of God.

We need to understand the sacredness of common life. We are still inclined to identify God with unusual happenings, with strange or splendid episodes; we have yet to realise that God is manifest in the steady flame of love and faith which illuminates the toil worn faces in the common round of daily duties. We must cease to measure our possibilities by the senses, and look for their fulfillment in spiritual relations with the ever present God. By some such intention do we acknowledge the presence of the Spirit in the undying fire which glorifies the lives of those about us; and from this rebirth of reverence will come an immense expansion of life's meaning.

Moses, the disillusioned herdsman, who had long believed himslef forgotten, is called to be the leader of God's people. A sense of mission, of predestination possessed him, and he became aware that life was just beginning; for the rebirth of reverence which increases one's sense of Divine reality, always expands one's conception of responsibility. As Amos puts it: "The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" To know God well is to become aware of His need of us; to translate the experience of His fellowship into ser-

vice, and to see in the world around us, the field of that service. If we are but slightly aware of capacity and opportunity it means that we are ignorant of God. We are forgetting that Jesus came to cast fire upon the earth; but if Jesus is the fire, *man is His bush.* If we are to augment the sense of life's meaning we must face its demands with faith; we must look at the ordinary tasks, that so often become monotonous and commonplace as manifestations of the love and devotion, which first illuminated the face of Christ, and now shines by reflected light from the faces of His children. To attempt this in the spirit of adventure is to find the meaning of life; it is to put an original interpretation on its familiar experiences, and when challenged in this bold fashion it rewards us by granting our demands.

The great fire is burning around us today, and if we come within the scope of its hospitable heats we shall experience, even in desert darkness, the companionship of Him in Whose Face hath flamed for man's salvation the light of the knowledge of the glory of God:

"While I see day succeed the deepest night,
How can I speak but as I know?—my speech
Must be, throughout the darkness, 'It will end;
The light that did burn, will burn.'"

VI

THE DANGER OF THE DESERT

"And Moses said unto God, Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"—EXODUS 3:11.

IT is passing strange that a man who understood the vision of the burning bush should have displayed such extreme reluctance in putting into practice the lesson he learned from it. The burning bush was the Heavenly vision. It played the same part in the call of Moses as Paul's vision did in his, yet Moses hesitated to obey.

Recall for a moment the reason why Moses went into the desert. It came from a mistaken application of a noble passion. He determined to break away from the killing luxury and splendid idleness of Pharaoh's court; and the impulse to do this came from a sudden realisation of his racial identity with his oppressed brethren. But he made the mistake, common to youth, of supposing that the birth of social passion automatically equipped a man for leadership in social service; and by killing the Egyptian taskmaster he got himself into such an embarrassing situation that flight into the wilderness was the only remedy. The value of his long stay was most important. He sobered and disciplined his passions, he cultivated the admirable habit of reflection, he improved his knowledge of God and of himself.

But the time had now come when it was necessary to return to his people, if his life was to amount to anything. The crisis came in the vision of the burning bush. The value of the desert discipline appears in the ability of the man to turn aside and see the great sight. That was the climax of his spiritual education, and the next logical step would have been obedience. But just here the man hesitates. And this fact shows us that while the discipline of the desert has its advantages, it also has its dangers. He brings no less than five serious objections to his going to Pharaoh. First he pleads unfitness—Who am I that I should go? Then he urges his lack of knowledge—What shall I say? Then he brings forward the probable unbelief of the people. Besides, he pleads, he is a man of slow speech, without eloquence or persuasive power. And, most serious of all, he suggests the propriety of sending someone else. Perhaps the dazzling light of the burning bush has hidden these things from us, mayhap his splendid future has made us indifferent to these desert experiences; yet it is clear that the man's career had reached a crisis, that everything would depend upon how he responded to his call.

Why did he hesitate? Why was he so unwilling to obey the Heavenly vision? Its explanation is paradoxical. The education necessary to equip us with adequate knowledge of God and life may, if too prolonged, expose us to the dangers of inertia and unfitness for response. There is a very delicate balance between vision and action. Small things may disturb this balance and expose us to ruin. While in Egypt the man's knowledge of God was less than that of the wilderness, but his power of action was greater; but here the very weight of knowledge was seriously interfering with his

power of action. Sometimes the most zealous and active man is so because his knowledge of the cause he is working for is small. This is the zeal of youth untempered by experience. But, on the other hand, knowledge often paralyses zeal. A fool's power of action is often greater than that of a wise man. And while the desert discipline was necessary for Moses, the danger lay in the paralysis of the power of action by excess of knowledge.

The truth is that his spiritual life had grown self-centered. The reality of the needs of his people and the passion which had driven him from Pharaoh's court had faded out, and his life had settled down to prolonged brooding upon the mystery of God. His religion was more a matter of exalted thought and feeling and less of passion and activity. In the beginning this had given rest to his troubled soul, it had refined and exalted his spiritual sensibilities, but latterly this same habit of reflection tended to become an end in itself and to exclude any influence that might interfere with his quiet and drive him out upon the big world with its hard work and service. The vision of the bush in the first instance was an irritation, an interference with his quiet. He was like a man who lay too long in bed of mornings. He was about to become a spiritual sluggard, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?"

We see this strange thing in the spiritual life of to-day. On the one hand the world is full—too full it seems to us—of men whose zeal is out of all proportion to their knowledge. Religious and social adventurers are going forth to battle upon impulse of one sort or another whose doings suggest even to the man in the street that they are novices at the business. They are entirely indifferent to guiding principles and equally

careless of their destination. They are exceedingly confused as to terminal facilities. Their motto might well be that of the facetious American: "We do not know where we are going, but we are on the way." Anyone can see that these people would be better for a period of silence, that the chief thing needed is reflection and quiet. Nothing short of a desert experience will fit them for real usefulness, for their unfitness for permanent service is due to lack of spiritual knowledge and personal discipline. They do not know God; they are poorly informed as to themselves; they tend to become extremists, faddists, and the like.

Those who take a more serious view of life, who feel that before a man begins a work he should count the cost or before he starts on a journey he should consider his end and goal, may easily point out their faults and suggest the propriety of a wilderness discipline. But there is another side. The Church is undoubtedly full of people whose knowledge of God is great; they bear in their lives the marks of the wilderness; they have learned how to dream and brood and reflect. Some even have seen the burning bush and heard the great voice calling; but nevertheless many of these finely equipped lives are painfully lacking in adaptability. They do not easily adjust themselves to their time. They do not respond to the calls of the day to come up and help as many think they should. Toward the fresh movements of life, the new endeavours toward social and spiritual betterment, they manifest an attitude of indifference, and when these new things press hard upon them they become restless, unhappy, betray irritation. They advance one reason after another why they should not respond. At bottom their superior knowledge of God and undoubted loyalty to Christ and

the Church make them shirkers in the face of practical applications of this knowledge to their own time.

In these two classes appear the two extreme views of personal development which have ever divided men into groups and furnished material for social philosophers. One is known as collectivism, the other as individualism. The collectivist believes that he realises himself in the mass movements of life. In the Church he gets the quickest sense of personal significance from being in the crowd, from being vocally on the side of popular moral and religious reforms. This man is fundamentally dependent upon what others think of him for what he thinks of himself. He can value himself only when he is in the moving mass. Solitude of any sort is stagnation, the paralysis of his mental and moral processes. He simply cannot stand still and think. Alone he is nothing, in the mass everything.

Such a man's signal virtue will be capacity for quick response, for immediate action, but his ever-present peril will be instability, fickleness, the speedy exhaustion of interest, and consequent reaction. The great movements which have swept over the Church and nation in recent years have left upon the wayside multitudes of men and women who are now in a thoroughly reactionary mood. Their capacity for service has been exhausted because they were caught in the vanguard and hurried along into positions which they could not hold. Their great need is to sit down and think and brood and pray. They need to get acquainted with God. More than anything else they need the discipline of the desert.

The individualist, on the other hand, realises himself in quite another fashion. He does not care for the crowd; he is naturally suspicious of the moving mass; he is always critical of sudden changes of front. He

seeks personal significance, not in what others think of him, but in what he thinks of himself—his appreciation of character and intention. Such a man will naturally think for himself; reflection will be easy to him. His great capacity will be stability, a moral invariability, an independence of shifting movements about him. His character will show itself in a certain fixity of position, a sure superiority to popular clamour, a certain enjoyment of temporary unpopularity, and a rather irritating indifference to surface opinions of all kinds. Mix conscience and devotion to Bible and Church with these elements, leaven it with spiritual knowledge and grace, and you get a peculiarly strong type of man, a man capable of leadership and possessing staying power.

The peculiar danger of this man is in his preference for his own ways. If the external conditions of life were constant, if the movements of the world about him remained the same, this man would perhaps become the ideal citizen and Christian. But, as a matter of fact, the movements of life are never constant. They are as changeable as the waves of the sea, particularly in an adolescent democracy such as ours, and the attitude such a man may take and often does take toward the new movements, ideals, and concepts of the time is one, I will not say of wilful disobedience, but certainly of hesitation. The very glare of the bush may blind him to the practical significance of much that is about him. This man, more than any other type, is susceptible to the danger of the desert.

He may, for one thing, become a religious epicure. Such a man tends to keep his emotions or opinions in a state of isolation. He may make religious feeling an end in itself and insist upon repeating his emotions in every act of worship. His passion is to keep the service

just as it was and has been from the beginning, whether the "other man" is edified or not. His epicureanism may take an intellectual form and he become a sermon taster, in love with the enticing words of man's wisdom, or he may develop into a defender of doctrine and believe, sincerely believe, that the very words and phrases of his doctrine are essential to the Gospel message, so that his mind is closed to all communications of truth that do not come by the well worn channels. This is the peril that ever waits to defeat the ends of orthodoxy.

Such a man may become a rank outsider, a looker-on upon other men's matters, and so break the connection between his thoughts and the currents of life about him. The great difficulty, of course, is to keep the balance between zeal and knowledge. Permanent work depends at bottom on judgments of value, in which a man is compelled to decide between opposites. This develops in thoughtful men the faculty of the judge. But the judicial temperament is usually fatal to the temperament of the advocate. And upon advocates rather than judges rests the responsibility of advance movements.

The danger is that the thoughtful man will prolong reflection until his mental habits become those of a judge rather than an advocate. He thereby loses his power of movement. Such a habit, when it becomes fixed, especially in religious matters, leaves the man, in spite of his great personal worth, inert and useless so far as advance movements are concerned. When the celebrated French sculptor, Rodin, was asked why he made his *Meditation* without arms and legs, he replied: "It needs none, for the habit of meditation unduly prolonged tends to balance opposites to such a nicety as to prevent decision and so results in complete inertia."

The end of this man is usually pessimism. He feels

himself out of sympathy with his time. He suffers from a self-imposed loneliness. How common a thing it is to see such a man a flaming evangelist at twenty-five, a pleasing religious philosopher at forty, and a gloomy misanthrope at sixty. This is the grave peril of the man who thinks too much. It is easy to remind the noisy collectivist that a city set on a hill cannot be hid, but it is equally important for the individualist to remember that a light set under a bushel cannot be seen. Reputation—what men think you are—is as influential as character—what you know yourself to be. For if stability turns upon character, influence—the power to market your spiritual products—turns upon reputation. A stream may be never so pure, but if men believe it contaminated they will not drink of it. A Christian, after all, is like a bank; he may be perfectly solvent, but if people think otherwise his influence will be strictly limited. This was the peril of Moses, and it is our peril. Too long contemplation of the Heavenly vision came dangerously near destroying his power to obey it.

What, then, were the elements in that vision which overcame his reluctance? They were two: First, the discovery of the nature of God; and second, the corresponding realisation of the power of human personality.

He learned what all true men come to learn, that the love of God makes itself real in action rather than contemplation. Love, active love, was the nature of Deity. The High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, was yet deeply and vitally interested in the human problem. He had heard the cry and felt the pain of His people in bondage. While Moses was composing psalms in the desert God had been suffering with His people in Egypt. And that is the great question after all. What does the great God think of the human problem? And what is

He willing to do to help man in his extremity? This great lesson, that God is a living God, that He lives in an active love for His fallen people, that He lives in the sorrows and the problems of His enslaved children, is carried to its fitting climax in the sorrows and sufferings of our blessed Saviour. No man can contemplate that great historic fact, that life of pity, that death for sin, that glorious resurrection, without feeling that God's supreme interest in the world is the human problem, that nothing human is foreign to Him, that He is in no sense an outsider, but one who by His incarnation identified Himself with all that concerns man's life. He felt their sorrows then, and He feels them now.

This lesson is not to be learned from books, but from living, from experience, and that is our burning bush. The light of it is breaking out all about us, the world is filled with its great illuminating power, if we only had wisdom to turn aside and see the great sight. And the essential meaning of this fact is this, that such knowledge of God, of His love and sympathy and passion to redeem, is absolutely essential to man's life. Man must have it. The Jews in bondage required it, and the world today requires it. To know the love of God in Christ, to realise that this is an active passion and power in human life, is the supreme need of the world today.

Moses could not realise this without discovering the power of the human personality to convey this knowledge to the world. It was a great thing to brood upon the mystery of the Eternal in the wilderness, to quiet the spirit in the golden glories and spacious atmosphere of that peaceful realm, but it was a greater thing to convey the knowledge of the Almighty's infinite compassion and purpose to the broken and burdened people in far away Egypt. He felt the question pressing upon

him: How was God to impart this truth unless he should go? He needs must have a man to carry it. The treasure has ever come in earthen vessels—that is the great proof of man's worth to God. Man can help God. By his faith and willingness to be used man has been permitted to release the redemptive power to the world. As God came to the Israelites by Moses and to the Gentiles by the apostles, so He must come to our age. A Christian out of contact with men is useless to Christ; a man out of communion with Christ is useless to the world.

Thus we see both the need and the danger of the desert experience. We require its discipline to equip us with knowledge of God, but this of itself is useless until it gets into the channels of life. And there is as great a need today for us to rise up and go back into this modern Egypt as there was in the ancient times for Moses to cast hesitation behind him and plunge into the difficult task of delivering the Jews from the hand of Pharaoh.

Today, as then, the Great Voice is calling: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And if we have well learned the lesson of the desert discipline we shall be swift to respond: "Here am I, send me."

VII

THE POWER OF THE DESERT

"Go thou near, and hear all that Jehovah our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that Jehovah our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it."—DEUTERONOMY 5:27.

THESE words were spoken to Moses by the Hebrews when they keenly felt the need of a revelation from God. They embody a confession of his power as a prophet and a tacit acceptance of his leadership.

This incident suggests a contrast with Moses' first attempt at leadership. Then we saw a discontented youth, passionately attacking a problem he did not understand, and getting rejected for his pains. We hear the scornful words of his associates: "Who made you a judge over us?" and we see the young man, panic-stricken, fleeing the court of Pharaoh and losing himself in the desert of Midian. Here, on the contrary, the people are ready to accept his leadership. They recognise him to be a man of spiritual insight, cleanness of life, wise, sane, and well balanced. He is a man capable of communion with God. They feel the need of a mediator, an interpreter of the Divine will. What has accomplished this mighty change? Once again we must go back to the desert for an answer.

The desert experience of Moses falls into three stages. The first stage was one of discipline; the sec-

ond, a stage of remarkable escape from its dangers; the third stage is an illustration of the power of that experience.

For the exercise of a great spiritual influence over others a man requires two things: First, his testimony must be based upon an assured reality. He must be sure of God. He must not only know God, but know that he knows. Secondly, he must have a power in himself to get his testimony believed. Moses had both of these qualifications. The inevitable impression made upon the people was that he knew God. The other impression quickly followed; they were sure they could best reach the Divine purposes through the leadership of Moses. Man's life has two sides, a fruit side and a root side. Men judge us by the fruits we bear. The fruit of Moses' desert experience is seen in his power over the people. He could inspire confidence in his testimony. But the fruit we bear is determined by the soil in which life is planted. The peculiar power of Moses over the people was not that of a military or political leader, but of a spiritual man. He had qualified as a mediator and interpreter for God. This power is derived from the root side of his life, from the accumulations of his forty years in the wilderness of Midian.

The acceptance of Moses' leadership was due first of all to the fact that the Hebrews were conscious of their deepest religious need, the need of a revelation from God. There is a profound philosophical meaning in the proverb: "Where there is no vision the people perish." Where there is no faith in God's authority over human life, sufficient to influence conduct, man casts off restraint and so perishes. The French Revolution furnishes a classic illustration of this truth. Re-

ligion is the bond of human society as well as the conservator of man's moral life. The ages of history in which men have least realised the Divine authority have been periods of disaster. On the contrary, wherever Divine authority has been clearly recognised it has produced eras of happiness and progress.

The reality of God was the supreme fact of life, which the Hebrews were just beginning to recognise. After centuries of ignorance and spiritual blindness the tremendous fact had been suddenly thrust upon them. That smoking mountain, that mysterious but compelling Voice from the clouds had confronted them with the fact of God. They felt the mighty compulsion of the unseen; they awoke to the deep and tender mystery which enveloped their lives, and out of it came a realisation of the mystery within themselves, of unfulfilled desire and spiritual need and consciousness of sin. The first effect of this new knowledge was an increase of discomfort, an augmented fear; and from this fear came an intensified sense of incapacity. Of themselves they could not commune with God. Who could look upon God and live? Who among them dared approach the smoking mountain? They were like the Jews of Isaiah's time, who, when they realised the signal vengeance of the Almighty upon the Assyrian host, went about the streets of Jerusalem crying: "Who among us can live amid the everlasting burnings?"

This feeling prompted them to look about them for a leader. They needed a mediator, an interpreter. They were like the Jews of Ezekiel's day, who, when they heard of the fall of Jerusalem, came clamouring to the hitherto neglected prophet in search of reliable information about God. This increasing sense of the nearness of God combined with their intensified feeling

of incompetence made them favourable to the leadership of the one man in their midst who was sure of God. "Go thou near, and hear what Jehovah our God shall say: and speak thou unto us * * * and we will hear it, and do it."

The times in which we live indicate in many ways a feeling akin to that of these ancient Hebrews. The fundamental problem of the time is the problem of authority. Whether we view it as a domestic or a social problem, whether we consider it from the point of view of politics or government, the age keenly feels that the problem at bottom is a religious one. It was never harder to do without God, nor perhaps more difficult to find Him than now. Men everywhere confusedly but keenly confess the need of authority. They miss the guiding hand upon destiny. They are beginning to experience the discomforts of the unsheltered life. Like Job, they had thought to die in their nests, but they now know it was not to be. One by one the little finalities have given away. The rapid advance of civilisation has destroyed the temporary protection given by wealth, culture, and earthly success; and men have been forced much against their wills to realise that out and beyond their temporary shelters lies another territory of vast spiritual experience in which men must needs find shelter from God.

The swift disenchantments of life tend to increase the feeling of instability and uncertainty in all spiritual matters. This modern restlessness, the epidemic uncertainty which Matthew Arnold has well called "life's sick fatigue," is all the more impressive because it is vague. It does not mean that men are ready to believe in the God of the Bible; by no means does it imply that they are ready to accept the leadership of the Church;

but it does mean that there is a growing disposition everywhere to look about for prophets and leaders, for men who in some assured fashion hold the secret of the eternal and unseen realms. The age is eager to hear the message of the pathfinder; it is ready to follow the man who has the courage to storm the heights of God's holy mountain and give to the world a new basis for faith and confidence. The augmented moral sensibility of the times, a by-product of Christianity, makes men demand more of themselves than in former ages. The quest for safe conduct has become a compelling and passionate obsession, and this more than any other thing constitutes the opportunity of the spiritual man to show that the Word still has its ancient power and by his confident testimony to bring men a true knowledge of the Most High God.

The acceptance of Moses' leadership was due in the second place to the fact that the Hebrews realised that God must reveal Himself through a human personality. Their very knowledge of God made them fear Him. Who could look upon God and live? They required a mediator, an interpreter. Go thou near and hear for us—by this they confessed the moral supremacy of their leader.

Emerson has finely said that "character is the moral order seen through the individual nature." If the vision of God is essential to human happiness, this vision can only be communicated by way of a man; and while this truth is most impressively shown in the Incarnation, it was long anticipated in the ministry of the lawgivers and prophets of the old dispensation. The Hebrews felt that this great God, whom to know aright meant stability, peace, and progress, must reveal Himself through a human personality; and they turned to

Moses, asking, not for expert knowledge concerning social problems, nor even guidance in matters of government, but specific information concerning the Divine will, with a disposition to obey when it should be given.

Moses gained the power to communicate the revelation of God in the desert discipline. Such knowledge cannot be obtained in the rush and hurry of life. A man must go apart and get a just perspective of things. It is only among those who have learned how to lead a "life of thoughtful stillness" that such a revelation is realised. The men of spiritual power have always known the desert discipline. Moses and Elijah, John the Baptist and Paul gained their deep insight into the mind of God in this way. Even in the midst of the crowd they never lost the independence of solitude. Few seek the desert voluntarily. They are usually driven into it through failure and mistake. It is this fact alone that should reconcile us to the humiliations of our first failures. The most active life needs, at times, periods of seclusion, quiet, and rest. God keeps His greatest communications for those who know how to be alone. His word ever is: "Go forth into the plain and I will speak with thee." The plain is often desolate, but it frequently becomes the place of vision.

The world exhibits three types of men: The crowd-centered, the self-centered, and the God-centered.

Most of us are crowd-centered. We have no root in ourselves. We live only when we are in the moving mass. This is the ever-present danger of our democracy. Men imagine they cannot possibly go wrong if they are moving with the crowd. The crowd is a terrible despot; how quickly does it seize the enthusiast and tame him to its irrational will. Its deadly effect is to level individuality to the plane of environment.

Goodness never becomes real until self-selected, and that often in face of opposing forces; and yet how few of us can muster courage enough to break with the crowd, and enjoy the glorious distinction of standing for an unpopular cause. The blessing of failure of any kind is that it detaches a man from the crowd, and drives him into the desert to think and meditate and pray.

But the desert has its dangers, for here you will usually find the self-centered man. To break with the crowd is often the keenest pleasure of a strong nature. If one have talent, learning, personal force, it is an added distinction to be different from others. But how often have men exchanged the bondage of the crowd for the more subtle bondage of self-service. This was Plato's notion of a church of aristocratic philosophers, composed of men who could think themselves apart from the crowd and enjoy the delights of contemplation. This was the temptation of the post-apostolic Church, when men sought salvation by forsaking the crowd and becoming hermits and monks. This, too, is the danger of mere culture, even the highest. Goethe was in many respects a great man, of incomparable gifts and intellectual force, but utterly loveless and barren of the higher virtues, a perfect type of the self-centered man. And this is the danger of much of the polite and refined religion of the times. There is a tendency to limit religion to such rare atmospheres and secluded regions as to make the devotee self-centered even in his highest devotional efforts. Religion of this sort produces a static rather than a dynamic piety. Men become stationary engines, rather than locomotives. If the world is fortunate enough to attach itself to their lives they can do much good, but they lack the

power of mobility; they cannot go out into the highways and hedges and draw men to Christ.

Moses escaped both of these dangers. His initial mistake detached him from the crowd, while his superior nature safeguarded him from a self-centered life; and in the desert he learned how to become a God-centered man. He learned there the reality of God, that it consisted not in a contemplative but in an active love. God was an activity, merciful, compassionate, and loving. Moreover, he learned that this loving purpose required a human ministry for its expression; and when he stood in the midst of the people they saw these two things: A man who had an assured knowledge of God, and one whose personality could inspire confidence in his leadership; hence they turned to him as their mediator and interpreter.

And this is the supreme function of the Christian man. Christianity does not aim to establish a Christian civilisation, but to produce a community of typical personalities. This typical personality is to stand in his generation as a burning and shining light; a man through whose individual nature

God shows sufficient of His light
For those in the dark to rise by.

For there is darkness, and men are vaguely conscious of it. Uncertainty characterises our thinking in all high directions, and nowhere more so than in the domain of the spirit. To see God again, to feel afresh the power of the Unseen and Eternal, once more to experience the guiding hand of Providence upon the affairs of the world—is not this the supreme need of the time? And it is to this typical personality, of which Moses is an

example, that the age must look for fresh light upon the deep problems of spiritual life and adventure.

It is the function of the Church to develop these typical personalities and release their power in the world. The historian of the future, in writing of our nation, will have occasion to say that the most remarkable feature of this age is what we call the social awakening. We see too keenly its extravagances and extremes; he will see its deeper meaning. The time has come for us to refrain from expending our energies upon criticisms and to turn our attention to appreciations. It is easy to point out the superficial and even harmful aspect of this awakening. It is easy to say that many are wasting their energies on doctoring symptoms rather than in the removal of causes. Extravagance and over-emphasis characterise new movements, but by no means adequately represent them.

What we Christians need to do is to consider the deeper aspect of the question. At bottom what does it mean? What opportunity does it bring home to us, and, above all, what chance does it offer to the spiritual man for regaining an assured leadership of the world? The heaving of the dough proves the presence of a mighty leaven. Visions are born of this awakening which disturb our ecclesiastical contentment. May it not be true that God is stirring up our nests and driving us back to the arena? May it not imply that our desert discipline is over, and that God is loudly calling upon us to come back into this modern Egypt with our saving message?

I believe this social awakening in its deeper aspect is bringing a mighty opportunity to the Church. It does not seem at present to be keenly alive to our spiritual message, but it is beginning to feel the need of a typical

personality; it is ready to appreciate the appearance of a man with an assured knowledge of God. It wants pathfinders, mediators, and interpreters of the will of Christ. It is ready to welcome guides who know the spiritual realm. For one thing many are beginning to realise that social redemption without personal religion is a failure. They are beginning to feel that personal love for Christ is the sole dynamic for social service. Social service without spiritual relationships at best can produce a child's garden. We know the flowers did not grow in that soil, and that the sun will wither them. As these ambitious schemes for social betterment have failed, men have been turning more eagerly to the Church. The very criticism of the Church which is so irritating to many is an implied tribute to its function. It is really a confession of the need and power of religion; it is at bottom a demand for the coming forth of typical personalities. Every successful effort to relieve social misery, and to allay the strife between the classes, prepares the way for the Gospel to reach the spiritual needs of men.

The great need, then, is not that Christian men should unite upon a method, but that the Church should produce typical persons, through whose lives and testimony men see God manifest in the flesh. What is required is not uniformity of method but identity of principle, with diversified individual application. We need guiding principles and fixed convictions, and these require for their cultivation a period of desert silence; but in the last analysis the only place where they become useful to God or man is in the practical leadership which comes from their application to the living problems of living men.

E. R. Sill tells a poetic story of a fine young soldier

fighting round his banner at the head of his column, while a craven lurks on the outskirts, who, envying the youth his shining blade, rejects his own sword because it is old and blunt, and flees the conflict. Anon comes the youth, clean forespent and weaponless, and finding the rejected sword in the sand seizes it and wins a mighty victory.

And that is a parable of modern life. First, we have seen this generation going forth to fight the forces of evil with the shining blade of social regeneration. We, too, have seen many like the craven who rejected the sword he had because it was old and seemingly blunt and fled the field. But now, after much fighting and many failures, comes the generation again, bannerless and weaponless, ready now to take up the old sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and eager to wield it in the cause of truth and righteousness.

And shall we who witness this mighty conflict, whose Gospel is the energy working through it, and who believe and have ever believed in the old sword of the Spirit—shall we leave these restless fighters to meet the enemy alone? God forbid! Rather is not this a time for us to use the old sword with greater zeal, seeing that the world is coming to our view of its power?

But if we are to do this we must put behind our testimony the courage of rich and deep experience, the persuasive and compelling influence of that typical personality, God begotten but man developed, to which in the hours of its deepest need the world has ever made its appeal, an appeal all the more impressive that it embodied vague hopes, and confessed disappointments, but supremely confident of one thing, the need of a mediator and interpreter of the will and the ways of God.

VIII

THE DEATH IN THE DESERT

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, and the Lord said unto him: This is the land; I have caused thee to see it; but thou shalt not go over thither."—DEUTERONOMY 34: 1-4.

GREAT men ought to die in high places. The top of Pisgah was a fitting place for the last scene of Moses' life. The Israelites, after forty years of wandering, had come to the base of the eastern range which constituted the last barrier to the Land of Promise. Here Moses bade farewell to his people, and went alone into the mountains.

He was an old man, but his eye was not dim, neither was his natural strength abated. As he climbed the lower slopes, the dusty desert lost its grimness in a mystic haze, and he steadily plodded upward until he stood on the top of Pisgah. Here before him, in wonderful outline, lay the land of his dreams and desires. Far to the north he could see the snowy summits of Lebanon and Hermon; shimmering to the south of Esdraelon, and flanked by the twin domes of Gerizim and Ebal lay the lake of Galilee; to the far south, the Dead Sea—grim reminder of retributive justice; at his feet the deep tropical trench of the Jordan valley, with the walled city of Jericho, soon to fall before Joshua's army, guarding its western slope; while directly in front lay the great central range, in one of whose wind-

grieved gashes he could descry the white walls of the hill fortress of Jebus, future city of God.

All this he saw with the eye, but with the vision of the soul he saw other things. It was the Land of Promise, of his dreams and desires. This was the country where he hoped to see Israel growing to maturity, learning in the ways of obedience and holiness to become the missionary race to a lost world. Here he expected to find rest after labour, to grow old and die among his own people. All this he saw and felt, but he knew it was not to be. He could look upon it, but never enter in. Too late he had come to it; he could see it, appreciate it, but he was dying. What a moment for a man like this—epochal, full of tragic disappointment.

What were his thoughts on that wind swept height? Like a great ball life lay behind him, and he could see all of it, the grave and the gay, the purposes of good and evil, the uselessness of sighing and crying, of fighting and striving. He had a complete chart of it, but his knowledge came too late:

There's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only I'm dying.

He felt the burden of an incommunicable wisdom. After all, wisdom was just a catalogue of useless regrets, a thing which by no magic could be imparted to others. And there was an even more disturbing feeling; this vision of the Land of Promise was his reward. His reward? Ah, how bitter that was! To be permitted to look upon what he had toiled for, and suffered for; to see it in its attractiveness and charm, all the while knowing that it is not for him, that he has come to it too late—that is indeed a bitter thought.

Such a moment comes to most of us. There is a time with all of us, if we live long enough, when we must go into a lonely mountain and gaze upon a land of promise—and realise that it is not to be ours. A clear realisation that much of what we have desired and laboured for, and believed that we deserved to have, is never to be ours, is inseparable from any prolonged existence on this planet. That is why a vein of melancholy runs through the happiest life. It is not only present in old age, but makes itself felt in maturity, and sometimes even adds a somber tinge to the long, long thoughts of youth.

This natural melancholy has begotten much pessimistic philosophy, proverbial wisdom, and sentimental poetry, and on the whole introduces a strain of mystification into life's clearest experiences. Is life a cheat after all? Are we creatures of delusion? Are we ever doomed to disappointment? Are we inevitably destined to view from life's highest summits the grim fact of failure?

I wish you to note this fact, for it is a fact of normal experience: We are so constituted that we cease to want the thing we have, we live in our anticipations and move in the direction of our visions; and frequently we seem to reach these Pisgah heights, and look with undimmed eye upon what we have worked for and wanted, only to realise that it is not for us. We have sown and others have reaped the fruit, we have patiently endured and others attain the reward, and the best that life offers is a vision of the thing that we have missed—just a Pisgah sight before we die. To live until we are wise enough to live better, to look upon the entire circle of life and know the whole of it, to gain from experience a wisdom that would make

rich coming generations and then realise that we cannot impart it, to awake to the consciousness that we have entered into our inheritance too late to enjoy it—that we can see life whole, only now we are dying—this is destiny.

Moses must stand aside and allow Joshua to reap the reward; he must look upon the eager faces of Jewish youth pressing into the land, with never a thought of him, and then turn away to the bleak uplands to die alone. Oh, these Pisgah sights, how disappointing they are, especially when many of us have to live on, long after we know beyond a doubt that the thing we have laboured for and desired can never be ours. Doomed, perchance, to wander in some Arabian desert, amid sand and waste and desolation, and know all the time that beyond the mountains lies the land of milk and honey, and that it is not for us, nor ever can be.

The experience of Moses is even more perplexing when we consider the reason why he was not permitted to enter the land. On one occasion he made a mistake. The people clamoured. They were always clamouring and complaining, and for a moment Moses became impatient and God-forgetting, and took some credit to himself for the waters of Meribah. This was a sin, of course, but a very small sin, a quite excusable offense; yet for this, and this alone, he lost his reward.

God seems partial at times, for, as Dr. Davidson has pointed out, He appears to punish the mistakes of some more severely than the sins of others. The sin of Saul son of Kish was quite insignificant in comparison with the transgressions of David, and yet God rejected Saul and pardoned David. The mistake of Moses was insignificant in comparison with the continuous clamouring of the Israelites; yet Moses was punished, and they

entered in. The sin of Moses was not only a mistake, but a mistake of impulse. There was nothing deliberate or intentional about it. He was so absorbed and troubled with the continual nagging of the rebellious Israelites that he forgot himself for an instant, and yet for this he could not enter in.

This is another of life's inevitable facts, the fact of solidarity. No man lives to himself, but in a series of relationships to others. Moses usually acted with reference to the needs of his people. He was one of those men, rare in any age, so conscientious in his sense of responsibility for others that he had no time to think of himself. He had to be prophet, lawgiver, judge, and father to a very immature and selfish people. What time had he to think of himself? What opportunity in the crowded day for personal cultivation? Was it an inexcusable thing that he should lose self-control for an instant? Was it fair to punish him so severely? Whatever we think of this, it is certainly true to life as we know it. We are unavoidably linked to one another. We share in the weaknesses and limitations of those closest to us, even while doing our full duty by them.

Here is a mother with large possibilities for culture and spiritual experience, linked to a large family pinched by poverty, enmeshed in group selfishness, or that even more deadly evil of thoughtlessness. What time has she for personal cultivation? And if she grows petulant and at times becomes unspiritual, while her hungry brood clamours for attention, is she to be punished and kept from her reward? And yet how many mothers there are who find themselves, in middle life, old before their time, hard, cross-grained, and sullen, looking upon a land of promise, of youthful day

dreams, knowing all the while that it will never be theirs? Here is a man, capable of spiritual passion and high aspiration, crowded always by homely duties and undramatic tasks, who finds himself at last freed from such encumbrances, ready, it seems, to enjoy the fruits of life, ordered at such a time to climb some Pisgah and look down upon the land of his dreams and then die without reward. The destiny of life rarely agrees with our expectations.

The power of those most closely related to us to limit, if not to destroy, our usefulness is a terrible thing. A minister's influence over his community is very strictly limited by the behaviour of his family; a man's fitness to possess the legitimate fruit of his labour is often determined by the attitude of those for whom he is directly responsible. Moses sinned because he was closely identified with the Israelites. It is best frankly to face the fact; sometimes the greatest punishments seem to be visited upon the accidental phases of conduct, while essential sins and deliberate perversions appear to be overlooked.

There is another aspect of this mistake worthy of notice. Even if we regard it as very sinful in itself, still, in comparison with what Moses accomplished, it appears quite inconsequential. Think of his masterly service in delivering the Israelites from Pharaoh, of his long, uncomplaining sojourn in the wilderness—this man who was fit from the beginning to live in a land of promise, of that journey of fifteen months which lengthened out into forty years, of the glories of Mount Sinai, and that after all these hardships and disappointments this man had led his people to the borders of the promised land. They had come through fire and water, but they were ready to enter in, a disciplined, eager

host. Why, then, was such a man penalised for such an insignificant mistake?

It is not easy to answer such a question satisfactorily. Still, the important thing to observe is that the behaviour of Moses stands out in strong relief on the background of this mystery. Whatever be the questions raised by the speculative mind concerning the justice of this procedure, they seem not to have occurred to the man most vitally interested. For years he had known the costliness of his mistake, but his behaviour after his sin was, if such a thing be possible, more exemplary than before. There was no relaxing of vigilance, no fault finding with Providence, no fretful complaining of destiny. He did his duty like a man, with never a thought of himself. He had a manly faith in his destiny, even when that destiny seemed dark, and a passionate ambition to do his work well. He was young with the eternal youth of high aspiration, the splendid vigour and poise of one conscious of a mission. His spirit does not break even when he realises the incompleteness of this life. He never seems so great, so strong, so full of resource and command of the future as when he presses up the mountain to take a last look at the land that he loved.

What was the source of his tremendous peace? Why had he escaped misgivings as to the justice of Providence? Before we answer this we must consider the important difference between accepting your destiny as God shapes it, and weakly acquiescing in your nature as you find it. Your nature is what you are now; but your destiny is what you may become, if you use well what God has given you. It is a very common but very contemptible opinion, that because one is naturally weak and poor spirited, it is therefore useless to strive or to

desire. Nature is what it is, some say, and you cannot change it. Such an opinion is a manifest confession of weakness; it is a false estimate of human nature. It is quite true that if human nature be left to its own devices it will not change for the better, but then it is our business to change our nature, and bring its aims and impulses up to the level of destiny. God has been pleased to give to every man the materials for the making of a good life. It is for us to use them or die. The man who accepts himself as he now is is lost. He is defeated without a fight. But he who accepts his destiny as God plans it will surely change his nature for the better, and come to his end in peace.

We become aware of the working of Providence in life ordinarily through some form of denial or reverse. Something crosses man's track, and breaks up the continuity of life. And when this happens it is common to find fault with Providence. Some say, if we cannot enter the Promised Land, we will cease to strive at all. But this is fatal to all the higher interests of the soul. Even when we think that punishment falls more heavily upon the accidental rather than the essential mistakes of life, still we ought never to give over striving for spiritual betterment. But if one is to resist the temptations suggested by this experience, one must have resources, and these are adequately provided in the divine plan for our life.

We should be ambitious to bring our natures up to the level of our destiny, a destiny opened to us by the redemptive mercies of God. We may never attain to the promised land just as we now conceive it; it may chance that just some Pisgah sight will be all that we shall get of that; but the important thing is that, by learning how to accept our destiny, we shall bring our

natures into conformity with the divine ideal; we shall develop a disposition fitting us for companionship with the Most High God.

It was his great faith in his destiny that enabled Moses to stand firm on Pisgah's height and surrender his earthly reward. It was the finest renunciation of a life of utter selflessness, and the source of his confidence in God is directly traceable to his desert experience. There he had been disciplined; there he had learned to escape its dangers; there, too, he had discovered its power to link him to God. There he had seen the vision of the burning bush, and from it years later he drew inspiration. His aim in life was to "know the good will of him that dwelt in the bush." This was his great accumulation which neither change nor disappointment could diminish, and it was this which, in the last hours of his career, enabled him with quiet heart and serene faith to accept his destiny. Moses believed in the goodness of God, and his faith in this, the deepest element in the divine nature, suggests three impressive truths:

The closer we are to the divine purposes, the more rigourous is He in judging and punishing our mistakes. The blunders of a leader are more costly than those of a follower. The clamours of the crowd were inconsequential; they were but children, of little importance either individually or in mass; but Moses was the leader. His mistake was vital because he was God's representative. If our mistakes often seem to be visited with greater penalties than they deserve, may this not indicate the fact that God takes a far deeper interest in our behaviour than we think He does. We have no right to think that our life has no importance. The very privations which issue from our blunders should

remind us of the critical character of all actions, of what Chesterton calls "tremendous trifles." This is why, in proportion as a man grows in the comprehension of God, he becomes increasingly severe with himself. It means the rigid scrutiny of thoughts and words, because such a life is becoming more capable of leadership. Leadership means influence, and influence means creative responsibility. The punishments of God often measure man's importance.

The continuity of the work rather than the satisfaction of the worker is the important thing with God. Moses is forced to realise the truth, that with God there is no such thing as an indispensable man. He had led the children of Israel for forty years. He had become an institution; it seemed impossible to think of the future without his leadership; still he is commanded to step aside, not because he is old or unfit, but simply because it is God's will. He did it gracefully because he saw in it another manifestation of the "good will of him that dwelt in the bush." His great renunciation was the fruit of that long, silent period in the desert, when he came to know the mind of the Eternal.

The work is more important than the workman. "Be the workmen what they may," says Bacon, "let us speak of the work; the true greatness of kingdoms and estates, and the means thereof." Moses' career was a means to an end, not the end in itself. This was the final and highest phase of faith in the great workmen who laid the foundations of God's Kingdom in this world. Thye always thought of the work—its continuity and permanence. Their prayer was ever: "Establish thou the work of our hands, yea the work of our hands, establish it."

Such a faith is necessary if we are to accept our destiny, for it is a very common thing in this world to outlive our usefulness. We appear to be born either before or just after a favourable time, or we fit ourselves for a form of service we deem indispensable, only to find that the times have changed and we cannot market our wares. It is quite apparent to us that Moses had outlived his usefulness. He was a law-giver, and the time needed a soldier. Moses must give way to Joshua, just as in a later time Elijah had to make way for Elisha. Sometimes the work God gives a man to do unfits him for the thing he desires to do. David wanted to build the temple, but God made him a man of war. So it often happens that our children enter the land which we are permitted to see only from some Pisgah height; it remains to the end a land of dreams. In this life there is no fulfillment.

But these unfulfilled desires are the sure prophecies of another and enlarging experience; for all temporal experiences lead out into eternal spaces, opening upon the wide horizons of spiritual relationships. Sometimes we see from Pisgah, not only the land of our dreams, but things of which we never dreamed. We are startled by a glimpse of the shining domes and glory crowned towers of the Celestial City. We awake to the realisation that in this world we have no abiding place, that our land of promise cannot be confined to homely earth, but that somewhere beyond the sighing and the crying there is a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

PART III

PROPHETIC STRAINS OF OLD EXPERIENCES

IX

RELIGION—WITH RESERVATIONS

"Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not."—II KINGS 10:28, 29.

WHAT interest have we in the misdoings of an old Hebrew king who has been dead these three thousand years? What are we to do with the sanguinary story contained in this chapter except to comment on the extraordinary thoroughness with which the man carried out his plan? The answer is that the one subject of perennial interest is human nature. No matter how far separated in time, or how different may be the social system under which one lives, man is and remains very much what he has always been, a complex of good and evil; therefore, the study of human nature, whether in ancient or modern characters, is one of the most profitable, as indeed it should be one of the most salutary of spiritual disciplines. So it is the element of human nature we find in ourselves that is latent in this story.

We shall be surprised when we get into it, to see how familiar it is. It is a wise thing for a man to be working at an understanding of himself and of his neighbours; to comprehend the strange inconsistencies and mutations of his mind; and the best way to illuminate this region is to go to the Bible where the stories are told for certain moral purposes. We get in these

stories what we often do not find in secular literature—the unveiling of human hearts. That is why the Bible is the way of life.

This story, so far as we are concerned, involves a secession, a marriage and a revolution. When King Solomon died, his foolish son Rehoboam came to the throne, and on account of his policy of taxation developed a schism among the people, and ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, went up to Samaria and set up house for themselves. Anyone that reads the story can readily understand the justification of that step so far as politics is concerned, yet one of the difficulties that Jeroboam confronted—and he was a man of considerable executive power and knowledge of human nature—was the religious phase of the thing. It would be highly inexpedient for his subjects to be going down to Jerusalem for their religion if they were to be separated politically from the nation whose capital was in that city. Hence he devised a scheme to have sanctuaries of his own, and choosing with great skill the sacred sites of the country, he founded a sanctuary in the north at Dan, and another in the south at Bethel, celebrated in Hebrew story as the place where Jacob had his dream. There he built churches, so to speak, and there he consecrated priests, and set up golden calves; images which were supposed to suggest God to the people. As someone has said, "he chose to break the second commandment in order to keep the first." He said to the people, "These be your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt!" The evil result of the marriage of the true with the false religion is seen in the history of the people down to the Assyrian captivity. Wherever Jeroboam is mentioned he is called "Jeroboam, the son

of Nebat, that made Israel to sin," and the awful idolatry which corrupted the people in later times, which was severely condemned by their prophets, and which was the primary reason for their deportation to Assyria, is to be traced directly to the unfortunate departure from the true religion which was characteristic of his policy.

This action also undermined the religious simplicity and purity of the people and made them familiar with other religions and other ways. So it was not difficult sometime after for Ahab to marry a Phœnician princess, Jezebel, a strong and vigourous-minded woman, who brought from her heathen home, her own private gods, and not content with that, determined that she would set up splendid sanctuaries for the worship of these strange and alien things. She had a temple to Astarte at Jezreel, where there were four hundred priests, and another at Samaria to Baal, where there were four hundred and fifty priests. We know the difficulties that arose from the grafting on to the parent stock of a false religion supported by the dynasty, and the enormous difficulty that Elijah, and his successor Elisha, had with those evil influences.

At the death of Ahab a revolution took place under Jehu, and the first thing the latter set himself to do was to root out the Baal-worship that Jezebel had brought into the land.

In some respects Jehu had a great many admirable traits. He was a root-and-branch sort of a man, a kind of man we all like, Rooseveltian in his strenuosity, so that his fierce and relentless driving up and down the land caused a proverb to be circulated in Israel which is current even unto this day. He was a man who knew how to get what he wanted, and who did not

stop at scruples when he was carrying out his plans. Hence he set out most valiantly to rid the land of Baal-worship, and the reading of this bloody chapter will convince anyone that it was a pretty thorough job.

A man like this at times enlists the co-operation of striking personalities. Here was the old, bearded anchorite, Jonadab, who had come out of his desert haunts to see what was going on, standing at the cross-roads when Jehu's chariot dashed up.

The horses were reined in, and the king looked down on him and said: "You are Jonadab, the leader of the Rechabites. Is your heart right with my heart, as my heart is with your heart?"

He said, "It is."

Then Jehu said, "Get into my chariot and go with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."

This was just the sort of job Jonadab liked. Hence you see these men linked together with all the moral and spiritual forces of the nation behind them going forth to root out the unspeakable evil of Baal-worship.

The chronicler, who looks down the line of history and sees the consequences resulting to future ages of the transactions of these men, says, "*Thus*,"—and there is an immense emphasis on that word for it covers all of those bloody transactions—"Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." "But," says he, "from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not."

This is where we come upon an interesting thing in the career of this man. Jehu believed in religion with reservations, and his attack on the sins of Baal and his unwillingness to attack the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, brings out one of the great structural lines

of cleavage in human nature between what we may call foreign sins and home-grown sins.

Baal at that time had no friends. Jezebel was dead. Baalism was an unpopular religion because it was politically expedient that it be unpopular. It was associated with the awful misgovernment of Ahab's reign. The people wanted to get rid of it. It was highly expedient for Jehu to encourage them in their desire. So this foreign religion, imported by an alien, that had no rating on the religious stock exchange, was a thing at which he could aim with the utmost satisfaction and be sure that he would get the approval of the people.

But the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was another thing. That was not a foreign thing at all; it was a home-grown thing. It had been grown on Israelitish soil and entered into the very fabric of the nation. It was popular. The superstitions and religious passions of the northern kingdom had centered in this peculiar mixed religion. So Jehu reasoned, "It is best for me to let it alone." And while he could strike hard at the sins of Baal, he had a very tender conscience for the mixed religion of Jeroboam.

This brings out a line of cleavage characteristic of human nature from the beginning. We all have an extraordinary preference for a divided allegiance, this strange confidence in a religion with reservations, which when one reflects upon it turns out to be no religion at all.

I have said that the interesting thing here is the light thrown on human nature. There are things in our world that are foreign, that have no friends, therefore it is quite easy to attack them. There are other things in our world that are closer to us. They are grown in

our kitchen-gardens and have been nurtured in our hearts. They involve our earthly interests. We have a great tenderness and regard for these things.

It is a popular opinion—it is quite erroneous—that religion sometimes makes men bad. We have known people of whom it might charitably be said they would be better people if they had no religion at all. That seems quite paradoxical, but this is what it means: it is not true to say that religion makes men bad; it is that religion brings out the defects of our qualities, just as the carbonating of a mineral water will bring out its singular taste sometimes to the point of making it unpalatable. Some men have just enough religion to bring out the bad side of their character. It sharpens their angularities and makes them disagreeable, one-sided, cranky and fanatical. That only goes to show that when the element of religion is introduced into a man's character, if it does not go deep enough the chances are he will be a worse rather than a better man.

It is quite a common thing for middle-aged people to regret that they have so little influence over the younger generation. The reason is that they allow themselves to become sour, acidulous, over-critical, and captious, and so transform themselves into gadflies that go about trying to sting people into the kingdom with fragments of texts torn from their living relationships in the word of God. We need not be surprised at this if we take a good look at the story of Jehu. It is not that religion makes men bad. It is that religion with reservations, that is a determination to be religious up to a certain point, only tends to exaggerate the defects of our natures and so to expose us to loss of influence to say nothing of self-respect.

This is the explanation of the failure of partial re-

forms. Nearly every popular reform, especially of a moral kind, is a partial reform, wherein people are wrought up to almost hysterical excitement about some one particular evil in the community, and all the fighting strength of the community is discharged at that thing and in a narrow way; yet advocacy of perfectly good and justifiable reforms may be vitiated because it does not alter our common inconsistencies. It is always easy to attack the foreign growth; it is always difficult to deal with the home-grown sins.

Having laid down this proposition, consider it in the matter of beliefs. Paul reminds us in the first Corinthian Epistle that the world is full of voices, and they all have meaning if we could understand them. The world is full of many beliefs. If one were able to rise high enough through the atmosphere that surrounds our planet, one would find that the great space is filled with flying fragments of disintegrating comets and stars. Sometimes they strike our belt of atmosphere and become incandescent, and you say, Behold the meteor! It only means that just outside the atmosphere of our world are great quantities of matter floating about in the air. It is the same way with our beliefs. Get just beyond your particular little world, outside the moral and religious atmosphere in which you habitually live, and you will find beliefs and disbeliefs, ideas, opinions and notions flying in all directions. Sometimes they come into violent contact with your own atmosphere and cause an incandescence that generates religious controversy and moral strife.

Some of them are foreign beliefs and some are home-grown products. It is always easy for the moderately religious man to devote more attention to foreign growths than to home-grown sins. It is easy to

pitch into Christian Science. It is easy to go for the Unitarians. It is easy to find fault with heathen religions that are struggling with Christianity on foreign fields. It is easy to pick out the strange cults that are growing so rankly in our luxuriant, impressionistic American cities, and to say all manner of things about them. But how hard it is to attack with the same consistency the private hobbies, prejudices and favourite half-truths that clutter up our minds in daily intercourse!

Take, for example, the parlour game that has ever been, and no doubt will always be, played by certain types—the hunting of heretics. It used to be a kind of sport. It was as much as man's life was worth to stand on certain platforms in this country, or preach in certain churches, without making a tremendous denunciation not only of the supposed unbeliefs of people outside the church, but pitching into the other denominations. The people loved it and called it "revival"! We have all heard these philippics wherein the preacher, after devoting hours to the denunciation of other denominations, leaves you to infer that the only true denomination is his own. He leaves his hearers under the impression that no argument of a positive kind is required to justify his position.

Yet the dangerous heretic is the man who tries to defend what he says he believes by attacking the beliefs of other men. Some of us are badly in need of this admonition. There is a great deal of complacency in our American churches concerning one's beliefs and relationships to God. When I have heard some good people talk it would seem to me that their neighbours were all unbelievers, that scepticism and scoundrelism were running riot in the land. But were I to ask them,

"How is it going with you?" I should probably be delighted to find that the plague had utterly passed them by. That is the way it usually appears to a man who believes in religion with reservations. He is very hard on the friendless and foreign Baal, but has a great tenderness for the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin!

Take the two great beliefs of the Christian religion. First, the deity of Christ. I remember once going into a certain community and being met by a fanatical-looking gentleman who took pains to inform me on the way to church that all the ministers in that town were heretics, every man a sinner and perverter of the truth, and he seemed to be suggesting to me that I had better be sure of my theology before I ventured to preach in that neighbourhood. I need hardly to say that he took all the enthusiasm out of my heart, for I felt from that moment that I had entered a foreign environment.

Yet when one sincerely affirms his belief in Jesus Christ as God's Son and his Saviour he is proclaiming in a most positive way a determination to be God's servant, to be able to say in justification of that belief, "Whose I am, and whom I serve." The sure way of commending one's belief in the deity of Christ is the surrender of his life.

Or take the other great truth, the atonement of Jesus Christ. It is, indeed, a great moment in human experience when one can confidently affirm "My Saviour died for me." What a truth this is for a sin-cursed world! It brings us under the spell of Divine love as no other truth can. Yet can we not see that if we do in our hearts believe that, it is going to put love and gratitude, patience and sympathy, and all the beautiful virtues of the Christian life in our hearts so we can stand before

our brethren with humbleness, lowliness of mind and confidence because we know we are saved by the precious blood of Christ?

But to go out and acrimoniously attack those who do not hold our views, or who cannot use our theological shibboleths, is to commit precisely the same sin that Jehu did and to believe in religion with reservations.

Or take the more intimate and homely thing, the matter of conduct. We all know that not all temptations assail us. There are some temptations that could not by any possible chance get hold of our lives. We should be grateful for this and call to mind what the old Scotch theologians called God's preventive mercy. In one of David's psalms he gives thanks to God for the grace which anticipated his every mood and seemed to go before him and prepare a way for his feet. It is a wonderful thing to have been born and reared in a Christian home and to have enjoyed from childhood the privileges of the church, and on that account to escape the blasting and devastating sins that wreck and ruin lives on every hand. But is it not true that in just such lives you often find no gratitude, no sense of obligation to God, to say nothing of humility and thankfulness, but rather the reverse—a tendency to attack sins and temptations and weaknesses in other people that have never assailed us, and so become like those Pharisees, who could always say the most scathing, bitter and terrible things about the publicans and sinners, but never until Jesus came were they forced to turn their eyes on their own hardness, licentiousness, hypocrisy and slackness.

We are at present concerned about the religious and moral status of the younger generation. Whatever one can say of them they are healthy-minded, idealistically

inclined and spiritually susceptible to the finest constructive influences; but if we are troubled because they take their own way of following Christ and do not immediately fall in with our advice on the subject, may it not be due in some measure to the fact that they know that we have had a great tenderness for our home-grown sins? We strike mightily at the sins of Baal, but of the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, we have never a word to say.

Modern psychologists have developed an idea of great significance. They speak about "logic-tight compartments." We have often been told that a man cannot divide his life into airtight compartments. On the contrary it is the easiest thing in the world. If we could get a view of our character at the present moment, it would look more like a honeycomb than anything else. It is just a mass of logic-tight compartments.

Why is it that a Nonconformist grocer, who uses short measures and light weights, can get into a rage about Roman Catholicism, and roast the government for its extravagant expenditure of the tax money? Why is it you would never think of cheating me out of a nickel, yet brag about cheating a railway company out of a dime? It is done every day in the best families, and worse things follow. We concentrate our religious interest and enthusiasm on one side of our life, and on the other side we have things that are absolutely unspeakable.

Recall that terrible story in Ezekiel. While the prophet was in the land of captivity God showed him what was going on in Jerusalem; how the leaders before the people were saying the right thing about Jehovah. "But," He said, "go with Me," and He took him into the secret chambers and there Ezekiel

saw, traced on the walls, the foul and obscene features of the real gods that these men worshipped. These logic-tight compartments in our souls are very common.

Take the case of David. David had a great deal of trouble with his conscience and much worry about his sins, and doubtless made resolutions that he would never do them again. But you see he was king, and was positive nobody knew anything about them. Uriah was dead, and the mouth of Joab was stopped. One day his minister called on him. He was sitting in his chamber clothed in most unkingly attire. His eyes were red, his face jaded, and the minister said to him:

"How is my lord the king today?"

The king replied, "I am not well. I am not sleeping well. Perhaps it is the heat, or the cares of state."

Now Nathan could have recommended a bit of a holiday, a journey to Joppa to take the seabaths, but on the contrary told him a story and said something like this: "I have called this morning to inform Your Majesty of an important incident that has recently occurred in this community. It is a little thing, perhaps, in the eyes of men, but I think it will interest you. There is a man here in the neighbourhood, a rich man who has everything that he desires. And there came into his community a poor man whose only possession was one little ewe lamb. That was all he had, but he loved it. The rich man, because he was strong, took away the ewe lamb from the poor man."

I can see David's heavy eyes lighting up with fiery indignation; and, rising from his chair, now every inch a king, saying: "Where is this scoundrel? Let me take him that I may have off his head before night!"

And Nathan said quietly: "Thou art the man!"

This is the proof of love that it is courageous enough

to stab the soul wide-awake with a shaft of light; and by breaking down the logic-tight compartments bring on a conflict which will set the foreign sins and the home-grown products in their true relation. For can we not see that if Jehu had let Baal alone, and concentrated his reforming zeal upon the evil sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan; if he had called on the nation to repent of its sin of separation, and urged it to return to its first allegiance to the true God, Baal-worship would have fallen away as something exotic and external to the spirit of the nation? In sooth, if we deal frankly with the home-grown sins, the foreign growths will take care of themselves.

A divided allegiance is something we are warned against throughout the New Testament. Jesus was friendly with all sorts of men save one and that man was one who had deliberately determined to lead a double life. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, and he need ask nothing, nor expect anything from God. No man believes in God, nor can be a good man, who wilfully turns the light within his soul into darkness. For nothing is more impressively shown in the career of Jehu than this that the true reading of his character is not to be determined by his zeal for the Lord, but by his tolerance of the sins of Jeroboam. And when we find ourselves in a mighty coil about the beliefs or unbeliefs of other people; when we are anxious to call down fire from heaven to destroy those who follow not with us well might it be that some fearless Nathan should stand before us, and, stripping the veil of make-believe from our eyes, show us that a religion with reservations, no matter how elaborately supported by theological shibboleths, or adorned by the splendour of ecclesiastical livery, is no religion at all.

X

THE PROPHET AND THE PARASITE

"Then answered Amos, and said unto Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."—AMOS 7: 14-15.

GOD deals with man in different ways, and the divine intention will usually be found associated with some form of experience in the man himself: something that troubled him is finally illuminated by the divine Spirit, and the man becomes aware that he is being urged to some form of service. This spiritual impulse appears on the surface to be sudden and unexpected, but turns out to be the culmination of experience, and retrospective thought reveals the fact of God's presence in it some time before that instant when he becomes conscious of being set apart. Let us admit at once that there is something mysterious about the calling of the prophets; still enough remains to connect their experience with ours. What I wish to make clear is that God reveals Himself to us through some form of experience; He respects our individuality, and uses precise means of awakening us to His presence and purpose.

This personal dealing with men in respect of their individual peculiarities is one of the outstanding features of prophetic experience, which is shown in the

conspicuous differences apparent in the prophetic writings. One star differeth from another star in glory.

It is also shown in another characteristic: there is a distinctive passage in each of the prophets which tells us the secret of his calling. Two things distinguish these personal communications: one is that from that moment the man was clearly convinced that he was being called to service, the other is that this calling was the last stage of a serious and often bitter struggle. Hence experience of some sort becames the organ of divine revelation. A sympathetic reading of the prophets will show, among other features, this characteristic fact. Hosea's prophetic calling came to him through domestic sorrow, Isaiah's through disillusion, Micah's by way of poverty, Jeremiah's through austerity. Habakkuk came to his prophetic consciousness through a long series of perplexing thoughts, while Ezekiel reached his through a sense of failure. It will appear as we go on that Amos learned his prophetic mission from loneliness and obscurity. The key to it is the great passage found in chapter seven, verses fourteen and fifteen; but in order to realise its importance we must know something of the history of the times, the character of the man's ministry, and the precise occasion that compelled him in such words as are here recorded to give an account of himself.

Amos, the first of the writing prophets, appeared in Northern Israel about the middle of the eighth century B. C. Palestine, as is well known, lies between the homes of the two ancient civilisations, Babylonia and Egypt. By the middle of the eighth century Assyria had developed to the point where she entertained ambitions to be a world power, and after long preparations set out to subdue the world by the conquest of Egypt,

the only nation capable of disputing the supremacy with her. To accomplish this Assyria had to pass through Palestine. Hence it came about that Israel from that time forth was brought into the arena of world politics, and the outcome of this experience was the Assyrian captivity, when Sargon king of Assyria took Samaria in 722 B. C., and carried away to Babylon the entire population in what is known as the Assyrian captivity. Amos was called about 759 B. C, and the object of his mission was to warn Israel of her danger, and, if possible, bring her back to God.

The difficulties in the way were well nigh insurmountable. Jeroboam II, a strong, warlike king, had reigned for over forty years, and, during his reign, the people had never been defeated in battle. They had grown prosperous and rich, and had developed into a luxury-loving nation indifferent to its moral condition. Moreover, the people had a false security in ceremonial religion, and indulged the notion that God would always look after them inasmuch as they were the chosen of the Lord. They simply did not and would not believe it possible that anything evil could befall them.

The prophet's efforts were at first directed to the destruction of these false hopes. His preaching was designed to quicken the national conscience and to set the masses in opposition to their religious and political leaders. At first little attention was paid to him, but eventually he began to impress the common people. Knowledge of his words and influence gradually spread upward until it came to the notice of the aristocracy, and brought about the conflict between the prophet and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel referred to in the significant passage wherein the prophet indicates his calling.

I can only mention some of the significant features of this conflict, in order to throw into high relief the great conception of a divine calling expressed in the momentous declaration of the man himself.

Amaziah represented the vested rights of a state-supported religion. He was priest of the great church at Bethel, a royal chapel, the king's sanctuary. In order to silence the prophet he used the familiar methods of the time-serving priest: misrepresentation of the prophet's teaching, and contemptuous denunciation of the man. He misrepresented the prophet's teaching by twisting a righteous criticism of the people into a charge of conspiracy against the state. Furthermore, a prediction of the ultimate fall of the dynasty was construed as a personal attack on the king, while a prediction of approaching captivity was represented as a want of patriotism, amounting to treason against the nation. In addition, Amaziah expressed the utmost contempt for the personality of Amos, called him a seer or visionary, objected to the invasion of his territory, and peremptorily demanded that he return to Tekoa and make his living there, and speak no more at Bethel, which was the king's sanctuary and a royal house. Space forbids dwelling upon the singular self-revelations here made, save only to remark upon the low notion of prophecy indicated in the speech of Amaziah. Prophecy was a business. Service of God led to high social advantages, and the puppet priest supposed himself superior to the countrybred Amos because he was minister of the First Church of Bethel, and had a king for a parishioner.

To this Amos made his immortal reply: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the

Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

It is needless to comment on such words. They are literally alive with the divine power that made Amos the embodied conscience of his nation. Emerson once remarked that character was "God seen through the medium of an individual nature," and that is the quality manifest in this prophetic utterance.

What, then, was the personal experience through which the man attained unto his prophetic consciousness? Let us at once admit an element of mystery about it, and then note the outstanding feature of his life.

It was obscurity, and its corresponding experience, loneliness. From Tekoa, a wilderness south of Jerusalem; not only a countryman, but engaged in the most humble of callings, an herdman of cattle and fig-pincher; remote from city influences, devoid of the superficial culture of contact with large masses; with plenty of time to think and brood and pray;—this was his environment. Yet with its loneliness the wilderness has ever been the school of great spiritual leaders. Need I mention the education of Moses, Elijah, and Paul, or remind you of our Lord's forty days in the solitude, to say nothing of the acute insight into human hearts shown by John the Baptist?

Amos saw through the outside of things to the living heart of his time. We see this in his stern, uncompromising criticism of the sins of the period. His scorn of the painted vices, the gilded corruption, the foolish excitements of the people, is unmatched in prophetic literature.

While we find much of this sort of thing in secular writers, Seneca or Juvenal or Lucian, for example,

here passionate denunciation is ever inspired with a sense of the reality of God and the spiritual values, of which these things are the base counterfeits. We see this, too, in the insistence that religion is the God-given opportunity for righteousness, and not as his countrymen imagined an insurance against the consequences of sinning. Responsibility to God was measured by religious privilege. Life's values rested upon graduated responsibility: and judged by this standard Israel was the chief sinner among the nations. But the deepest of the man's convictions was his God-consciousness. God was felt to be as real as the shattering of an earthquake or the roar of a lion: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

In reflecting upon such an experience we are apt to feel out of touch with it. It seems too remote to concern our modern life because we know nothing of a wilderness experience. Quietude or reflection upon the unseen verities is little known to our fevered times, and yet we are not unacquainted with obscurity or loneliness. Human life never seems so small or trivial as when we find ourselves buried in large moving masses, too hurried and fretted to understand the object of existence. There is no loneliness like that which overtakes a man in the crowded places. It is one of the chief causes of present-day discontent. To feel oneself obscure is to feel useless and unwanted, without enduring values; to be lonely is to be at the mercy of uncontrolled forces; and yet this is not the whole of it, for with it comes a longing to find a resting place for mind and spirit. What if this heartache and bitterness

should suddenly unmask life and reveal to us God? What if fire break out in the wilderness and show us the Lord opening pathways of deliverance, pathways to usefulness and enduring values?

That is what happened to Amos when God took him from behind the flock. Who would have thought this man capable of such a work? Let us admit the fact of loneliness, its temptations and trials, for if a man determine to hold high purposes it is difficult to find in these times kindred minds with whom he may commune; but such hours are precisely those in which God appears unto him. No man is fit to speak for God until he has suffered a little from this sifting experience; and the man must want it keenly, and be willing to seek it from the hands of mercy, if he is to have it; for as one of our own poets hath said:

"God is not dumb, that he should speak no more.
If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness
And findest not Sinai, 'tis thy soul is poor."

Amos found Sinai in the wilderness, with its thunder and its fire; but there is a greater mount for us to find in our wilderness. Calvary and the cross have shown us the love of Christ. Loneliness, obscurity, misunderstanding, these are the common experiences of our race. Sometimes 'tis bitter and sore, this burden of individuality, this weight of conviction which sets apart from others, which consecrates us to hard and lonely service; but if God made use of such experiences in building up that unshakable persuasion of a divine calling from which has come the noble order of the prophets, shall we who are the heirs of a greater blessedness despair of finding in similar experiences the open road to a stronger life?

XI

JEREMIAH'S COMPLAINING PLACE

"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."—JEREMIAH 20:9.

AS a man prays in his heart so is he. Prayer life is the test of character. I do not mean by prayer life what a man will say in public; that may be artificial; it will certainly be correct. By prayer life I mean the closet life, a man's secret and sincere communion with God. When a man goes into his closet and shuts the door on a curious world, what he is essentially will express itself in his speech.

This closet life is a sacred domain, the most private part of us; and yet the Bible invades it and permits us to overhear a man at his prayers, and what we hear is often startling and unexpected. For one thing, we learn that a man does not speak to God in the prayer closet as he does in public. In private he is himself, and sometimes he says things there which seem to our polite ears both inappropriate and improper.

This text is one of the most original prayers in the Bible, yet it is quite different from what prayers are supposed to be. The prophet uses language foreign to our modes of thought. In fact, this is not so much a prayer, in the conventional sense of that term, as a complaint.

It is an interesting thing to observe that the people who complain to God are either the very bad people or the very good people. Mediocre goodness is rarely guilty of such questionable taste; its prayers are usually quite correct and appropriate. But the bad man does not hesitate to denounce God; he finds fault with providence; sometimes he indulges in blasphemous expressions. The very good man, a man like Jeremiah, for instance, will on occasion go into his prayer closet and unburden his heart, and his prayer is often, as here, a complaint.

This prayer issued from Jeremiah's mid-career. The favour of his early ministry had departed when Josiah died, after some eighteen years of what seemed to be unusually successful work in Jerusalem and surrounding towns, due partly to the zeal of the king and partly to the discovery of the Book of the Law in the year 621 B. C. Suddenly a serious predicament had arisen. Josiah, through his policy, had involved Judah with Pharaoh-Necho. When the Judæan army was destroyed, Jehoiakim, a worldly minded man, came to the throne. He had no sympathy with his father's religious enterprise and wanted to revive the pagan days of Manasseh. The first thing he did was to stop all religious activity and try to destroy the prophets. Jeremiah found himself in the middle of his career, after a period that looked like permanent success, friendless, persecuted, disbelieved, contemptibly treated; and one day, after a particularly strenuous time, he had been arrested, bastinadoed, and put in the stocks, where for nearly twenty-four hours he had been spit upon in scorn and derision by the defaming multitude. Early in the morning, hungry, heartsore, with every bone in his

body aching, he crept into his prayer closet and poured out his prayer.

He tells us here the fact of depression, and that is an experience that overtakes every earnest religious man. He tells us how that depression was relieved, and how, in spite of opposition and failure, he is enabled to remain faithful to God. This fact of depression grows in part out of the temperament of the man. William James, in his suggestive book on Pragmatism, has called attention to the tender-minded and tough-minded temperaments in philosophy, and that difference among philosophers can be traced to the deeper differences in human nature. Some men are naturally tough-minded. Others are naturally tender-minded. There are men who like opposition. They are hard and self-reliant. The tough-minded are bold, impudent creatures. They court the opposition of the mob. They are never so happy as when they are in a minority of one. Such men rarely become depressed, because they like unpopularity. They can drive themselves through the world and get their way done. They are rarely capable of sympathy. Such men may make great leaders in secular affairs, but they are rarely found among the prophets. The tender-minded man, on the other hand, is keenly susceptible to environmental changes. He cannot stand opposition. He does not like crowds. He is easily discouraged, and is in constant need of sympathy.

The man of this type may be a great success if he is not among people who are hard and sceptical. But if he is opposed or neglected, he may become quarrelsome and morbid and sentimental and weak. With proper discipline, however, such a man may become a great prophet.

Jeremiah was of the tender-minded temperament. From his youth, he shrank from publicity. When God called him, he said, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." He did not like crowds; and he did not covet opposition. He needed sympathy and tenderness. He was more of a fern than a rose; he grew better in the shade than in the sunlight. He lived best in quiet. He did not like noise. In the early stages of his career, he was a weak man. He needed hardening in the right direction to get a toughness of fiber without which no man can be great, and yet at the same time so as not to lose the tenderness of heart and sympathy with others that are essential to a prophet's usefulness.

This man in the early stages of his dependence indulged in the questionable and altogether contemptible habit of self-pity. When you were a little boy and your parents did not do just what you wanted them to do, there were times when you derived considerable pleasure just imagining the scene as the people looked on your coffin with tears falling upon your cold baby face, and you were saying, "Yes, if you had only known, you would not have brought me to this untimely end." How excusable it is in children, but how contemptible in a strong man. I know of no evil like self-pity for a man of strength and character. A great deal of our so-called piety, a great deal of our sentimental talk about bearing a cross, about undergoing discipline, is nothing in the world but self-pity.

Some of us find ourselves in the forties as flabby and weak and unfit for hard work as we were when we were twenty, and we are laying the blame on God. Now that was the source of Jeremiah's depression. But you must remember that when God sent Jeremiah out into

the world He overcame his initial reluctance by saying: "I have made of thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land. Your enemies will dash their heads to pieces on the strong walls around your life." That is the sort of promise Jeremiah had gone out with. During the lifetime of Josiah it seemed as if all that were coming true. But as soon as Jehoiakim came to the throne everything was different. Now he was surrounded with people who were not sympathetic believers but scornful scoffers who heaped contempt upon him and made fun of his message. Then he began to say: "God has deceived and disappointed m.e He told me he would make of me a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, and now I am but a pet lamb led to the slaughter. Wherever I go, I find my so-called friends plotting against my life, and now here is this unspeakable thing, this bearing of insults, this being covered with the slime of contempt, this hiding of me in prison, this threatening to throw me into cesspools. God has deceived me. He has not kept His word. He has not played fair."

The man's depression had a dangerous side at his age. He was about forty years old. He was in the "roaring forties." Talk about the temptations of youth! There are no temptations like those of middle age. Talk about the danger of adolescence! It is not anything compared with the dangers of maturity. That is the period when we have lost many of our illusions, when we have learned that the old principles do not guarantee cleanness of life, when we are aware of the opposition that besets us, and when we are tempted to lay aside high ideals and adopt expediency, when the subtle voice of the tempter comes and says: "Be not

righteous over much, neither be ye wicked over much. Just keep in the middle of the road, and don't make yourself unfavourably conspicuous either as a sinner or as a saint, and then you will be happy." It is the time when temptations cease to stimulate and begin to wear down our resistance. It is the time when a man who has had a certain measure of success in the world, begins to cast up the balance and say, "Why not relax and take a moral holiday?" It is the time when, if there is any weakness in character, or in religious principles, we know it. We know it then, and when some first-class brutal fact comes into collision with our aims, we are apt to feel the depression of middle age. You will be surprised to see how many men in our time are finding this out. In the Middle Ages the monks were asked, "What is the most dangerous hour in the day for the religious man?" And they said, "It is the hour after the noonday meal, when all spiritual things lose their meaning, when, in the glare of the sunlight, spiritual things look least attractive, and the animal in man comes to the surface and clamours for food." And they called that time, when the demon of midday comes to whisper its lies in the ears, the most dangerous time for the religious man. You will find in the *Divina Commedia,* among the first sentences of that book, which was written when Dante was thirty-five, these words, "Midway in the journey of my life, I found myself in a dark wood where the right way was lost." That is the period when the weather changes constantly, when sunlight gives place quickly to storms, and when confusing shadows are far more deceitful than absolute darkness. It is the time when we are apt to feel that moral ideals are losing their meaning, and when we know something of the depression of midday,

or, as the Psalmist puts it, "the destruction that wasteth at noonday." We talk about a depression that is associated with darkness. I do not think that there is any depression like that which comes to a servant of God who stands at mid-life facing the cruel facts of everyday experience; conscious of his weaknesses and shrinking powers and the growing hostility in the world. If there be any disposition in a man to be depressed it is the time of times when it is going to show itself. All *that* lay back of Jeremiah's experience.

Everyone knows what that means. When we were young, God came like the Pied Piper of Hamelin through our town playing His subtle tunes. We laid aside our toys and, entranced by this strange heavenly music, followed Him, and He led us through the pleasant fields, until suddenly the music stopped and we found ourselves on the barren and brown mountainside. Then we were far from home, and He began to lay burdens on us. There are few ministers of the Gospel who would not say that if they had known what the ministry meant when they were boys they could not have been drawn into it with a team of oxen. And if you were to say to them today, "Will you leave it?" they would say, "No." And yet, they know its difficulties. They know the need for encouragement. Perhaps if they had known the difficulties at twenty-five they could not have been lured into it. But they are in it. It is one of the experiences of the minister to feel this at mid-life, just at the time Jeremiah felt it. We have changed somewhat from that day when every one of us expected to be called to the biggest church in America.

But our minds still go back to those days. Our young hearts were filled with idealism. But somehow

or other, people are deaf. They do not hear our voices, and the crowds do not come. They went their evil way, and we were puzzled awhile, and then we grew more and more conscious of the swiftness of the years, and we found ourselves in early middle age well equipped for our fight, magnificently endowed, chastened and disciplined in spirit, and yet surrounded by a horde of men who had made a success in a secular way, jingling their money bags and pointing to us standing in the world's market place and saying, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" and all we can say is, "Because no one hath hired us; no man wants our goods."

We know what that means. When we begin to feel like that, we are apt to raise the question whether we have not make a mistake. But there is always a background of success on which that seeming failure is projected. Jeremiah saw eighteen years of it. You have got years behind you. There was the time when you used to get calls more frequently than you do now. There were times when men seemed to care to hear your voice. They are not so eager now. You are not so young any more. Well, but you won't cheapen your goods. You won't go into the market place and offer shoddy stuff. You are offering something that is intangible and fine. You cannot sell it, not because it is not valuable, but because your market does not understand your product. But all the same, it leaves you lonely, troubled, worried; and sooner or later the feeling comes, "Am I not a failure?"

When a man gets to thinking like that, the first thing you know he says, "Am I not still young enough to change my sphere of labour?" Then the overworked pastor hears the siren's voice of some church board: "Come and be our secretary. Race up and down the

land, and be a rabble-rouser for the Church. Have done with this little job that you have." Or here comes the more subtle voice of our theological seminaries, "Oh, if you were only a professor in our seminary, what a wonderful world this would be!" Sometimes it is the voice of business, or that demon voice of the lecture platform: "Leave your pulpit! Turn your back on your calling. Go out and entertain the world, and you will be a success." And then there comes this feeling: "If I cannot manage my own business, how in the world can I manage the Church's business? If I am unable to strengthen myself on my own teaching, how shall I teach others?" And to the man of sense there comes the feeling, "If I cannot be a prophet, I will not be an entertainer." Oh, he is depressed all the same. That is a sore and bitter thought.

This creates a necessity for complaint. A man who is depressed because he thinks he has not had a square deal, is a man who has a grievance, and no man ever had a grievance who did not talk about it to somebody. This has been so the world over. Men who have a grievance are always in search of an ear into which they may pour it. "Bow down thine ear, that thou mayest hear." "O Lord, make no tarrying." The world is so full of noise and talk that we want somebody to hear us. We want to complain. We have got something to say. "Oh," says Job, "if I knew where I might find Him! If He would only come out from behind this screen of mysteries and show Himself in tangible form, if He would only open His door and let me come to His judgment seat, what an argument I would pour out in explanation of this unspeakable business!"

But there is all the difference in the world between

complaining *to* God and complaining *about* God. Let me illustrate it. You have a friend, and somebody tells you that he has said something about you. It hurts your feelings. Now that is a grievance, and calls for an explanation. Suppose you go to him and say: "John, I have heard this thing. Did you say it?" And John puts his hand on your shoulder and says: "Yes; I said it. But I am sorry and ashamed for it. You know I love you." The thing is gone. The complaint is made and the matter is ended. But suppose you did not go to John, and someone came to you and said, "John said so and so about you." "Is that so?" "Yes; and if you knew what he kept back you would not trust him any more." Well, the first thing you know, the little sore spot that you had has become active hostility, and your tongue is your greatest enemy. You say things about him that bring on a progressive alienation. Some things grow as you talk about them. Talk about money, and money grows upon you. Talk about your best friend, and the thing grows in the wrong way. Now see how Jeremiah goes about the business. He complains to God; he never complains about God. But complaining about God is more popular.

It is popular, in the first place, because it seems more correct. A great many people are entirely of that opinion because they do not know God very well. When we pray to God in public, we make a beautiful prayer; but the prayer with which we exhort the people never gets into our own heart and life at all. We say the thing we think we ought to say, but we do not open our hearts and complain to God. At the same time, we do not hesitate to complain about God. That is the peculiar peril of the minister. It is his peril to exploit

his moods instead of preaching his principles, to make his pulpit instead of his prayer closet his complaining place. God have pity upon the church that has such a minister!

What do these men say? Difficulties about belief in the Bible; trouble about belief in the Church; the Church full of hypocrites; social salvation is better than individual evangelism; everybody knows that Christianity is more or less out of date. All the time these brethren are exploiting their moods. There is the second reason why it is always easier to complain about God than to complain to God. It is always easier to be talking about your moods than to be practising your principles. It is easier to tell the world how you feel than what you believe. Half of the conversation that goes on in pastoral visits has to do with symptoms or feelings or moods of the people. When we get into the homes we find ourselves in what Chesterton calls "medical atmosphere." You remember in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* when Miss Hazy got on her symptoms she could talk for hours. Our feelings! A man does not feel well. Why not? Because God has not treated him right, and before you know it that vague discontent has grown into hostility or unbelief. The feeling has become enmity against God. Complaining against God becomes a progressive alienation from God. Go about talking unkindly about your friend and before you know it you cannot look your friend in the face.

Of course, this sort of thing is very popular in some places. If a man goes out and attacks religion, or if he creates some new thing the newspapers will run after him and he will get a following. He is a leader; he is a broad man; he is a prophet; he is the founder of a

cult that will turn the world upside down. But there are those who know that man has left the track, that he has abandoned his client in the last hour of the trial; that he has lost himself in a wilderness of words, and that all this brave talk and posturing before the dumb, unthinking mob very poorly disguises from the discerning mind the fact of a broken spirit, a complete and pathetic failure. It does not mean a failure of religion; but it does mean a failure of *his* religion.

I do not for a moment lose sight of the difficulties of our day. But the fact remains that many ministers are no longer running restaurants. They have given them up and started cooking schools wherein with much learning and poetic artistry all sorts of condiments are set forth. But we have got to get back to the restaurant business. Who ever heard of going to a cooking school to get anything to eat? The most adventurous soul would not risk his life on the products of these cooking schools. You go to a restaurant because you are hungry. You want a cook who will feed you according to your appetite.

That is the trouble with some of our denominations. John Wesley believed that when a man had religion he knew it. If a man had the toothache he would know it. There are altogether too many just now wondering whether there be such a thing as conversion, and are spending a great deal of time talking about the psychology of religion. There are too many occupied with a philosophy of religion that never gets below their necks, and all the time in our midst are poor aching hearts vaguely longing for the power of the living Christ. If you complain about God, you will land just where some of these have landed. First, you will have popularity, and then you will have oblivion.

Jeremiah tells us how to go about the business. There seems to be a fixed notion that he was a sour, pessimistic, old fellow. But read his prophecy through, and you will find that the man did his complaining in his prayer closet, that he never complained about God.

Consider a threefold function of this experience. First, it rested him. It is a great relief to find someone who will listen to you. There would have been no psalm book if men had not felt like that. Nearly all our hymns arose from a desire to communicate something to God.

Jeremiah went into his prayer closet to complain to God, and said: "O Lord, you have deceived me. You are stronger than I, and I cannot beat You in the open; but I will never open my mouth about You again. I have been deceived and beguiled. You said You would make me a defenced city and an iron pillar, and here I am like a pet lamb led to the slaughter. I am not going to open my mouth." I am very sure there was a kindly smile on our Father's face. That is why you cannot reduce the prayer necessities of human nature to written forms. Prayers must be as broad as our lives. We have an idea that God is a peculiarly sensitive gentleman, with a certain exacting requirement as to forms of speech, as though He would be offended with the prattle of His children. But He is not. He overhears every muttering of man's soul. All of our petitions and yearnings are passed through the transforming medium of the Spirit that knows the groanings of the human heart and makes intercessions for us before the throne of God. Have you forgotten the intercessory work of Him who cried out in the hour of His greatest need, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There are times when conventional forms

of prayer won't do. There are times when we must go to God and speak out just what we have on our minds, just let the thing out. It rested Jeremiah, and when a man gets rested things begin to clear. He begins to see the landscape.

And then, it encouraged him. You know, sometimes our hearts make such a racket that we cannot hear what is going on outside. That was the trouble with Jeremiah. He had said he would never open his mouth about God again; he had said things that were almost blasphemous. But in the silence that followed he hears just without his closet the scornful shouts of the defaming multitude. He thought of them in their sin and blindness, and then he thought of his own interests. Suddenly there broke out in him a devouring fire in his very bones. He could not be silent, he felt that he must go among the people and declare the word of God. You will find you have a deal more religion than you thought, when you let loose your complaint.

But more than all, it made the prophet strong. Let me turn to an earlier experience. After eighteen years of successful work under Josiah, Jeremiah came to the conclusion that he had been a failure. Reverses had come under Jehoiakim. He would give up his work and return to Anathoth. It was a mistake, he thought, to continue to be a minister. "I was beguiled into the ministry," he said, "I will go back to Anathoth to be with the boys and girls I used to know and settle down to easy middle life." He went back, but things were not what they ought to have been. The old associates began to whisper about him, and when he saw peoples' heads together he knew they were talking about him. He felt very much like a rabbit in a forest with glaring eyes of wildcats staring at him, expecting every minute

to be eaten up. Then he went into his prayer closet and demanded of the Lord some explanation of this unspeakable experience. If ever a man had reason to find fault, he believed he had. He wanted some word of comfort, but instead he got the most severe shock of his life. God said to Jeremiah, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, how are you going to contend with horses, and if in a land of peace you have been secure, what are you going to do in the jungles of the Jordan?" This plotting of the villagers of Anathoth is just like running with footmen. You wait until you see what Jehoiakim and the princes of the great city will do to you. You are complaining in a land of peace and security. Just wait until you get into the jungles of the Jordan, you will come to know what real trouble is. *"Cheer up, Jeremiah! The worst is yet to come!"*

What happened? Jeremiah stood up like a pillar. A new vision of manhood came to him. He realised that his work was just beginning, and he went back to the Jerusalem from which he had fled a coward and a craven, and stood up in the temple area before the princes and the people, and he told that crowd, "If you don't mend your ways, this temple and this city will be as Shiloh, a heap of ruins." And the mob gathered around him and said, "Let us kill him." And Jeremiah said, "You can kill me, but you cannot silence me." *There* is a man who has been made an iron pillar. *There* is a man who has been hardened in the right direction.

There was a time when Jeremiah said something like this: "Oh, that I had a lodging place in the wilderness far away! Oh, that I might flee away and leave my people!" You know what he wanted. He wanted

companions, but without responsibility. He did not want solitude. You know how it was in those days in houses along desert roads. Men would meet, going east and west and pass the time of day. It is as we do on the deck of an Atlantic steamer. Jeremiah wanted to get away from his people for a time. Where is the minister who has been with his people long enough to know them and love them, and realise how imperfect they are, who has not often felt: "Oh, I would like to leave these people! I would like to take this church and congregation and drop both into the great gray sea somewhere and stand on the shore and watch the bubbles come up and know that I would never see them again"? If a man feels like that, some of these days an opportunity is coming to him. When Nebuchadrezzar came down and destroyed Jerusalem and started on his return towards Babylon, somebody said to him: "You know that old chap Jeremiah? Well, he has not been against us. In fact, he has been telling these people that they would better yield. Let us take him along with us." And Nebuchadrezzar sent someone with the invitation: "Come along, old chap. You have done your duty for forty-four years. Come over to Babylon. Ezekiel and all the good people are over there." But Jeremiah said, "No; I cannot leave my people." And what people they were! There was not a man among them who could understand him; not a man among them who loved him; and they took him down to Egypt and killed him; so that he died in an alien country, far, far from the land he loved.

Is it any wonder that six hundred years later when the men of Judah saw Jesus walking in their midst they said, "Is not this Jeremiah?"

Life does not begin to be great until you have felt

the inspiring opposition of a hostile world. You cannot love this world as you should and sacrifice yourself for it, until you estimate its power of doing you hurt at its right value. Some of us like the nest, we dread the arena. But we will never amount to anything until we get into the arena. You cannot know your place in the arena unless you have your escapes. It may be in your prayer closet, or it may be in your imagination on high places. Just think of the mountain tops where you can get a broad vision. I remember one day sitting alone on Calton Hill in Edinburgh. The clouds were broken a bit and here and there the sun was breaking out in purple glory. You could see west to the Forth Bridge, and to the north to the Fifeshire Hills and directly in front you could see the Castle. And ever and anon through the murk of the storm, you could see those depths of the sky that Wordsworth talks so much about. Suddenly, as I was sitting brooding above the smoke and noise of the great city, I saw an old peasant climbing labouriously up the hill. He sat down beside me and looked in silence a while, just like a Scotchman, and then turned to me and said, "Have you got a match?" "Yes." And then he pulled out an old pipe and lighted it. I looked at him out of the tail of my eye. He had on one of these things that peasants wear around their necks in lieu of a collar. His coat was soiled and ragged, but there was a strange mystic glow in the old face. He said: "Do you know, I am a shoemaker by trade. I live down there by the Cowgate. It is an unclean place. There is swearing and drinking and fighting there all day long, and every now and then I come up here and take a look at this to *remind me that I am not all flesh.*" When you get high above the noise and travail of the world, when you follow our

Saviour's example and seek the mountains, how different things seem in the softening glow of God's great kindliness! It gives you the feeling that you are not all flesh, you are not wholly a part of the strange play of material forces surging around our planet, but there dwells in you an immortal soul, dear unto God, bought by Christ and aflame with the great message of love. Build your prayer closets on the mountain tops! Go into them with your plan. Then go out boldly and stand up for Jesus Christ in the world that slew Him. It will happen to you as once it happened to a company of obscure men without the support of influence or anything of the sort, who thrust themselves into the murky darkness of the Græco-Roman world with a story of the Cross that made them worthy witnesses to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.

XII

INVESTMENTS IN THE PROMISES OF GOD

*"And I bought the field of Hanameel, my uncle's son, that was in Anathoh. * * * For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."*—JEREMIAH 32:9, 15.

RELIGIOUS men do many surprising things, things that are disconcerting, perplexing, and often impractical. They do things that are extremely costly to themselves and take positions that from a world point of view appear imprudent and unwise. Yet as time passes we are obliged to say that they acted with peculiar insight into the ways of God, and history eventually justifies their position.

The reason they behave in this way is because they are walking by faith. They see Him Who is invisible. They believe in God, and on that account have a certain insight into the ways of God. And so while their actions from the point of view of worldly prudence often appear impractical, they somehow or other are found to be on the side of great events.

The reason which underlies the actions of men of faith is born out of religious experience, and this is the point of view from which to approach the puzzling real estate transaction alluded to in this text.

At the time this event took place Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadrezzar's army. Some years before this he had carried away to Babylon the flower of the

nation, and now after an interval his army had appeared again and the city was being besieged. The guttural voices of alien foes could be heard around their walls. From afar they could descry the camp fires at night, and there were times when even the thunderous tread of the mighty host would strike fear into their craven hearts. The best friend of the nation, the prophet Jeremiah, had been put in prison in the king's house, because he had dared to tell the truth.

It is easy to see that at such a time the cost of food would be constantly increasing; that the value of the land would be absolutely nil; that the enemy would overrun the fields, taking the cattle, destroying the farm buildings and driving the population into the city where money alone would be greatly in demand. At such a time, with characteristic Jewish shrewdness, a certain relative of Jeremiah who owned a bit of land in Anathoth in the outskirts of Jerusalem, a part in fact of the old family estate, bethought himself of an opportunity to get rid of it. He knew very well the folly of offering it to any real estate dealer. No farmer could use it and it would offer no attractions to a business man in the way of investment; but that old cousin of his was a bit quixotic, and had curious notions about the land.

It is a strange thing that the obsession still prevails and there are certain types of business men who imagine that a religious man can be persuaded to buy something that nobody else will have.

So Hanameel went away up to Jerusalem and sought out his old cousin, on whom doubtless he had not called in the days of his adversity, and said: "My dear cousin, there is a bit of land that belongs to the family in Anathoth, where you were born and brought up, and

you know how tenacious our family is of its holdings. Many of the dearest associations of your life are centered there. Buy it and own it for yourself."

I think I can see Jeremiah looking at him out of his strong, sorrow-marked face, seeing straight through this proposition, quite aware of the trickery involved in the suggestion.

Yet, after reflection, he said: "I will buy it."

He had probably laid by a little money (an old and lonely man would naturally lay up a bit against a rainy day), and so from his scanty savings he paid down the purchase price and took most meticulous care to secure a legal title to the property. He had the deed drawn by proper authorities, certified by witnesses required by law; and then he summoned Baruch, his Boswell, and required of him that he put the deed in an earthen pot, which was an ancient substitute for a safe-deposit box, and told him to bury it in the ground and remember where he left it, in order that he might, if need be, be able to prove his ownership of the land.

Why did he buy it?

Any business man can see that it had no more tangible value to Jeremiah than a bit of ground that one might have purchased in No Man's Land during the World War. He did not buy it because he was a sentimentalist; and although the greatest patriot of his time his motive was not that of patriotism. He was not influenced by what Chesterton has called "the queer innocence of the afternoon of life"; that guileless belief sometimes found in old men in the value of strange and quixotic possessions.

He bought it because he saw that a refusal would be tantamount to a denial of his faith and a repudiation of the principles of a prophetic ministry of more than

forty years' duration. God had assured him that although the children of Israel must go away to Babylon for seventy years, eventually He would bring them back and restore them to their old privileges. For years the faithful prophet had preached this doctrine up and down the land and had not been believed, and he saw at once that if he refused to back his faith with his money it would be easy for men to say something like this: "Oh yes! You think all right about God. You preach about Him, but you are not willing to practice what you preach."

Still Jeremiah was human, and after the transaction was completed he was overtaken by a feeling that perhaps after all he had made a bad bargain. He went into his prayer-closet and laid the matter before God. When he came out he had God's answer, for this is what the Lord said to him: "Fear not, Jeremiah, for houses and vineyards and fields shall be in demand again in this land."

And when he heard that he was content.

Now had the prophet reasoned as men usually do, he would have said something like this: "This is a hopeless proposition from the point of view of worldly prudence. I am getting on in life and I cannot expect to live until the captivity is over. I cannot hope to occupy or use this land during the period of the captivity. So far as the material value is concerned it is nothing. If I purchase it I have put my money in a bag with holes. On that account I am inclined to reject the investment as contrary to worldly prudence."

But Jeremiah held a different view. He reasoned that God's promises transformed impossibilities into actualities, and whatever God promises becomes for us opportunity, and opportunities that come to us from

the promises of God constitute commands. So he thought, and so he behaved.

This fact has vast suggestiveness for us; for if you will reflect upon it you will see that the values of life turn upon our choices, and that our choices are usually influenced by one or the other of two idea-systems. We all live very mixed lives, and the ideas that influence us rarely attain the dignity of what we might call systems, yet sooner or later we are going to be influenced by the one or the other of these systems which tend to fix the trend of character.

One system is based upon the idea that all values that are worth struggling for are derived from their relationship to ourselves,—what we call self-interest.

The other system of ideas revolves around the conception of God, so that the life of man is God-centered, not self-centered. Such a man will reason that values are determined by the approval of God. If it costs pain and suffering, or even death, still the price is well worth paying for the goodwill of God.

A man of the world who has no vision of unseen realities when thinking of investments will proceed upon some such hypothesis as this: He will say: "In the first place, I am looking for the greatest degree of certainty."

But there are very few certainties in the world, and so experience teaches us to get hold of something that has a high degree of probability. If a man make an investment from this point of view he expects eventually to profit by it. It is not a dead certainty, but it has a high degree of probability, and on that account he is inclined to take the risk.

Now if you judge this proposition of Hanameel by such a standard you can readily see that it is an im-

possible suggestion. What chance, for instance, would he have had with a real estate lawyer in New York City? So whatever reason Jeremiah had we must look for it in some other region as expressing an entirely different-idea system.

The religious man, that is to say, the man to whom God has opened the wonders of the unseen world, who has come to realise, in the language of Hocking, that "faith is anticipated attainment," reasons somewhat after this fashion: "I believe that God is the Lord of the world. I believe that He orders the destinies of men according to a fixed and unalterable purpose. I believe that men of faith will be admitted by degrees into the comprehension of that majestic plan. I am willing, therefore, to venture my life, money and time on the will of God. I will not make immediate profit a condition of service. Neither will I shirk hardship or denial, but I will courageously stake my all on the will of God, because I believe in the promises of God."

The distinction alluded to here is suggested by the conversation our Saviour had with Simon Peter at Cæsarea Philippi. Peter had confessed Him as Lord, and then remonstrated with Christ because He had suggested He was going to Jerusalem and put His life in jeopardy. Peter was reasoning as any man would reason, somewhat in this fashion: "Why put yourself in jeopardy, or take risks that can be avoided? Why not remain here in Galilee, where you are understood and loved, and avoid the contention and danger of the Jerusalem mob?"

Our Saviour replied: "Get behind me, Satan! For you savour of the things of men, and not of the things of God."

In other words Peter was thinking like a man rather

than thinking like God. How does a man think when left alone? Withdraw the influence of religion or morality or enlightened benevolence from the control of the man's thought and how will he express himself? He will put it to himself something like this: "Never jeopardise your life or your money unless you are obliged to do so. Never take any risks that you can avoid. Never invest in anything where there may be a possible loss. In other words, spare yourself at all hazards."

But our Saviour was thinking as God thinks, somewhat after this fashion: "Do your duty at all hazards; and if doing your duty means to die, then die, but do your duty. Follow the right path wherever it leads, no matter what it costs. Follow the vision that faith opens to you and it will eventually lead you to values of an enduring kind which the world cannot take away."

That was the way Jeremiah reasoned. Had he refused to buy the field or put in jeopardy his life-savings, that act of refusal alone would have been a repudiation of his teaching concerning religion. But by investing his hard-earned savings in a field that had no immediate market value, he proclaimed in an immortal way his profound belief that this world is God's world, that God's promises turn impossibilities into actualities, and that out of them issue opportunities which constitute for faith the nature of commands.

When we consider the program the Almighty has offered His people under both dispensations, we must be impressed, if we have any historical imagination, with its sublime audacity. It is nothing more or less than an invitation to believers in all lands and in all times to undertake that which from a worldly point of view is absolutely impossible.

One of the most audacious sayings in the Bible is in an early psalm. "Ask of me," says God, "and I will give you the heathen for an inheritance." Who and what were the Jews at that time? An insignificant people, without wealth and military strength, and with but a very shadowy hold on fundamental things; a poor despised and provincial folk, while the inheritance was held by the alien, unbelieving, rich and efficient world. No student of history can read the account of Jeremiah's purchase without remembering the story in Livy, when Hannibal's army was besieging Rome. The ground on which he pitched his tent was put up at auction in Rome and bought at a great price. That was a fine thing, but the difference was this: Rome at that time was sound to the core, while Jeremiah's Jerusalem was nothing but a dump, absolutely without defence and certain in the end to be destroyed. Yet Jeremiah risked all he had on the promises of God, because he believed that the Lord would restore the people to the land.

Will you notice how profoundly applicable this principle is to the days of our Lord and His disciples, the beginning of Christianity? "Ask of me, and I will give you the heathen for an inheritance." Was there ever, from the point of view of an unbelieving world, a more pitiable spectacle than that little group of insignificant fisher folk gathered about Christ on the night in which He was betrayed, when at the conclusion of His talk with them He said, "In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The world of that day meant the empire of Cæsar. Rome was mistress of the world, rich, efficient, learned, strong and able; and against her material and intellectual resources was pitted the voice of

God issuing from the testimony of a small group of unimportant men.

When Paul and his associates went into that world of brilliant culture, of adventurous intellect, of refined and subtle religions, of strongly entrenched traditions, and of glittering material splendour, with nothing but the unadorned, simple word of God, could anything be more audacious, or anything to the eye of unbelief seem more impossible than such a task? Yet we know what happened, and how those men transformed the ancient world. Unto them we must give our meed of praise and gratitude for bringing us the gospel. They invested all they had in the promises of God, and we know what happened. They bought a field in Anathoth, and out of that field has come the spiritual sustenance of the world.

Look around you, today. It is a grave, somber world in which we live where many who formerly lived careless lives have grown old before their time as they contemplate the spectacle of a world about to take a new direction; experimenting afresh with its ideas of government, philosophy and religion. It is a period comparable only to those great epochal changes like Alexander's conquest, the fall of Rome, or the Renaissance, and as yet no man wise enough has arisen to indicate its goal or to describe the constituent elements of its experience. The Christian Church stands sorely pressed on every field and on every front. Whether it be from the seemingly prosperous church in the heart of an American city, or from the little conventicle in some African forest, or Chinese village, it is the story of a tremendously concentrated and diabolical process against the things of the Spirit. The Church of Christ today is standing very much

as Jeremiah did in his day facing Nebuchadrezzar's army, or as Paul looking out upon the irresistible might of Rome.

Consider for a moment some of the things we are contending with:

Paul and his associates had one advantage over us in respect to their missionary enterprises: They went out into a world of spiritual hunger with a brand-new religion. Today Christianity is an old religion. People think they understand it, they think they know what it is. You cannot go about the world, even in heathen lands, without seeing Chrisitan churches and meeting with Christian evangelists and Christian influence. People discuss its doctrines and profess to understand its creeds. They are familiar with its divisions and sects, and know something of its mutations and changes as it has passed through history to the present day. They are painfully and terribly aware of our inconsistencies. When we speak to men about Christ and the Gospel it seems as if we were telling an old, old story, a story that is worn out and almost outgrown, for we are facing a new knowledge, a new concept of the world, a new philosophy, growing out of the enormous expansion of our material universe as the result of the ever-advancing influence of science.

Go into the great towns anywhere. One of the saddest sights to contemplate is the slow but inevitable retreat of the churches from the congested centers of population; the amazing attractiveness of the suburbs; the fear of down town sections of great cities.

Or go into the suburbs and see the churches that are quietly going to sleep. Great sleazy, well-dressed congregations that have lost feeling and sympathy about the salvation of man, where churches resemble clubs

and delicatessen shops, and where preaching is often so vapid and spineless it is not worth hearing.

Go anywhere you like in Christian lands, or out into the heathen world; it is the same everywhere. A man without faith would surely say it is just as quixotic to put your life, or money, or time in the Christian adventure as it was for Jeremiah to invest his savings in the bit of land in Anathoth.

I have always felt that until we have the courage to look reality squarely in the face, to recognise our weaknesses and indulge in a remorseless criticism of ourselves and our ways, that we will never have a desire to turn our hearts to God, or get the power into life that He is so eager to give. The present weakness of the American people is that we do not know how to criticise ourselves. There is no nation in the world so badly in need of some kind of saving discipline.

We cannot criticise ourselves. We are afraid to look facts in the face. A man who has courage enough to confront the American people with facts about the moral and spiritual trend of life is usually called a pessimist. What is a pessimist? He is not a man who has the courage to face facts, but a man who, after looking them in the face, confesses he has no remedy for them. If we could only realise the stimulus of difficulties and get away from the rose water idea of religion, and see these things in a bigger way, we should thank God and take courage that He brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this!

Take, for instance, foreign missions. Ask modern congregations to invest in foreign missions and what do they often say in reply? They tell us of what some business man has said about conditions in India, and of how impudent a thing it is for western people to ask

the Chinese to abandon their native religions for the sake of Christianity. They remind us of the slow progress of the missionary cause and so tighten their purse strings and avoid an investment in the field of Anathoth. Can we wonder that people say we do not practice what we preach? The truth is the Christian Church as a whole has never yet ventured to live by faith. We are fond of calling ourselves "pilgrims," yet nobody ever became a pilgrim who rode in a Pierce-Arrow car or lived on an income of ten thousand dollars a year. The pilgrim is a man with a staff and loin cloth and is usually found in the dusty lanes among the people, and he is particularly distinguished in this that he has a large investment in the field of Anathoth.

Have we ever had the courage to take our Saviour seriously when He said, "You must deny yourself and take up your cross"? Sometimes I fear we are very like Peter. When Peter heard this kind of thing from the Master he took it for granted that he had made the great sacrifice, and on one occasion ventured to say: "Master, we have left all. Now what are we going to get in return?"

Well, what had he left? A ratty, old fishing boat on the lake of Galilee, so leaky it had to be baled out, an old, tattered, patched sail, and a few nets through which fish would dart, to his discomfort, because he was too lazy to mend them. This, and nothing more.

What have we ever given up to be Christians? When have we ever given of our substance and our life, that someone might know Jesus Christ? Is it any wonder, then, that God withholds His gift of power?

Let us consider the profitableness of this investment.

What was it that underlay Jeremiah's faith in the transaction? It was his faith in God's promise. He

believed the exiles were coming back to the land. I have often tried to imagine what happened seventy years later, when the first contingent under Joshua and Zerubbabel, returning from Babylon, approached the desolated city. I like to suppose they marched through the field of Anathoth, and remembered the prophet, dead and gone now these many years, but whose character and words had left an indelible impression on their people. They must have said: "This is the very field, and there is the old farmstead. Do you remember what Jeremiah said, and how at the time we did not believe him? Yet here we are in the land again, and the old man was right."

How does this fit into our problem? In this way: Viewed from the standpoint of worldly prudence such investments are foolish. If it appear difficult to impress our great cities with the meaning of Christianity, or maintain our churches in the congested populations amid a babel of tongues, does it not seem hopeless to impress China, or Japan, or India with the power of Christ?

But the man of faith, who is influenced by a different idea-system, sees more in these fields than other men can. The world is a safe investment for life and service because God Himself has holdings in it. Suppose I should offer you a proposition something like this: "I have a bit of oil land in Texas. The geologists tell me that all signs are favourable. We are organising a company and have every reason to believe it will turn out a profitable investment." The chances are you would decline the opportunity. But suppose that, in addition, I should be able to inform you that the Standard Oil Company had already underwritten seventy-five per cent. of the stock. That would change

the aspect of the investment entirely, because experience has shown that great companies do not put their means and energies into losing propositions.

This is a poor illustration of what I have in mind. If we have faith at all we must see that God Himself has invested His all in this world. The needs of humanity and the responsibilities of the Church have been underwritten by the Lord Jesus Christ. God's promises are founded on God's performances. When I look on the pierced hands of Jesus, I realise what it has cost Him to come into this world. He has suffered for it! He has invested the most costly of all possessions in its welfare, I mean pain. What we suffer for we cling to, fight for and mean to have. It is so with this world. Superficially it looks as if it were a devil's world. At times it appears to be man's world. But when we look upon the face of Christ, when we stand before the Cross, we realise that it is God's world. And what God has suffered for, what God's Son has died for, God means to have. The world becomes the inheritance of the Church because Christ died for its salvation. This means that eventually God is going to have His own; He is going to have it through His Church; but He can never obtain what is His own, until we who profess to walk by faith accept the implications of discipleship.

It is the deep current of disenchantment that has come to disturb our prosperity, especially since the war, which suggests to discerning minds the presence in our civilisation of many elements of disintegration which have in past times heralded the downfall of societies, and suggested new departures of the human race. One reason for this certainly is that men have lost communion with the living God. They have "forsaken

God, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." The world is athirst, the cisterns are dry, and all about us men are calling with thickening voices, "Who will give us water to drink?"

We have it. What are we going to do about it? If such reflections make one serious, they also exalt the privilege and opportunity of the disciple of Christ. What Christ has died for He means to have; on that account our investment is secure. Only we may have to wait for it, and while doing so invest increasingly in it. Nothing is plainer than this, that God is not a bit economical with our material resources. There is such a thing as the increasing cost of living with Christ. He does not hesitate to demand our property, to expend our energies, and sometimes to send His best and finest into the hottest fires of persecution. But at least He never asks us to go where He has not been before. He has carried the world of human necessity in the totality of its needs and pains. Because He has put His life in this investment He means to have it; He is going to have it through His Church. The only question is *when?* The answer to this can be given when the people of God are willing to stand with Jeremiah, and in face of a scoffing and unbelieving multitude, invest their precious accumulations of time, and money, sympathy and service in the fields of Anathoth; which all about us at home and abroad, in spite of the blindness of many, are breaking out into abundant harvest, waiting for you and for me.

XIII

THE PROPHET OF VISIONS AND DREAMS

"Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Is he not a speaker of parables?"—EZEKIEL 20:49.

THERE are four things that we should know, in understanding an Old Testament prophet. First, his historical background. These prophecies belong to great historical movements, and we must first know the times, in order to understand the message. The next thing is to look for the personality behind the book. All these teachings originate in personal experience, and the man behind the book is sometimes more important than the book itself. Gerald Lee has remarked that "a book is a man's heart shouting from the housetops." That is especially true of the prophets. The third thing is the characteristic or fundamental teachings of the prophecy. Then the last thing is the application of the teachings to our own life, thought and time.

The Old Testament prophets, particularly great men like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and including men like Amos, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, belong to one of the most dramatic periods of the world's history. Let us take a broad view of that period. Try to realise that Palestine was brought into world politics by reason of its location. Palestine lay between Assyria and Egypt. It was impossible to approach either of these powers directly from the sea.

It was also impossible to approach them from the desert; so it was necessary, if there should be any communication of a commercial or military character between them, that it should take place through Palestine. In other words, Palestine occupied the same position in the political life of that time that Belgium occupied during the war. It became, in a sense, the battlefield of the world, and many great struggles and strategic campaigns in which Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria were involved were decided on Palestinian soil. That is why this country, otherwise so insignificant from a worldly point of view, was continually brought into the perspective of world politics.

About the year 745 B. C., Tiglath-pileser started with a huge army, on his way to conquer Egypt and make himself a world power. Egypt was the only nation that could dispute that title with Tiglath-pileser; but to conquer Egypt he had to go through Palestine, and he had to hammer his way through a number of kingdoms which had little or no offensive ability, but which had an irritating defensive ability. It was just as was the case with Belgium when she stopped the Kaiser on his way to Paris.

It was during that period that Isaiah received his message. Isaiah died about 700 B. C. Assyria was still fighting; Egypt was still unconquered. Assyria had possession of every kingdom in Palestine but Judah, with headquarters at Jerusalem. Then for seventy years prophecy was silent. It was in the reign of Josiah that Jeremiah began to prophesy. Zephaniah appeared shortly before Jeremiah. We then come down that period to the destruction of Assyria, the rise of Babylon, the almost immediate involvement of Judah's fortunes with Babylonian life, resulting in the Baby-

lonian captivity. It is a very picturesque period. It was in that period of stress and strain, of war and blood and tears, that great prophets appeared.

There are three facts of the reign of Josiah that we want to get clearly in mind. Josiah began to reign in his own right about the year 626 B. C. The first thing to note is the spiritual aims of the man. He came to a nation that had for more than sixty years suffered from a violent pagan reaction. The Temple was often neglected, and even where attention was paid to it pagan practices had come in. When he became fully conscious of this situation, Josiah wanted to revive the ancient religion, purify his city, and bring it back to God. That was a noble desire. But for some years he was unable to accomplish anything. About the year 621 B. C., when his people were seeking to restore the Temple, they found the Book of the Law, which, read in the presence of the people, aroused their conscience and what seemed to be a permanent reform set in. The great preacher of this reform was Jeremiah.

The second thing to notice is the revival of the power of Egypt, and her effort to regain her sovereignty. Pharaoh-Necho organised a great army and marched on Assyria in 608 B. C. When he came into Palestine, poor little Josiah challenged him to fight. The Egyptian sent word to him substantially like this: "You little man back in the hills, I have no quarrel with you. I am after bigger things. I will be your friend." But, "No," said Josiah, "I will fight!" And he went out with a little army to the field of Megiddo and the Egyptian struck him a backhanded blow, and slew him. There died all expectation of a religious reform. Pharaoh stayed long enough in the land to dethrone

Jehoahaz and put Jehoiakim on the throne. Then Judah became a dependency of Egypt.

Then he moved on. For many years Babylonia had been gaining in power. Pharaoh-Necho led an army against Nineveh, but Nebuchadrezzar met him at Carchemish in 604 B. C. and destroyed his army. Then the Jews realised that they were face to face with a relentless enemy. Read the first chapter of Habakkuk, if you want to see that described. There is an astonishingly beautiful description of the advance of this relentless army, as beautiful as you will find in Scripture. So these are the three things to remember: the spiritual ambition of Josiah, defeated by Egypt; the Egyptian renaissance in her effort to achieve new world power; and the rise of an entirely new world power, Babylon, in 607 B. C.

This brings us to the "Babylonian captivity." There were two captivities. The kingdom of the north in 722 B. C. was carried into captivity in Assyria—that is, ten tribes. The two tribes were left at Jerusalem, the southern kingdom, which lasted until 597 B. C., the year that Nebuchadrezzar took Jehoiachim to Babylon, and carried away captive the flower of the Jewish population. Eleven years later, he destroyed the city and took away all of the people, except a handful of common folk, who finally drifted to Egypt and disappeared from the story.

Our prophet Ezekiel went out from Judah to Babylon in the first contingent of captives in the year 597 B. C. The prophets of that period as a whole were Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah's ministry covered forty-four years. He was the prophet of the decline and fall of Judah; he closed the epoch of Hebrew nationality and opened the era of the Jewish Church. It

was the aim of Ezekiel to complete the work that Jeremiah began.

Ezekiel was born about the year 621 B. C., the time of the finding of the Book of the Law. He grew up in stormy times. He seems never to have been young. He was an old young man, or a mature young man, at the time he went out with the first captivity. He did not begin to prophesy until 592 B. C.—that is, he had five years of silence in Babylon before he began to utter the Word of God.

The Book of Ezekiel consists of forty-eight chapters. Unlike any other of the major prophets, it is a very orderly book. Ezekiel is very careful, ordinarily, to date his prophecies. He tells you the time and usually the place where they were uttered. The book is divided equally into two parts—of twenty-four chapters each. The first twenty-four deal with the first part of his problem. They cover the period of obscurity, loneliness and humiliation. The second twenty-four cover the period of his popularity. They deal with the latter half of the problem left to him by Jeremiah. Now the problem was twofold. In the first place, he had to destroy the false hopes of the nation; and, in the second place, he had to create and stimulate the spiritual hopes of the Jewish Church. The first twenty-four chapters concern themselves with the work of destroying the false hope of the nation concerning its life and destiny. The second half is concerned with the desire to create and stimulate the hopes of the Jewish Church, that small community gradually being called out and shaped up within the corrupt nation. The task of Ezekiel was very difficult. It was made difficult, in the beginning at any rate, by the fact that so long as Jerusalem remained inviolate (which was between the

first and the second captivities) it was almost impossible to get the exiles to believe that their captivity was anything more than a summer picnic, a kind of prolonged Cook's tour at the expense of Babylon in a foreign land.

You know how it was in those days. The city was frequently the head of the state. So long as the city remained inviolate, the state remained intact; but if you destroyed the city you destroyed the state. When Nebuchadrezzar carried off the first contingent to Babylon he left Jerusalem standing under a vassal king. Hence these captives took a rather optimistic view of their situation, so much so that false prophets came over and told them such things as they would like to believe. Jeremiah took it up and wrote a beautiful letter of counsel. He said to them: "Marry and settle down and buy property and enter into business. You are going to stay there a long time; but remember, God has given you a future and a hope. Don't give up your hope. Don't abandon your future. Some day He will bring you back." But they did not listen to Jeremiah. They listened to the false prophets. So when Ezekiel would tell them the significance of the discipline, and try to make them see that it was a searching period of judgment, they would not listen. Further, when he told them of the power of Babylon and the weakness and paralysis of Judah, they would not hear because they did not want to hear. You know, it almost parallels the experience of Lord Roberts and a small company of enlightened men in England who tried to wake up that nation to the menace of German militarism. The thing was going on right under their very eyes, and men not only would not listen to Lord Roberts, but someone had the nerve to suggest that he

should have his pension taken away, because he had called upon England to leave the fleshpots, put on its armour, and go forth to fight. They called him a pessimist, just as they called Jeremiah a pessimist and a traitor for telling the truth.

Ezekiel's mission was made difficult, in the second place, by his temperament. There is a lot of humour in Ezekiel, humour of a grim sort. Here is an illustration of it. "Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, *and I sat where they sat,* and remained there astonished among them seven days." He tried to be "a good mixer!" Have you never seen that tragic thing in churches where the minister, a sort of middle-aged, scholarly, dignified, respectable individual, will, in response to an imaginary duty, go into the primary department and make a fool of himself trying to get in touch with the children? Well, that is what Ezekiel tried to be—"a good mixer." He went where the people were selling their wares, talking over religion and politics and telling stories. He sat where they sat chockablock together—but he had nothing to say! He just sat there dumb and astonished. I can imagine them saying to one another, "Here is this old killjoy of a prophet come around to take all the pleasure out of our lives." He was just like a preacher at a picnic.

And then Ezekiel was greatly embarrassed by the fact that he was one of those men who could not open his mouth without uttering a parable any more than he could open his eyes without seeing a vision. He suffered so much in the estimation of the people that one day when the Almighty told him to go and tell them a certain thing, he replied: "Ah, Lord God, they say of me, 'Is he not a speaker of parables? We do not know

what he means; we do not understand him. He talks a language we cannot comprehend!'"

Ezekiel shows his type of mind in the description of his call. He went out one day and looked up into the sky and began to meditate in the desert. The wind arose. Out of the sky a fire-fringed cloud leaped. It grew blacker and blacker. Then there appeared a chariot, with guardians of four faces, with wheels within wheels, full of eyes, with the wheels running in all directions. Suddenly there appears a throne, and on it One like unto a man. In the blinding fire he sees an appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. And then, he said, "I heard a voice, and when I heard that voice I fell down on my face." That is Ezekiel's way of telling us that he had a vision of God.

What troubles us in the interpretation of apocalyptic symbolism is that our ideas are formed upon Greek rather than Hebrew models. The Greek model is the model of proportion. Everything is in its place. But the Jew is not appealing to the eye at all. The Greek did. The Jew is appealing to the mind. He does not ask how the thing looks; but his idea is: "How many different things can I get into that picture? Each thing will mean something." Now the Jew never thought abstractly like the Greek. That is why you could not write the New Testament in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew could not think of sin. He was always talking about sinners. He says, "O Lord, do I not hate them that hate thee?" The Jew had to use images to represent his ideas.

Now take the wheels. They are very grotesque. If you wish to realise how grotesque they are, take a look at Dürer's pictures of the apocalypse. The wheels represent our idea of omniscience. They were rolling

in every direction and they were full of eyes and they were looking everywhere. There is also the idea of omnipotence. He puts in all the things he can in order to tell you that he has seen God. He is trying to tell you what Paul means when he says, "The whole thing passes understanding." And then he fell down on his face.

God said, "Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee." One reason why we cannot understand God is because we are down on our faces too much, with a sort of spurious humility, and without self-respect; without straight, up-an-down, honest, sincere manhood we can never expect to know much of God. God does not like a sneak any better than we do. "Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee." And then he goes on to state what God had to say to him. So much for the illustration of the curious qualities of the man's mind.

Now let us look at some of the distinct things he teaches. First, we shall take the prophecies of the first period. The purpose of these first twenty-four chapters is to give us a record of the efforts Ezekiel made in the period of his obscurity—that is, prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B. C.—to convince the Jewish exiles in Babylon that God intended it should be a long period of judgment. It was to be the destruction of a nation in order that they might be a church. They did not know the difference between patriotism and religion. We do not know in America yet. I think there are some people who are going to find out. We have discovered that there is an immense difference between civilisation and the Kingdom. You can knock civilisation to pieces and you may not hurt the Kingdom. The Jews thought, "If you destroy our national ambitions,

take away our racial glory—then what becomes of religion?" Ezekiel's hearers were very much like orthodox, spiritually minded creatures before the war. Ezekiel was trying to tell them that religion was one thing and patriotism another, that the Kingdom of God was one thing and Jewish nationalism another.

Let us pick out two or three significant visions of this period by which Ezekiel sought to impress his lesson on the mind of the people. First, there is the prophecy concerning the princes in chapter nineteen. It contains the parable of the lioness and the whelps. He tells of a lioness that brought forth whelps and how they grew up and became leaders. One fell in a trap, one was killed by a wild beast, one was carried into captivity, and so on. One by one their princes, their leaders, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin were taken away. Ezekiel was trying to tell them that if the princes were taken the people would go, too. That is to say, there was no stability in political life. They had neither diplomats, statesmen nor military leaders.

Then he turns to a second vision and applies this to Jerusalem. This is an acted parable. Ezekiel came out one day with an old, rusty pot that had all kinds of foul scum on it. He built a fire under it and filled it with clean water. By that time, the people were interested. "What is all this?" they said. Then he got some of the finest meat and dressed it with particular care. While he was engaged in this business a man came up and whispered to him, "Your wife is desperately ill." But he could not leave his work. And the people round about watched him. "Why," they said, "he doesn't know how to cook. He knows that pot is not clean. But look at him! He is putting clean meat into a filthy old pot!" Then it began to boil; the scum came to the

top; foul odours passed from it. Then the people said, "Why, this is our wise old friend, but he does not know how to cook!" At that point, he turned around and preached his sermon. He said: "This pot is Jerusalem. You may put the finest meat in this pot, the best men you can find, but you cannot keep the evil down. The whole city is foul. Therefore this pot must be taken out and be put in a desert place, and there it must be exposed to the sun and the rain for many days until it is cleansed. Then you can cook in it." And then he said, "That evening my wife died."

What is the meaning of this but that you cannot make a city clean by putting a few good people into it? They have to be regenerated, and his argument was that Jerusalem must be destroyed and lie a heap of ruins for many years in the rain and the sun to be cleansed, so God can put people in it after His own heart. Then they came back with their argument. "My dear fellow, you overlooked the fact that God looks after Jerusalem. There is His house on the hill. How can Jerusalem fall when God lives in it?" I do not know what Ezekiel thought about that, but one day he had a vision, which is recorded in the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters. God carried him to Jerusalem and showed him what was in the town. He took him to the Temple; into the great chamber, and showed him how the elders were conducting worship with obscene images away back in the sacred recesses. Here they were bowing down before these things while outside they were pretending to worship Jehovah.

Then God took him out into the women's court, the outer court, and the women were worshipping Tammuz Adonis. Then He took him into the inner courts where the men were worshiping the sun. There all kinds of

idolatry were mixed up with true religion. The elders were thoroughly corrupt and hypocritical. Then he was taken out of the Temple and watched what went on. He saw the wheels and beasts and the chariot. And then he sees God pack up His belongings, taking everything that properly belonged in the Temple, and putting it in this chariot. Then it sails majestically off and disappears. It is the vision of the way God moved out of His house and abandoned the city to destruction. There he ends. These are prophecies characteristic of the first twenty-four chapters. They are concerned with three ideas: the instability of the political organisation; the corruption of the people; and the determination of the Almighty to abandon them for a while.

Then came a period of silence. Men of great foresight are usually lonely men. High altitudes are always lonely. I remember that once in climbing in the Alps. We were planning to take several days to make a journey. When we started there was a great company, including a number of Frenchmen. They were extremely interesting, for nobody can talk as they do. Well, all kept together on the lower slopes until we reached the little inn. But the next day, when we were to start the real climb they were not there, and when we reached the high slopes of the mountain there was a great loneliness. There were none there but mountain climbers. It is the same way with the pathfinders of the soul. There is this great loneliness for the man who has foresight enough to see further than most people, and so he has to be silent. Such was Ezekiel. Here is a book for the lonely minister who can see through a situation.

Now let us turn to the prophecies of the second

period. The purpose of these prophecies is to restore and stimulate the hopes of the Jewish Church. As a matter of fact, there was not any Jewish Church until after the exile. If you will study the way in which it was evolved in the Old Testament, you will see God beginning with the family of Abraham. Out of that family came the tribes, and out of the tribes came the nation. Then the nation, as it grew more and more corrupt, through political and commercial ambitions, furnished a spiritual remnant, and that remnant was carried along with the guilty over into Babylon, and it was the remnant that came back at the end of the exile and founded the Jewish Church. It was the business of Ezekiel, as it was of his predecessor, to encourage and sustain the faith of these godly men and women who were labouring to realise the spiritual destinies of the chosen people.

Notice how the period was inaugurated. Things went along, I suppose, in the usual humdrum way. The prophet was silent, lonely and very much neglected. One day a ragged and starving man came staggering in upon the company of exiles and fell to the ground. He had just enough strength left to tell them that Jerusalem had fallen. They did not know that Nebuchadrezzar had surrounded the city and destroyed it. They did not know that nearly all of their brethren were on the way, even then, to Babylon. But when they heard the news they forgot all their dreams; they cast aside their foolish optimism, and said: "Where on earth is the man of God? We want to know what this means." Ezekiel in an instant became the most popular man in the company. Everybody began to discuss it "over the teacups," as we would say. They were asking what it meant. Ezekiel was not deceived by his

popularity. You know how he puts it: "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. * * * Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." The masses of people were very much like Saul, who wished for Samuel in the time of disaster. They had no power of taking hold of spirituality. They tried to turn, but they could not break the hard grip of secularity. But there were enough people to serve as a remnant, and so there comes some of his best teaching.

I wish I had time to dwell upon it. For one of the things that will strike you, read, for example, the thirty-third chapter. Just see his consciousness of individuality, which stands over in striking contrast to the comparative absence of that in the earlier prophetic teaching. Prior to the exile the individual Jew got his value from his relation to the state. In thinking, he always thought from the state to himself. Now God had destroyed the state and he was a man without a country, a man without a home, a man who had no political rights, a man who had no economic privileges, a man who had no money and no temple. He was thrown upon himself to find in his own thought and faith an inward sanction that would sustain and encourage him in the day of the great disaster. They began to say: "Ah, yes, our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge. We are in captivity and have lost our state and our home because of our fathers' sins." Then the prophet said: "No, no; the soul that sinneth it shall die. The righteousness of the righteous shall save the righteous, and the sinfulness of the sinful

shall destroy the sinful." That old proverb about sour grapes was no longer to be current in Israel. They had reached the stage of individual consciousness.

Now that did not take place among the Greeks, the most enlightened pagan nation, until the end of the century. It gradually crept into the speculations of the Sophists, but it was not there clearly until the period of Socrates and Plato,—that conception of individual responsibility and right. It came to the masses by the same means, for at the end of the period, a century later, when Alexander the Great had destroyed the city state, the Greeks were thrown back upon themselves to find sanctions of a spiritual kind which they had formerly gained from the state. So it is in the Book of Ezekiel. When you come into the post-exilic period you have a sense of individual life, duty and desire that you could not have had without that purging discipline.

A second very striking thing is the spiritual conception of the Church. That is beautifully illustrated in the thirty-sixth chapter, in which there is a great promise. God says He will take away the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. It is the emphasis on the spirituality of religion. Do you know the Book of the Covenant in Jeremiah? It is like a diamond in a fine setting. It is the loveliest thing in the book, apart from the man himself. Well, here it is more rich and beautiful in Ezekiel. "I will take away the heart of stone, all of your pessimism and your sin, and give you a heart of flesh, a heart of a little child that can believe and hope and yearn and love."

Then there is the revival of spiritual hope in the vision of the valley of dry bones. What a vision that was! That is a challenge to Christianity as it was to Judaism: "Shall the dead live?" "How can a man be

born again when he is old?" How can I be changed when my habits are fixed, when my youth is gone? How can I be changed when all my desires are stained? There is no answer but the grace of God. In this case, life came from the word of God, communicated through His prophet Ezekiel.

But the finest thing of all was the vision of the power given to the Church for carrying out the Divine will. That is in the forty-seventh chapter. Ezekiel goes in vision to the Temple. You know the Temple was situated on a sharp spur, and towards the east, with almost precipitous descent, a gash went down to the depths of the Jordan Valley. Just south and east of it was the Dead Sea. A more desolate and discouraging spot perhaps could not be found on this planet. There was a ltitle stream bed, the Kedron, that started near the door of the Temple and ran down a great brown gash into the valley. No plants lived beside it; no trees grew on its banks. As you followed it, it became more and more desolate.

One day, Ezekiel in vision was walking about on the mountain. He came to the door of the Temple. He saw running out from under it a little stream. He watched it as it ran down and emptied into the stream bed of the Kedron. Suddenly it was deep enough to cover the ankles; then it was deep enough to reach the knees; then it came up to the loins. Before he knew it, there was water enough for swimming. As it flowed along the water touched the dry valley and life sprang up. There was fresh green grass, trees sprang up on its banks, and the stream went rushing down in torrential fashion and emptied into the Dead Sea. Whatever it touched it changed, transformed, and as it leaped in all its fury into the very heart of the Dead Sea the

water became sweet and swarmed with fish. That was God's way of telling him that the stream that makes glad the city of God would rise in the Temple of the Jewish Church and flow out through the arid waste places of the world until the desert should bloom as the rose, until the wilderness should become a great forest.

Follow that in your imagination. What can we do even today in understanding Christianity, without that conception? Light comes from that temple, the light of the law of God. What was the function of the Law of Moses? It had a twofold function. It was a diagnostician and healer. It gave the diagnosis of the world's trouble and pointed the way to the world's Physician. The best definition of sin outside of Scripture is that in the Shorter Catechism, " Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." There you have a precise description of the function of the Jewish law with respect to its power to diagnose the world's trouble. Here are the ethical, moral and intellectual desires of mankind running at cross-purposes. Your way is just as good as mine, and mine is just as good as yours, because we have no standard. Then God comes along and throws the true light through it all. Then you and I see what sin is. It is transgression of the law of God.

Then God gives character standards. Here they all are, the Greek with his standard, the Assyrian with his, the Babylonian with his, and the Egyptian with his. But God drops His plumb line down and every one of them is out of plumb. That is what we get out of Moses' law. You cannot understand sin, especially the New Testament doctrine of sin, until you grip that. Then there was the ceremonial implication of the law: its types and sacrifices, its day of atonement,—all of

which is so fully described in the Galatian epistle, where it speaks of the law as bringing us to Christ, just as the schoolmaster. The Greek pedagogue was not a teacher. He was an attendance officer. It was his business to find the child and bring him to the teacher to be taught.

I remember the old Negro mammy who used to take me to school. I can almost hear her say: "Come along, honey. It is time to go." And then we would go across the fields, and I can recall how in my childish fancy I imagined I could see strange eyes looking at me from the shrubs. Then later she would come again and take me home from school. She could take me to the teacher but she could not read a line. The law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we may be saved.

And that was in Ezekiel. See how it breaks out. Take the history of the idea from Ezekiel's time to the advent of Christ. After Ezekiel came the second part of Isaiah, those last great chapters. Now whether you hold to the Deutero-Isaiah position, or whether you hold to the unity of the book you have the same historical situation. The building of the Church is on the old foundation. You have the rise of that spiritual body and the corrupt tendencies which later produced Phariseeism and Sadduceeism, which, in the time of our Lord, were responsible for the failure of the Jewish people. But in the very center you have what the New Testament called "the devout in Israel," who waited for the consolation of Israel. You hear Simeon say, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, * * * for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." There was Anna the prophetess. There were Zechariah and Elisabeth, the parents of John the Baptist; that shy, delicate girl who was the mother of our Lord; and

Nathanael who sat under the fig tree, who were looking for the coming Lord. They were people who were true to the spiritual implications of the great promises of Ezekiel.

Then pass on to the founding of the kingdom, to the Life, Death and Resurrection of our Saviour. Then follow the evangelical stream in the apostolic Church. There is the story of the Jerusalem period, a period of beginnings. Then there is the Antiochene period, a period of transition, and, finally, there is the Roman period, which is the period of culmination, until Christianity has spread over the known world.

The purity of that stream was threatened, on the one hand, by pagan accretions, and, on the other, by monasticism and ecclesiasticism, until the rise of corrupt Romanism, which, at the time of the Reformation, swept the Church through a period of purification, at which time the Bible was restored as the source of authority and Christ's atoning Cross reaffirmed as the gracious basis of salvation.

And now in these latter days, it is represented by the growing power of evangelical religion, the expanding power of the missinoary enterprise and the closer fellowship of the churches, until sectarianism is disappearing and all divisive things are being relegated to the rear. Fundamentals are seen more and more clearly, and the commanding influence of the historic Saviour is becoming the one great thought of our age. That stream is flowing broader and deeper today than ever before. Nothing can stop it. Each generation falls heir to the glories of the past, for what God builds God always completes. Happy indeed ought we to be, if we can take our share in this heritage and give it unto the world!

XIV

THE HIGHER EGOTISM

"And I said, Should such a man as I flee?"
—NEHEMIAH 6: 11.

IF we are to appreciate the power of these words, we must know something of the historical features of the period to which the book of Nehemiah belongs. It was the epoch of Jewish re-establishment in Palestine at the close of the Babylonian exile. That momentous spiritual pilgrimage, fraught with such consequences for the human race, developed into three movements belonging to different times, and directed by able men who have left their mark upon Hebrew history.

Not all Jews of the exile returned to Jerusalem. They had enjoyed certain privileges; many were prosperous merchants and traders; others had become distinctly cosmopolitan, and preferred to remain in a foreign land. Some, too, had practically abandoned the religious aspirations of their race, and were to all intents assimilated to the heathen population.

But the spiritual remnant, often referred to by the prophets, eagerly embraced the opportunity of returning to the old land, so soon as the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus opened the way. This exodus is described in Scripture under a religious, an ecclesiastical and a political aspect.

The religious expedition left Babylon for Jerusalem

in 537 B. C., under the lead of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Their primary object was not to rebuild the city or organise a government, but to refound the racial religion on the ancient base. Their principal task was to rebuild the temple; and this work was accomplished under many difficulties. But so soon as finished a new problem arose, that of religious instruction. Their sacred books were lost; theological scholars were few; their prophets for the most part practical and unimaginative men; or even where their imagination touched the problem, it was apocalyptic in character, as we see in the prophecies of Zechariah. They were facing the problem of intensifying the spiritual life of the people under the most undramatic conditions, and the especial need was for regular instruction in the Word of God.

To meet this need a second expedition set out from Babylon under the lead of Ezra the scribe. This was in 458 B. C. His object was to put the Word of God into shape for regular instruction of the people, so that they might become informed as to the spiritual nature of religion and the meaning of the covenant promises. But Ezra faced two great difficulties. The first was internal. Two tendencies had developed among the Jews on foreign soil, and were destined for centuries to trouble the religious adventure in Palestine: one was a separatist tendency, the other a secular tendency; one desired to preserve racial purity and proposed that the nation should devote itself exclusively to its religious destiny; the other desired more liberal relations with other nations, and was ambitious to resume the rôle of political adventure. These tendencies eventually developed distinct parties, which towards the close of the second century B. C. bore the names of Sadducees and

Pharisees. The former were secularists, the latter separatists.

The secularists were diplomats, politicians and often men of liberal culture; they desired more intimate relations with other nations; and many of them were among the most prosperous merchants, who were willing to remain in the land of captivity. They had great influence among the returned exiles and Ezra realised immediately the necessity of checking it, if their spiritual aims were to be realised. The other difficulty was external; in the pernicious activity of the Samaritans. This mongrel race desired to have closer relations with pure-blooded Jews, and found a willing ally in the secular party. It was soon evident to Ezra and his associates that unless this outside influence could be checked, no prospect of success could be entertained. Jerusalem from a political and military point of view was little more than a dump. The people possessed neither military nor political ability. What they needed, in addition to priests and prophets, were able leaders, men of worldly wisdom, who knew how to take hold of a tough job and put it through.

So it came about fourteen years later that Nehemiah led a third expedition to Jerusalem, with the specific purpose of organising a government, rebuilding the city walls, providing for adequate defense, and generally for the purpose of tranquilising the internal life of the people, in order that the religious and ecclesiastical authorities could carry out their work.

The memoirs of Nehemiah tell us how that work was done. Now literature is of many kinds. We have, for example, the ambitious literary epistle, like those of the younger Pliny, written with an eye on the public and the future; then we have familiar letters, like those

of Paul, or James Howell, written to intimates, and with no desire to excel in a literary sense. Then we have the fascinating form of literary expression called the diary, wherein a man communes with himself. The memoirs of Nehemiah are in a very real sense a man's self-communings. In his old age he lives over again the great days of his prime. I like to think the book originated in this way. When the man's course was nearly run and his old mind was crowded with the accumulations of the past, he sits down to live over again the great days of his career.

Now we can understand why for the comprehension of this book it is so essential to know the man behind it. The important thing is not what the man said but what he did, and what the doing of it reveals of his character and personal force. There is no book where the personal pronoun "I" so dominates the story. Superficial people upon reading it say, "How egotistical this is." Yes, it is egotistical, but it is the higher egotism, without which no great work was ever done. Nehemiah was not a priest, nor an ecclesiastic, but a layman; and before we have done with him, I hope we shall regard him as a very rare layman—*a layman who knew his limitations.* He did not go to Jerusalem to teach religion, for he well knew that other men were better fitted for this than he. He did not undertake a priest's functions; he was not anxious to be the whole show himself, as is the manner of some among us today. He went to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of rebuilding the walls, organising a government and tranquilising the people, in order that the religious and ecclesiastical authorities might realise their aims. He knew that was a secondary rôle; a means to an end; he knew that so soon as his work

was done he must sink into the background and let others do their work; but he was content to have it so.

George Eliot said of Savonarola, "No man ever had a commanding influence over others who did not have in him the impulse to dominate, and this impulse has usually been the more imperious, as the complications of life tend to make self inseparable from an end that is not selfish." That is what I mean by the higher egotism. It is never wrong for a man to put his whole self into his work. You must get to the point where your personality is identified with your work. They are not two things, but one; to speak of your work is to speak of yourself; to speak of yourself is to speak of your work. That which makes it right or wrong is the end. Is it selfish or unselfish? It is true that Nehemiah often speaks of himself, but then he was the life and center of a great movement; in spite of which you are aware of his modesty, his humility. You can never feel that he is telling the story for his own glory; what he cares for is that he may do his work well.

In passing let me say a word about biography. When we are young, we like romance, fiction and poetry of a certain sort. We often have moods Byronic; that desperate romantic pessimism of youth. We pass out of this into a speculative period; we talk much of the philosophy of life without clearly knowing what we mean; and then when we mature, when facts mean more than visions, and realities bulk larger than dreams, we find our greatest satisfaction in reading history; we begin to look about for men who have lived as we have; and in our search for sympathy, for understanding, for companionship, we turn to biography. That is why we turn to these men God used in other times, who stretch their hands across the centuries; who come in the quiet

of the night and sit round us and tell us to run our race with patience. Many a time at midnight, when the city is still, the lights turned low and there is a mystic suggestiveness in the dying glow of the fire, these strong earnest faces peer at me out of the shadows—Jeremiah, Hosea, Nehemiah—I know that I am not alone, but working side by side with them in serving the same great God.

How, then, can we get in touch with the personality of such a man? You will not get it by the ordinary method of Bible reading. We must remember that God honours an earnest mind, a mind not afraid of hard, patient work, and that most difficult of all mental labours, brooding upon the inner meaning of things. I think much of our Bible study is worse than foolish; it leads to nothing but drivel—the worse sort of drivel. There is no possible substitute for hard thinking. I care not how much you believe in the inspiration of a devout life, there is no escape from digging at the roots of things, if we expect to know the mind and message of God's servants. And when you dig, think it through. If you wish to get on familiar terms with these great men you must patiently work for it; dig down until you touch their spirit, and I venture to say it will set your heart aglow with such joy and peace as you have never known before. This is the only way to know Nehemiah.

The thirteenth chapter furnishes many striking illustrations of the vigour of the man. There was a certain Tobiah, a Samaritan diplomat who took advantage of Nehemiah's absence in Babylon to get on the soft side of the chuckleheaded old priest in charge of the temple; and actually succeeded in setting up a Samaritan lobby in the house of God. Nehemiah remarking upon this

unspeakable thing says, "*But all this time was not I at Jerusalem.*" When Nehemiah returned there was a great to-do. He cast out Tobiah and all his fine furniture into the streets, and had the chamber fumigated. Another time, some disregarded the Sabbath regulations he caused to be promulgated. Vagrant Samaritans and a miscellaneous set of nobodies having no respect for Sabbath observances used to prowl about the town. They would come down to the gates of the city and say, "Here is a bargain in fish: prices are down today." Nehemiah published an order against this, and naïvely remarks, "After this they came down to the gate, *once or twice.*" Then there was the matter of mixed marriages; this was the terrible danger confronting the exiles: How could they hope to be faithful to their spiritual destiny, if the race was corrupted by alien blood? What was the practical trouble here? Simply that Jewish boys, having no regard for the spiritual aims of their people, were making sheep's eyes at Samaritan girls: things were getting terribly mixed. Nehemiah knew perfectly well that this thing had to be stopped; this marriage of Jew and Samaritan was producing a sort of Brunswick stew of races, which would utterly defeat the spiritual aim of the Jew; so he promulgated an order against it, and when it was disregarded, he took some of the ambitious bridegrooms by the hair and banged their heads together and threatened them with severe punishment if they did not observe the law. On another occasion a certain son-in-law of Sanballat was making free use of the town, in utter disregard of the laws; one day Nehemiah met him in the street, and remarks with characteristic logic "*therefore* I chased him from me."

These expressions of a virile personality must be considered in connection with his prayer life. His formula for prayer was. "Now therefore, O God, strengthen *my* hands." He did not ask the Lord to strengthen the other fellow's arm, as the manner of some is; but rather that he might strike at evils with the power of a fixed and divinely supported purpose. He was always praying that he might be made a hammer to put the fear of God into Jewish hearts. The times called for such a man, and God did not withhold His favour.

Nehemiah was a man of ideals. What is an ideal? It is just a pattern idea, a picture of what you wish to be, just this and nothing more. The possession of an ideal is no more likely to equip a man with power than the possession of a picture makes a man a painter; but it does help to concentrate effort upon a given object; for out of such dreams come visions of a career. Nehemiah was a young man, and therefore he had ideals. He must have been a beautiful lad, for he was one of the king's cupbearers, and Oriental monarchs would not have any but beautiful persons about them. No man wearing sackcloth was allowed to enter their presence. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, and enjoyed as was his right the luxury and magnificence of an Eastern court. But with all this I do not think he was happy; deep down in his heart he wanted something more, something conformable to an honourable career; here he was but an upper servant, an entertainer; but his strong spirit called for nobler deeds. He would not always live a paddock life, like a prize pig at a country fair, a mere ornament, a part of the scenery of life. He wanted, vaguely, it is true, but keenly to take his part in the world's work.

Now to such a man opportunity always comes, but often, as here, in the garments of poverty and need. One day in the streets he met a ragged old man, and said to him, "Are you not a Jew?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, what are you doing in this condition?"

"I have had an awful journey. I have been across the desert. I am just from Jerusalem."

"Well, how are things in the old land?"

"Oh, they are not getting on at all. The temple has been built, Ezra is doing his best with a bad situation, but the city is without proper military protection; its walls are down, there is no government and no order in the town, moreover, the Samaritans are incessant in trying to destroy the influence of religion. In fact, we have no leaders, no men of affairs. We need a ruler over there, but the people are discouraged and things could not be worse."

Nehemiah returned to his quarters. The story had reached his heart; it hurt him with a poignant pain; moreover, it rebuked him. Who was he to live at ease in a heathen court, when God's people, his own flesh and blood, were in such dire straits? His grief found expression in prayer and penitence; and as he prayed, his mind cleared and he saw visions; he saw a way out of this ghastly smooth, paddock life, and said to himself, "This is my chance." His hour of duty with the king came to relieve his vigil; but so soon as he entered into the royal presence the king noticed his sobriety and said: "What's the matter with you? I like not these sour faces." And Nehemiah replied, "I have a sorrow."

"What sorrow?"

"I have heard a tale of my people in Jerusalem that

strangely moves me; a man from my country tells me that they are failing for want of a leader."

"Well, what would you like?"

"I should like to go over there and organise the government and rebuild the walls of the city and help my people realise their religious ambitions." And the king said, "Go, and I will back you up."

What led Nehemiah to make this momentous decision? Four things, the first of which I have mentioned—that is, his discontent with an idle life in the king's court. What is the use of being rich and well fed and clothed and belonging to high society, when your life is not counting in the world's work? What is the use of living in an atmosphere of unreality, when here is an open door into the broad spaces of the world, into strife, into life? That was one thing. Another was his sympathy for those in distress, beautiful, quick sympathy of the clean heart of youth. And then, too, there was a Scotch-like sort of patriotism, a love of a land he had never seen, his homeland, the cradle of his race and religion. Who has loved the brown soil, like the ancient Jews? "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." The folklore of this people, their poetry, their romance, cling to the heart like their wild trailing vines. But above all else, gathering up and concentrating the elements of his fine nature, was his determination to be a certain sort of man: not an idler in a king's court, but some day and in some fashion to carve out a career for himself. It had lain long in his young heart, vague, mysterious, inchoate; but this old Jew's story had given it clarity. He saw duty plainly, he felt its attraction; and was most fortunate in having a kingly friend who would encourage him in carrying it into actual performance.

We now approach the most important feature of his career; I mean the testing of his ideals and aims. Much of the preaching I have heard in recent years has had much to say of the importance of ideals, but little of the tremendous necessity of testing them in actual experience. The mere contemplation of a fine thing is without value; it must be achieved. The test of a man is not that he will accept a call to a great work that is a long way off; but how will that man behave when he gets into the midst of it; when he confronts its exasperating details, its undramatic tasks. Will he continue to believe it a great work, when the romance and novelty have left it a drab and dreary job? If he still believes it worth doing and does it, then he is a great man. And this is the test of many a preacher.

Nehemiah's ideal was tested in *six* different ways; and they are trials which confront every Christian worker in some form or another. The first came from the character of the work to be done. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." But what was Jerusalem when he reached it? It was a dump, just a pile of broken rocks, a stretch of weeds overrun with wild beasts; a little country village on the top of a hill in a remote land. How dreary it must have seemed to one who had just come from the court of the king, in stately Babylon. That is where he had gone to do a great work. His job was to build a mud wall round an insignificant town. It did not seem worth while to the inhabitants; but this man had the power of taking unpromising materials and making something great out of them.

What is originality? It is not doing something nobody has ever done before, but in doing a commonplace thing in an uncommon way. God has given us abun-

dantly of these common things, it is our privilege to add an element of distinction from ourselves. God gave Nehemiah a brown hillside, a lot of mud and rock and commonplace folks. He mixed with it, unseen to the secular eye, a mighty spiritual purpose, and out of it Nehemiah made—Jerusalem. That was his first test.

His second was the test of ridicule. The Samaritans, led by Sanballat, a resourceful rascal, ridiculed his efforts. Of course they did not know the sort of man that had come to Jerusalem; and when they heard of his purpose they began to chuckle. "Why," they said, when they saw all this activity in the sleepy town, all this laying of stone and measuring of land, "even if you finish the wall, a fox stumbling along in the darkness may run into it and it will fall down. We could knock it down without half trying." This sort of talk came to the ears of Nehemiah, but he went on with the work.

Do you know that many of us fail, not from lack of talent or opportunity, but simply because we are not tough enough? We lack toughness of fiber and a saving sense of humour. We are afraid if we handle rough problems we will hurt someone's feelings. A friend of mine, a preacher, once complained that he was not making headway; and I remarked to him, "It is because you always wear kid gloves in the pulpit; get some knuckle dusters and go after your people; put the fear of God in their hearts, and they will take some notice of you." He failed simply because he was not tough enough. Someone has said it makes a world of difference whether people laugh with you, or at you. A general of Napoleon's army, a mighty doer in battle, once fell from his horse in parade, and the laughter of the people broke his spirit. He was not tough enough.

Nehemiah had this toughness of fiber, because he was not an impressionist; he did not depend upon emotion for his stimulus to work; he was hard in the right way, because he had principles and convictions to sustain his purpose, and he could not be shaken from his course by this Samaritan laughter.

Then came a test, sooner or later it comes to all, from discouraged associates. When this young fellow came over and told them what he was going to do everyone thought a good time had come. They were willing to aid him, so they brought out the old mattocks and axes and spades and said to him, "Now, put us to work." They kept at it like Trojans for a while, but after a time blisters came on their hands, backs began to ache, their eyes were sore, and their heads full of dust. They had been digging, it seemed, for years, and nothing had been accomplished. The ground was hard and the sun was hot: What difference did it all make anyway? Then the old fellows laid aside their implements and began to talk, and this is what they said, "It never will be what it was in the old days: why, when I was a boy, etc., etc." Nehemiah was an enthusiast, a hot-blooded young fellow: it did not make any difference whether the wall was built or not. Nehemiah turned upon these discouraged associates, and not only resisted their complaining, but put his brave spirit into their flagging hearts. He understood human nature.

The average man is not big enough to contemplate a great whole; the best he can do is to see one small section of life. This is where the preacher often fails: He tries to make his people see the whole circle; they can see only one small part of it, and that part is always directly in front of them, their own self-interest.

Nehemiah did not talk about the spiritual purposes involved in the success of his scheme; he did not talk of building the wall as a whole, but said, "Let every man build the section of the wall immediately in front of his house." Now Jacob on the west did not care a fig for what happened to Abraham living over on the east side of the town. But when he thought of the possibility of Samaritans coming down through the open spaces right in front of his own dwelling, and carrying off his wife and possessions, he was tremendously interested in building that wall. Nehemiah believed in local option. That is how he built the wall.

Another test came from the heartlessness and greed of his neighbours in the town. These were the big business men who said among themselves, "This is a fine time to corner the food market." So they got control of the corn supply, and while Nehemiah was working night and day to protect the town, these subtle rascals raised the price of food. The poor pawned their property, and then had to sell their children into slavery in order to get food. Nehemiah heard of it, and went straightway to the Board of Trade, Corn Exchange, or whatever place was used for such purposes; assembled these captains of industry, and spoke unto them after this fashion, "Stop this thing at once or I will cut off your heads." There was no talk about an investigation; or appointing a food dictator, or any commonplace suggestions for the delay of the public business, but just this laconic word, "Stop it or die forthwith." And they did it. They usually do when a man like this is running things. That single illustration shows finely the place of righteous indignation in shaping public affairs.

Then came the test of legitimate self-interest. Public

men often have to refuse what is lawful on grounds of expediency. It had been customary for former governors, who received no fixed salary, to reimburse themselves by taking presents from the people. It was an unwritten law in Nehemiah's time, but fraught with dangers; for while the poor had little to give, the rich gave in abundance, with the result that they usually had their way. It is quite difficult to condemn the man whose bread you eat. But Nehemiah refused to abide by this custom, and served during his entire administration without pay; and the reason he gave, and it was a great one, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." Nehemiah's religion was practical; he valued his influence above his worldly interests.

Then came a triple attack of craft. Sanballat, Tobiah and their followers got together and said, "This Nehemiah is a lad of parts, and we must get him into our power by craft." The story is told in the sixth chapter and I think there was a merry twinkle in Nehemiah's eye when he wrote it. They sent a message to him like this, "Come down into the plain of Ono, and let's talk this thing over." Now it is wise to talk over things that are not settled, but when once things are determined the time for talk is past. So Nehemiah refused point-blank to leave his work, practically saying to his enemies, "You very well know there is nothing to talk about, why, then, shall I leave my work to waste time in useless discussion?" This is much needed in these days. Many of us think that going to church and prayer meeting and Bible classes, and generally enjoying our religious Epicureanism is an end in itself; it is not. All these things are means to a practical everyday sort of Christian living. And yet how many good causes have been literally talked to

death: Assemblies, Synods, and conventions, movements, sociological congresses and riotous revivals have used up the energy that should be going directly into the things that are settled, and are *calling loudly to be done.*

O Lord, how long? When shall we rid ourselves of this convention habit, when shall we be freed from the wordy tyranny of these prophets of unworkable schemes, the ecclesiastical parasites who go up and down the land telling other people how to do it, and who never by any chance do anything themselves? The Church must rid itself of this fussy habit, abandon the worship of the god of statistics and crowds, and seek refreshment in the quiet places and among the eternal verities.

Nehemiah would not waste time in discussing questions that were settled. The times called loudly for work, not talk; and the Samaritans knew this as well as Nehemiah. So they came back at him and sought to frighten him with lying rumours. They sent a servant "in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel"—and, they might have added, we propose to see that this is communicated to the Persian King. It is reported that Mrs. Jones was not in church last Sunday, and the poor preacher is very much perplexed for fear he has hurt her feelings. It is reported at the corner grocery, and John Smith saith it: but who in the world is this John Smith? Who is this Gashmu anyhow? Nobody ever heard of him before he endorsed this portentous rumour. There is an inscription, I think in Aberdeen University, like this: "They say. What do they say? Let them say."

And thus Nehemiah answered them. What did this man, animated by the noblest aims, care for the chatter of a lot of Samaritan magpies?

Then they said, "We have one more arrow in our quiver." And they got hold of a priest, a man of religion, and said to him: "Go and see what you can do with this fellow. Get him to take refuge in the temple and that will discredit his influence with the people." They thought they had him then, for they knew Nehemiah's great respect for religion and religious ministers. So the priest came to Nehemiah one day and said something like this, "My dear brother, you know how vitally important your life is to the success of our enterprises; it has come to my ears that there is a plot on against your life; even now you are in grave danger: come, take refuge with me in the temple until the storms are past." Nehemiah listened, and with a flash of that quick mind saw through it. I can see his eyes grow more and more piercing as they burned their way through that prinking little priest, and then pointing a finger of scorn he shot this word at him, "Should such a man as I flee?" And you see the hypocritical messenger shrinking back into oblivion.

It is a sad reflection that when the devil fails to find laymen to do his work, he always finds some priest or minister of religion to aid and abet him. During the Pazzi conspiracy in Florence, when certain enemies wished to be rid of Lorenzo de Medici, they hired a professional murderer to do the job. The original plan fell through, and it was then determined to carry it out in the cathedral and the signal for beginning the assassination was to be the elevation of the host, the most solemn moment in the Roman ritual. But the hireling refused to carry out the job. His reason was that "he

did not mind killing Lorenzo, but he would not do it where Christ could see him." So runs the frank old chronicle, "*two priests* who had no such scruples were found to undertake the task." The devil seems to find it easy to get false ministers of religion to aid and help his cause. Many of the vile sex plays that now pollute the American stage, many of the novels which deliberately call evil, good, and good, evil, are written by renegade ministers, who have left the service of their Master to becloud the conscience and debauch the imagination of the long-suffering layman.

What was the secret of Nehemiah's strength? It was his religion, his practical, everyday religion. He went to church, he prayed, he lived and he laboured as one who felt the eye of God upon him. The work he did was inspired at every step by his old-fashioned piety. And it is well to notice in closing that he was a very rare layman; a layman that knew his limitations. Let this sink into your minds. *Good wall builders are not always safe interpreters of the law.* At last the great day came. Nehemiah turns the task over to his associate. The people are assembled and the law is being read, when Nehemiah notes the sad faces of the people: this will never do; running out on the platform he asks the reader of the law to pause a moment, and then says to the people, "This is not a day for sadness and fasting, but of feasting and rejoicing, *for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" That is his secret, the joy of his religion. We need it and must have it if we are to be strong enough to break through the barriers of nationality, through the false restraints which hamper our church life, to the living, vibrant heart of humanity. We need more of Nehemiah's religion. If we had it we should have more of Nehemiah's vitality.

XV

THE CAPTIVITY OF JOB

"The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."—JOB 42: 10.

IN revealing himself to the world God has used two kinds of men. Some were workers; they wrought upon the world. Others were wrought upon by the world. Some had to do, others had to bear. Job belonged to the latter class. We do not so much see what Job is doing in the world, as what the world is doing to Job.

The scene properly opens in Heaven. The sons of God are all there and among them is Satan—the adversary and critic of life. The Lord thus addresses him: "Where have you been?"

"Oh," answers Satan, "I have been traveling up and down the earth and have seen many curious things."

"What, then, are your impressions?"

"I have two; first, that there is no such thing on the earth as disinterested righteousness, and secondly, no man loves You for Yourself alone. Wherever I have been, I have found men are religious because it paid. They profess to love You because it is profitable."

This is still the point of view of the man of the world. Perhaps it expresses the belief of many who have lived beyond the romanticism of youth, and have had some of the experiences and compromises of mid-

dle age. It is not easy for such people to believe that anybody will sacrifice himself for an intangible end, unless there be some material advantage attached to it. This is the practical philosophy of mid-life when untouched by the transforming grace of God.

This sinister adversary stands for something in the human soul, the heart of man strangely resembles this scene in heaven. God is there, and there also is this Satanic being with a plausible argument and a host of visible evidences on its side which seems to justify the belief that no man serves God for naught. Our human nature never votes unanimously on any proposition. Even in the earnest spirits there remains a minority which says, "Deprive a man of the obvious and visible advantages of religion and he will cease to be good." It is well to affirm at the outset that such an argument cannot be answered by argument, because what is immediate and tangible is usually on the wrong side of the debate. In this respect the man of the world has the better of the saint, because the obvious facts are in favour of the adversary's point of view. The newspaper facts are always on his side. The only convincing answer to this kind of argument is a demonstration in experience, and it is essential to that experience that it be from the point of view of the man himself.

Job was not in heaven, neither was he aware of the debate concerning him, but down here on the homely earth, with his family and friends, his flocks and herds. And all the while the adversary in that inaccessible region was pointing to him and saying, "That man's religion is vain." Job had no suspicion that his religious life was to undergo a trial, when the Almighty gave his adversary permission to test his servant. The test ran through two stages. First came the loss of his

property. There came a day—a day that comes to most of us—when everything was changed. He lost his property and then his children. Yet in all these afflictions he failed not. The adversary was hard put to it. He was not so sure of himself, so he returned to heaven and the Lord said, "How about it?"

"Oh, he is still faithful, but he has not been hurt enough. Just touch his skin, make him suffer bodily pain and you will see how it is." Then the Lord said, "Go ahead, but do not kill him." So Satan touched him and he was covered with boils. There he sat, this brave-hearted man, in the ash-heap, troubled with many thoughts; and ever his faithful wife beside him. This seemed the worst thing that could happen, but he failed not. So far as the cynical scepticism of his adversary was concerned Job answered him in the only way by a demonstration within the sphere of experience. The man was stripped of every tangible good, yet remained faithful to God.

But what the adversary could not do, Job's friends came pretty near doing. Therein lies the extraordinary insight of this writer. It shows how well he understood human nature, and that our worst temptations come, not from Satanic but from human sources. Job's friends came to see him. They were well meaning and deeply religious; and in the early stages very considerately stood beside him, and by their sympathy gave encouragement to the burdened spirit. I am sure Job appreciated their reticence. But when they began to talk, their sympathy dried up in the fierce heat of advocacy of their favourite point of view.

These three men with the curious names were dogmatists. Now a dogmatist is a man who deals with unsupported assertions. He does not say to his op-

ponent, "I am arguing with you," but "I am telling you," and if you disagree with the dogmatist that proves that you are not only wrong, but bad. We know the type and there is no institution that breeds them faster than the Church, unless it be a modern university. The dogmatist may be, and doubtless is, often a good man, but he is an astonishingly short-sighted man.

As these excellent churchmen argued with their afflicted friend their peculiar points of view became obvious. Each was a dogmatist, but based his dogmatism upon a different thing. Eliphaz based his dogmatism upon a single experience. He had a dream one night, and a spirit passed before his face. He remembered the day and the hour and the minute the thing happened; and because of the one experience he could so vividly relate upon occasion in a testimony meeting, he jumped to the conclusion that he was ready to settle any and all religious problems that arose. Such people are far too common in our work-a-day world. Many people attach more importance to the date and details of their conversion than to the fact that they *are* converted. They can recall with irritating precision the very instant the thing happened, and with astonishing assumption imagine that they are capable of explaining some of the most mysterious problems of life.

The second of the trio was Bildad, and Bildad was a traditionalist. He was a veritable Sancho Panza for proverbs. He rarely opened his mouth without expelling some crystallised thought of past times; and so bespattered Job with worn-out phrases and wise sayings, and expects him to be convinced simply because he can talk so fluently. We know this tra-

ditionalist type, a stickler for words who with most Jewish perversity believes that things are true because they have attained the dignity of Proverbial Wisdom.

And then there was Zophar. He was a dogmatist on *a priori* grounds. He professed to be so well acquainted with God (although with naïve modesty he refrains from telling us how he obtained such knowledge) that he could predict what God would do in a given instance. He had reduced everything to a formula. Granted a given instance (Job with the calamities and the boils) all you have to do is to apply the infallible rule—and there you are!

All these gentlemen, with the very best intentions and in ways conforming to their favourite point of view, agreed on one thing, namely, that there was nothing mysterious about Job's experience. Everybody knew that where there had been no sin there could be no calamity or suffering. Then with perfect consistency they put in the minor premise: Job suffers, therefore Job is a sinner. And to them it seemed that this was the end of the matter. God was on their side. Eliphaz said, "My judgment is just because I had my vision." Bildad asserted that his judgment was in harmony with the theological opinion of all past times; while Zophar would insist that it is an *a priori* axiom of religion that where there is no sin there can be no suffering. That seemed to settle the matter.

Well, then, they would say to Job: "The cure for your trouble is repentance; all you need to do is to confess your sin; perhaps you have been leading a double life; perhaps you have been beguiled into evil practices. Confess it and God will restore your property and health and everything will be as it was before." All

this seems quite easy, but then these gentlemen had no boils!

In reply Job said something like this: "I know what you mean. I am a sinner, I confess it, after the similitude of Adam's transgression, for no man can be pure with the Most High. But you appear to think that my present suffering is due to some special form of sin. But I know this explanation is false. I do not understand my experience, but I am certain that your view is a mistaken one." Then, growing more excited as the dogmatist invariably does, they came back at him and summed up their opinion in some such words as these: "Now to your other sins you are adding the vice of hypocrisy. We have always had some doubts about your piety, and we very much fear that our worst suspicions are about to be realised."

Now all the while this debate was going on a young fellow by the name of Elihu was looking on and listening; he got more and more interested until his nervous system began to flutter. Finally he said: "I beg your pardon. I know I ought not to open my mouth in this august assembly, but I must have my say. I have a view of this thing; let me tell you what it is." You can imagine these old gentlemen with a startled expression on their faces turning toward the young man as he began to speak. And he, too, proved to be a dogmatist. Most young men are. Yet his point of view was different from that of the others; more original and more daring. He based his dogmatism upon a false estimate of God's majesty. He almost equals the Epicureans who placed their deities in a remote heaven, and made them indifferent to what goes on in this world. His argument amounted to this: "What is all this pother about? He is the Almighty God, a Great God; why

should He Who is so majestic concern Himself with the petty experiences of such creatures as we are?" That is to say, because God is God, it is foolish for men to suppose that He is interested in their affairs. Elihu developed this argument at great length. God speaks to man in one way or another, but man regards it not.

We do not know precisely when the book was written, but it appears to reflect the post-exilic point of view. Before the Babylonian exile there was very little consciousness among the Jews of what we should call individuality. A man gained his value from his relation to a race or a state. The Jew attained his consciousness of individual importance somewhat earlier than the Greek. You find this in Ezekiel when he answered the proverbial statement current among the exiles, "Our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge," by saying, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This passionate craving for personal significance is one of the most pathetic and persistent forces in human nature. It is a great and terrible experience when a man is forced by his adversities and afflictions to regard himself for the moment as distinct from the mass, until he feels that there are only two beings in the universe—God and himself. It was this insurgent sense of individual importance brought out most vividly in Job's consciousness that made him aware of the stupendous mystery of the whole business. Yet Elihu ignored this, just as the others did.

And Job is turned away from traditional views of religion to find an answer in his own convictions. I do not think a man becomes spiritually of age until some such process takes place in his soul. The point of view of the external people, of the traditionalists and con-

fident gentlemen with a single experience, is thoroughly beside the mark. This wordy young man, so fascinated with his own verbiage that he dare tell Job there is no mystery in his life, is quite incapable of finding a solution. What Satan could not do, these well-meaning friends came near doing. They misjudged Job. What troubled the man was not so much the fact that he did not understand his trial, as that his friends so confidently asserted that they did.

He now begins to complain and someone will ask, "How about his patience?" Well, what is patience? It is certainly an achievement, rather than a gift, and a slow achievement at that. Patience at any rate cannot mean the absence of complaint. It is rather a willingness to live faithfully in the face of a mystery that you cannot explain. The prophet Habakkuk faced a mysterious experience, and what did he say? "I will take my stand on my watchtower, and see how God will answer my complaint." That is patience, and Job had it in abundance. He did not understand his experience, but he is not disposed to find fault with God. He is even willing to wait and see; but his friends tried him sorely, because they were in such a desperate hurry. Some questions require time for their settlement, and surely this is one of them. Job had to endure a great deal of hardness for a season in order to prove the reality of his righteousness; but the impatience of his friends came near breaking his spirit, because they faced him with three alternatives, and started reasoning processes that all but clouded his faith.

The first of these alternatives was this: Renounce your integrity and accept a false view of God. That was the view of his friends. "You say you are honest and sincere. In this we believe you to be self-deceived.

The finest thing in your heart, that thing you call your integrity, is a lie. Renounce it forthwith. Go through a stereotyped process of repentance, accept our narrow view of God, take our traditional notion of religion, and everything will come out all right."

The second of these alternatives was "Hold on to your faith in your integrity as against your friends; but do not look to it to sustain you; confess an unsolvable mystery in your experience; recognise the vain hope of any subsequent solution; give up faith in God Whom you cannot understand and die." That was the view of Job's wife.

The third alternative was—"Hold on to your integrity, and wait for an answer from God." This was the view of his afflictions that he finally adopted. The first alternative we have already discussed, but I want to say a word of the second and third. I wish to put in a plea for Job's wife. She is one of the misunderstood women of the world, the favourite target of bachelor commentators. Some have even ventured to say that she was the agent of the devil, and have likened her to Xanthippe, the much maligned wife of Socrates. Many practically say that Job's wife was in this instance the mouthpiece of Satan, and that her advice amounted to this: "This God of yours, why not curse Him? Defy Him. Rouse His wrath and let Him slay you." Can any reasonable person imagine a wife giving such advice as this? Job had the boils, but she had the husband with the boils, a greater affliction truly. Think of what she had lost! She shared in all the sufferings of her husband; her home and her children gone; yet she endured without complaint the whole of it. She was the biggest human help Job had. She never said, "Curse God and die." What she did say,

if you read the story right, was, "Renounce God and die.," a very different matter. What she meant was this, "Job, our view of religion has turned out to be wrong. We thought we understood God, but now we find He is an unsolvable mystery. Let us give it up. We are leaning on a broken reed. There is nothing left to live for; our property is gone, our children are dead, you are sick and friendless. Let us abandon everything and die."

In my judgment, the best commentary on Job is a series of illustrations made a century ago by William Blake. His treatment of Job's wife is altogether satisfactory. Beside the patriarch in every illustration, save one, is this appealing little figure, sharing all his experiences and partaking of all his afflictions. The one picture from which she is absent shows Job looking over the rim of the world into the pit of hell. She could not go with him in this experience because she had not fallen from such a height. If you will carefully read the poem you will see that God never blamed the woman. Job's answer to his wife was characteristic: "Shall we receive good from the hands of God and not evil? In your disturbed frame of mind you talk as if you were one of the foolish women." If I were a woman I should not like to be the wife of a great saint. This woman's attitude is that of the average Christian, and she is closer to us than Job himself. Let us not be too ready to put labels on her, lest haply we despise something in our own nature. Job never showed to better advantage than in his patience with his wife, and it was his steadfast faith that finally brought her up to the level of his vision.

Job determined to hold hard by his integrity, the finest thing he knew. Dogmatic people try to reduce

human experience to measurable limits. To them religion and life are things that can be put up in a box and labeled. So thought Job's friends. They believed you could take a line and measure the majesty of God, and they tried to take a human life and strip it of all mystery. The truth is that a life without mystery is a life without meaning. There can be no great faith without spacious atmospheres and lofty vistas. The life of faith is mystery, and the life of mystery is wonder, and without wonder there can be no worship. "Open thou mine eyes," says a Psalmist, "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." And in that very psalm he has said more than a hundred things about the law, yet felt the depth and mystery of what was beyond it. Thus felt Job as he fell back on his indestructible hope. He believed that somehow and sometime God would answer him, that God would be on his side, that his integrity would be openly acknowledged. This constituted Job's captivity.

Let us now see how God turned it. The process began in Job's own reflections. Instead of turning sour and pessimistic, more than ever he looked into the depths of his consciousness, and came at last to realise the ultimate significance of his sufferings. He felt deeply and truly that God would meet him and answer him, and suddenly there broke into the sorrow of his mind the great truth, "I know that my redeemer liveth." Redeemer here means *vindicator*. Job's idea is that it may be here on homely earth, it may be yonder, worlds away, but eventually, whether he lives or dies, he will confront his Vindicator, Who will judge him righteous. From that moment the cynical adversary in the courts of heaven is driven from the field. He had said that no man was righteous for the sake of right-

eousness; yet here was the very man he had selected actually saying that only the vindication of righteousness would content him. Thus Paul felt in the Roman prison when he wrote his last letter to Timothy: "The time of my departure is at hand. * * * Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous jurge, shall give me."

I think one of the most powerful arguments for the immortality of the soul is found in this fact. If man were mortal there is no solution of Job's problem, for it is a problem of the suffering of the righteous. I can understand why the wicked should suffer, but I tell you the more I see of life the keener is my feeling that the unmerited suffering of good people requires an explanation. They are rarely if ever adequately explained in this life. It is not the fact of suffering that breaks down a man; but it is suffering without meaning or apparent object that is the cross which no man can bear. But once grant that earthly experience opens out upon an eternal world, that the sufferings of the righteous are part of the plan of God for the perfection of His kingdom, and I think we may well be content to wait patiently. Only goodness that is unadorned is seen to be self-sufficing. Clothe it with ever so little of this world's riches, and men will still doubt its reality; but once strip it of all external support and let it remain goodness, and men will believe in it. That is why there is so much pain in the world:

"Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,
We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain
ends too."

I think when life's fretful fever is over we shall find that the road to intimacy with God lay through this old,

undramatic, gainful way of pain. That is why God Himself came to us not with argument but in an experience; not through barren philosophy, but by incarnation. He Himself has suffered, and through His pain we are made alive. Job did not know this, but he was on the road to its comprehension, and thus his lonely figure reached across the centuries and made itself familiar with Gethsemane and Calvary.

This is what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Why? Because faith means loyalty. It means steadfastness under conditions the most trying and frequently mysterious. Without faith of this sort it is impossible to understand God. Amiel has well said that "God is the Great Misunderstood." He could not tell Job his experience was a trial. The mystery of it was essential to its reality. To have told Job what was taking place in heaven would have reduced the whole experience to absurdity; but we know what was taking place there. The adversary was completely routed, not by an argument, but by an experience.

While this process of reflection was going on Job's mind began to clear. Then something happened. God spoke to him. Notice particularly what God said. He did not try to explain the trial, neither did He inform Job concerning the debate which had been going on in the courts of heaven. Still less did He say to his much-tried servant, "Now that you have endured enter at once into your reward." What God did for Job was to deepen the mystery of his experience. He practically said to him, "Who are you anyhow to darken counsel with words? Where were you when I made the worlds and hung the stars in the sky?" In our deeper moments we become aware of a greater, more

awful mystery within ourselves than in all the external glories of the world, and so felt Job, for this Voice from the sky stirred him to the depths. I can see him turning towards the Voice, his old eyes glistening with tears, but his face illuminated with a new vision, and I hear him say in broken accents, "I heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear. I thought I understood Thee, for I believed in the traditions of my fathers, but now that mine eye seeth Thee, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." That was a divine moment in the history of a soul, showing not only the greatness of God but the greatness of His servant also.

For if God deepened the mystery of Job's experience, remember He brought him up to the level of it, and that is just how anyone is made great. Why should we wish to get rid of the mystery that surrounds our lives? You and I could as easily live in a world without air as in a spiritual world without mystery. It is well for us sometimes to reflect on the unspeakable things in God's relation to us, especially to stand before the Cross, to contemplate that Life and Death and Resurrection, to visualise in spirit that stupendous Word of God, and wonder and wonder and wonder until one is overcome with silence and awe. This is to feel about the mystery of life that deeper and more tender mystery of the love that created it.

In this fashion Job's captivity was turned. Windows opened and he looked out upon a greater God, upon a Divine Being more in harmony with the requirements of his expanding personality. While indulging in such happy reflections Job bethought himself of the mistaken view of his friends. He desired that they should also share in his blessedness and straightway kindles a fire and offers prayer and sacrifice," and the Lord turned

the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends." Suddenly the clouds broke, the sun came out, and Job looked upon a world without a shadow. I believe the question put to us today differs very little from that of the cynical adversary, "Doth Job fear God for naught?" Are we Christians for what we can get out of it, or because we believe goodness is its own reward? I wonder how many of us love God for Himself alone? If we have learned to do this beyond all controversy, it has been the fruit of such experiences as are here described. Our poverty comes from our obvious riches; but our riches are to be found in the implications of our experience; so if going back to Job and learning how he solved his problem we can be brought a little closer to the comprehension of the mystery of grace, and understand why Christ forgot His agony and pain, and on the Cross prayed for His enemies, we shall have lighted on the secret of happiness—we shall enter into the blessed companionship of our Lord and our God.