THE LOOM OF PROVIDENCE

The Loom of Providence

BY

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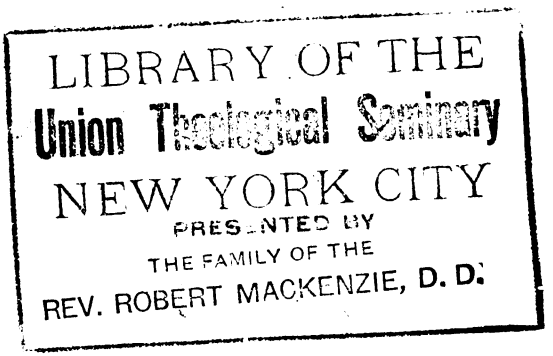

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"With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustred by His love;
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land."

PREFACE

THESE sermons were preached in the ordinary course of the ministry throughout the year. They were suggested by the general theme of God's ways with men. They were aimed at the cultivation of faith and patience and hope under the discipline of God. Life is larger than we now see; God's purpose for us includes many things which we cannot now understand. This should be more for our encouragement than our despair; nothing evil can befall the righteous man either in this world or in any other. To get a grip of this truth is to steady ourselves in all the swirl of present things. In crossing the Jordan on horseback the rider, looking on the swiftly moving stream, grew dizzy and was like to fall; his Arab guide struck him sharply under the chin, saying, Look up! These sermons aim to act the part of the Arab guide; to call attention to some of the abiding principles that mark God's method with us in providence and in grace; and to do so in such manner as may enlist the attention and the memory of active business men.

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I

THE LOOM OF PROVIDENCE

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.—Romans viii. 28.

WHAT an enigma human life is! Here we are, endowed with quick and sensitive faculties susceptible of sharpest pain and keenest pleasure; capacities within us of unspeakable sorrow, of ecstatic joy. As between the towers of old German castles they stretched wires which every wind that blew woke to major or to minor tones, so are we stretched with such taut and responsive faculties and exposed to all the forces of nature which wake the chords to gladness or to sadness. Nor have we often the choice of place in which to live. Some fateless wind or bird carries the seed of one pine tree to a sheltered valley, where it grows straight and tall, vexed by but few storms; another is carried far up the mountain slope, and grows exposed to all the storms that blow. The providence of God has cast the lot of some of us in sheltered places and of others in places exposed to adverse winds.

We are endowed with a moral nature, conscience taking note of right and wrong, happiness following ultimately only the right and misery surely following the wrong. With this sensitive moral nature we are

sent into the dubious ways of this world, beset with many probabilities of moral danger and disaster. Endowed also with an immortal life to be shaped into permanence of character, good or bad, in these few years of time. One could so look and so reflect on this side of life as to fall into doubt whether it were not better that a child born should at once silently pass into the world whence it came.

Over against these hidden uncertainties God has hung out exceeding great and precious promises, which gleam along our way as lamps shone along the bends of the river for the boatman's guidance in his voyage through the night. Of all the many promises of the Bible this one in the text seems the most comprehensive and the most assuring. When you go hunting in October you find the hills laced with many light paths made by the deer as they went browsing here and there, but there is one path broad and well-beaten as if the deer from many hills had trodden there, for it leads to some favourite spring where they all went to quench their morning thirst. The Bible is laced with many footpaths of the saints feeding on the green pastures or sauntering by the still waters of God's promises, but there is one path well-beaten as if all had trodden there, and that broadest path leads to this text. It is the one lingering spring when all others are dry: "All things work together for good to them that love God." With that promise possessing the soul, we can look with hope into any child's face and congratulate it on its share in life. With that hope we can look into what unknown years and experiences are yet before us on earth without fear. With that promise we can look to another life and another world,

knowing that no permanent evil can befall us. It gives us the franchise of the universe and of eternity.

This promise being of such importance, let us look more closely into it, that we may know more of its meaning and sufficiency in the day of stress. There is that in its language which suggests a web of cloth woven on a loom. We examine such a piece of cloth in three particulars: First the warp, the long threads: do they run from end to end unbroken? Then the woof, the cross threads: are they cotton or wool or silk, are they closely woven? And then we unroll the web to see if the design is such as we desire and if it is well wrought in. Let us try our text that way.

"All things work . . . for good." That is the warp, the long threads. "All things"—looking back over our lives, running our fingers along our past experiences, can we say that? Is it clear to us to-day that all things have worked for our good? We hesitate here. There are some things in our lives not yet explained, which show no connection with that word "good." They have worked for pain, privation, disappointment. When Jacob looked over his past life at a certain time he saw so many of these unexplained things that he dismally said, "All these things are against me." When Job looked over his life there appeared so many broken and defective threads in the warp that he hastily said: "Man is of few days and full of trouble. Mine eyes shall no more see good." Doubtless there are those to-day who speak with Jacob and with Job. Some there are the warp of whose lives run longer and stronger, who can say, *Some* things work for good. Many things that disturbed their faith and distressed their hearts at the time, rising

now in retrospect, are seen in a clearer and more encouraging light. Others, older in years and riper in experience, who have outlived the haste and passion of early judgments, can look back and run their fingers along the warp-threads and say, *Most* things have worked for our good. But Paul in our text says with confidence and with emphasis, "*All* things work for good."

We may well listen to Paul, for he is speaking out of a wide and varied experience. There are many years behind him, and many trying scenes. He runs his fingers over these warp-threads, and says, "I know by experience what tribulation is, what persecution is, what famine is, what nakedness, peril, sword is. I have tasted them all, and so far in the providence of God they have worked for my ultimate good. I have conquered and more than conquered. Not only have these threads not broken, they have been strengthened by the test of experience."

We may well listen to Paul, because he is also speaking out of the rich inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is all very well for Paul to go over the past and speak with the confidence of experience. But bethink you of what lies before us. The awful forces of nature beating on our fragile lives as the surf beats on the little limpet clinging to the rock on the shore; the mysteries of death, the disintegration of the grave. Has he thought of these among his "all things"? And how can he say so confidently and so emphatically that all things work for good? Because he is speaking by inspiration of the Spirit, to whom nothing in the future is unknown, to whom the whole purpose of God, the whole outcome of his providence

is known; who sees beyond the present clanking of the loom the finished product of the weaver. And in the wisdom of that inspiration he runs his fingers along the warp of the unfinished web, and says, I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from, or to break the warp-threads of goodness that bind us to, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Someone has traced these long threads from end to end and has tested them. We know that all things work together for good. This is the comfort and the triumph of Christian faith.

Let us look at the woof—the cross threads. All things work *together* for good. When the weaver has stretched his warp on the loom he then fills his shuttles with variously coloured threads and thrusts them back and forth, weaving the warp-threads together. The warp is not a web of cloth; you cannot cut off a piece of it and clothe yourself. It must first be woven together by the woof. This word "together" is the emphatic word of the text. We sometimes hear this verse quoted, "All things work for good." That is not true. It is not true to Scripture. It is by no means true to life, as we know life in experience. There are some things which, in themselves considered, are evil and only evil. There are some things in the providence of God which, if taken by themselves, are cruel, some things which find their expression in the words spoken on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These things cannot be explained by themselves. At the weaver's

hand are many shuttles, filled with differently coloured threads. He now thrusts in a white, a blue, a black thread. You cannot judge the purpose of the weaver by the thrust of one shuttle or the weave of one thread white or black. You must wait until he has emptied all of his shuttles, until he has thrust in all the woof and knit up the warp together. Nor can we judge God or pass upon his ultimate purpose in our lives by any one event in our experience or by any one day or year in our lives. We are yet on the loom, his shuttles are not yet empty. Give God time to put this and that together, to complete the purpose of his providence. It is the end that crowns the work.

It is time to look at the design. "All things work together for *good*." After the weaver has set his warp and emptied his shuttles of the woof he removes the web from the loom, unrolls it, and reveals the design he was all the time weaving. Perhaps the tapestry is a battle scene, or Rebekah at the well, the birth in Bethlehem, the scene of the cross, or the ascension of our Lord. He hangs it up now for your inspection and opinion. On the loom of Creation God is working out the design of the Good. He casts no shuttle at random or in caprice. On the great loom God stretched his cosmic warp-threads and then filled his shuttles with the woof of light and shot them back and forth. "And God saw the light that it was good." He stretched his world-threads and took up successive shuttles filled with the red threads of fire, the grey of flooding rains, the blue of oceans, the green of forest, the purple of heath, and wove them together and at the end of that world-day unrolled the web, and behold a beautiful, well-ordered world. "And God saw that it

was good." The weaver sat down again and filled his shuttles with threads of life, of spirit, of thought, of imagination, of affection, and at the end of that day took the web off the loom, and behold the man made in the divine image. "And God saw that it was very good." On the loom of his providence over man he is working out the same design of the Good. Once more he stretched the warp, this time of human history. Stretched them over fifty or a hundred centuries, and then filled his shuttles with threads—purple threads of law, scarlet of sacrifice, grey of prophecy, silver of psalm, white of type and typical lives, until in the fulness of time he unrolled it, and behold the Desire of all Nations, the Man Christ Jesus, the Revealer of God's love, the Redeemer of Man, and over him sounded voices from heaven: "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," "Peace on earth, good will to men."

At last he set the warp of your own individual life along the days or the years allotted to you and filled his shuttles and is weaving. He is still at the loom and on go his shuttles day and night. White threads of youthful joy, scarlet of suffering, grey of sorrow, purple of duties, black of temptation, and golden threads of grace thrust in and out at each clanking of the loom. And what he is doing we know not now, but we shall know when he has emptied his shuttles and woven all the warp together into his foreseen design. And when he is done with you he will remove you from that loom, and behold you are a man redeemed, a perfect man, according to the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. Looking on that final outcome of the loom of providence David said, It was good for me that I was afflicted. Jeremiah said, It was good

for me to bear the yoke in my youth. James said, It was to my joy that I fell into divers temptations. Paul said, My light afflictions worked out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. At last when God was done it appeared to them as yet it will appear to us that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

"All things work together for good." To whom? To all? Let men be their own judges. God makes his rain to fall on many fields, but some give grain and some give thorns. The sun shines on all things alike, but the wax is melted and the clay is hardened. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, if the eyes are healthy: but if the eyes are diseased the light of the sun is as piercing needles. Something depends on the inward condition of that on which the benefit falls. Law and justice and orderly government work together for good. To whom? To all? While we are in harmony with the laws of our country and obey them they work together for good. When we are out of harmony and disobey them they work against us. The lawbreaker does not find the penitentiary good. Here too something depends on the inward condition of the citizen. The ordinary providences of God fall upon us all alike. Joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, do not follow any specific lines that we can trace. We all live under the same moral government, but all are not similarly affected under these providences.

"Some murmur when their sky is clear
And wholly bright to view,
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue.

" And some with thankful love are filled
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy gild
The darkness of their night."

Here also we must consider the inward condition of mind. By the same law we read, " All things work together for good to them that *love God.*" The condition is reasonable, it has been tested in experience. The outward happening is interpreted by the inward state of the soul. The prophet could say: " Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." David could say: " Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." And again, " Because thou hast made the most high thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, because he hath set his love upon me therefore will I deliver him." Nothing evil can befall the man who loves God, either in this world or in any other. Love is mistress in the Interpreter's house.

Yet if our love to God is the full measure of this promise it is of very uncertain outcome. Our love is weak, wavering, subject to all moods and tenses. If the weaving out of this promise depends on the accuracy and constancy of our hands it will come off the loom with colours mixed and threads broken. Does God leave this promise to the hazard of our changeable affections? The text does not stop here. It adds, " To them who are the called according *to his*

purpose." That purpose goes underneath our love, antedates it. It was the working out of that purpose that awoke our love. Herein is love not that we love God, but that he loves us. We love him because he first loved us. It is therefore not so much our love for God as God's love for us that secures our final good. Our love may change as moonlight on a cloudy night, his purpose is without change or shadow of turning. Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end. It is the saving purpose of God, then, that lies beneath our Christian hopes. It is his wise hand that fills each shuttle and his unerring hand that thrusts in each successive thread. God is at the loom. Love fills the shuttles with their various threads, Love conceived the design of our perfect salvation, and Love will surely complete it in that day.

It is as Paul saw this profoundest truth of the gospel that he says, "We know that all things work together for good." Whatever changes he might yet meet, God's purpose of love changes not. Whether he was to be subject to the play of "all things" for one year or for fifty, he knew that no years could outrun or outreach God's love. However inexplicable present afflictions might be he knew that God was at the loom making all these afflictions work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

"With mercy and with judgment
My web of time he wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustred by his love;
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land."

II

GOD'S MOTIVE IN HIS WORKS OF NATURE

Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.—Revelation iv. 11.

And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.—Genesis i. 31.

WE recently thought of the motives under which we do our work. This text lifts us at once above all the-e smaller duties, cares, and questions concerning ourselves, to questions about God and his works. The questions, what shall we eat or drink or even what we must do to be saved, are not the only questions we find ourselves asking. There is room in our mind for more sweeping, less selfish questions as we look upon the ways and works of God in the universe in this world and in man. Let us try for the hour to forget our own side of these things and look at them from God's side. Let us move away from the mere utilitarian view in which we ask what purpose they serve, to what practical use we may put them, and ask why God made them, what was his motive in thus making the universe, the world, and man.

When the geologist is searching the hills for coal or iron he sometimes finds formations so suggestive as to

lead his mind far away from the practical purposes of the minerals themselves to thoughts of God and the power and beauty in which he works in the earth. The astronomer searching the heavens for the laws that govern our seasons and our crops, that guide our ships across the seas, sometimes feels the law of levitation drawing his thoughts upward to the other side of the stars, and he wonders in what centre of light God moves and works. It is a pity that in theology and religion we should not forget politics, or business, or the church, and give ourselves a little while to think of God and of what he thinks of all these things and us.

I know the path the text invites us to enter leads as it were into one of those glorious passes in the mountains filled with moving cloud and shadow, alluring and baffling the wondering eyes. Looking at such a pass from your door in the valley it is never twice the same; now impenetrable with clouds close compact, and now opening before some stirring wind to heights so distant as if angels only could wander there. If at best we can know but little of these works of God, if we know only part of his ways, the thunder and diapason of his works who can know? How much less can we know of the wondrous mind and motive from which they come!

> "These are thy glorious works, parent of good,
> Thus wondrous fair. Thyself how wondrous then!
> Unspeakable——"

Yet let us not turn back too soon. For inasmuch as we are made in the image of God, that which cannot be learned by looking without may be learned by look-

ing within. From the drop of dew pendent from the blade of grass we can tell the law governing those massive worlds pendent in infinite space. So from the motions and motives of our own souls we can catch something of the divine motive from which came the light, the life, the bliss of this world and of heaven. In man there is an instinctive and irrepressible desire to turn raw material into forms of usefulness and beauty. Here in Genesis we read that no sooner had men started on their career than Tubal Cain began to fashion instruments of brass and iron, and Jubal turned the idle reed of the marsh into a musical pipe and strung cords into a harp. Your boy was scarcely three years old when he sought to improve the parlour by driving nails into the floor; his sister gathered a handful of rags and made them into a doll and gave it a name and took it to bed with her as well pleased as if she had created a world. Yourselves passing through the pine forest will wonder into what houses or ships the trees could be formed. Passing through some new valley you will imagine the farms and orchards that could there be made. Passing along the stream you will think what mills could be run, what electric power and light produced by its flow. There are women in every congregation who, finding themselves in a place of disorder, will feel their fingers aching to arrange it as they think it ought to be. The brooding spirit of creation and order is in us. The beasts of the field roamed under the trees and along the banks of the rivers for centuries, seeing nothing in them but a place to quench their thirst in one and to find food and shelter in the other. But man looks upon a tree and immediately wishes to form a cabin, a canoe,

or a plough. It is by the exercise of this faculty that man has classified the maze of the sky, transformed the face of the earth, turned the wilderness into waving fields, the waste of ocean into pathways for commerce, the chaotic cruelties and tyrannies of savage society into well-ordered government, the waste of rock and forest into temples of worship. Extend now this quality of our own nature—this instinct to create, this desire for order—extend this out into the infinite, and we come to God. For as the pool on the seashore rises and falls in time with the swing of the great sea with which it is connected by some secret vein in the rock, so man making a cabin, his wife putting it in order, his daughter making a doll, is just the swing of the Eternal Creator rising and falling in the pool of their little souls.

Mark again that man enjoys what of good or right or order he makes. There is a glow that comes to the mind in all true work, produced not by the usefulness or the beauty of the thing made, but by the sheer act of making it. True work and joy are mother and daughter. The highest joys of earth are not those let down upon us as a gift; but those we create for ourselves in our own true work. When the miner has tramped the canyons for many weeks prospecting for gold; when with sweat and toil he has removed the overlying rock, and at last comes to the yellow grains, there is a joy which the Danæan showers of gold from the skies could never produce. The thrifty young man will toil and save and buy a lot in a suburb, and build his own cabin with his own hands, and by-and-bye take his bride there. Poor and poorly made perhaps, but there is more happiness in it than in any

perfect palace he may yet order to be built for him, and all because he himself made it, and in making it tasted the wine of the true creator's joy. There are no grapes so luscious as those from the vines you planted and trained on the trellis with your own hand.

Extend this quality of our own nature up to the infinite again, and we come to God. As our minds go out in creative energy, not only for the sake of the thing made, or for the uses to which we may put it, but for the sheer joy of making, of creating; so God's energy goes out in his works, not for the ends they may subserve, but for the sheer joy the Creator had in creating them. By these steps of inference we rise through the mountain pass and come above the clouds, and there on the summit hear the Scripture telling us what was the primary motive of God in the creation of the world and of man. "Thou hast created all things, and for thine own pleasure they are and were created."

The principle thus given us in our text is illustrated and confirmed throughout the Scripture in God's works of nature and of grace. As to God's works in nature: Here in Genesis we have the story of creation. The spirit of God brooding over the material chaos of disorder until there came forth light, and "God saw the light that it was good." That man seeing the light should find it good and a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun, is no wonder, for it is the support of his life and health. That the Sons of the Morning should shout for joy when they saw the dark abyss illumined, is no wonder; but here we are told that God himself, seeing his own handiwork, felt that it "was good." The ordered firmament awoke new joy.

The wonder of life followed, and behold, again, "God saw that it was good." And this from step to step in the rising evolution of his purpose. Till at the last arose the man, shadow of his own image, reason answering unto reason, will to will, affection to affection, and behold the fulness of joy; "God saw that it was *very* good." David, looking back on these works of creation, exclaimed, "The Lord rejoiced in his work." And here in our text those lofty spirits and saints in heaven, looking back upon the completed scene, exclaimed, "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."

This will answer curious questions that sometimes rise in our minds. There are shores paved with many-coloured shells on which man has never landed; valleys carpeted every spring with the glory of green, and every autumn with the glory of golden colours, on which man has never trodden. The poet awakens a tone of sadness in our hearts when he sings:

> "Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear,
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Such apparent waste seems a pity; one would fain direct it to a worthy purpose. For millenniums before man came to earth the glory of the sunset flushed the sky, the rainbow spanned the retiring cloud, the mountains reflected themselves in a thousand mirror-lakes. Long after man came, the forests along the Hudson and the Delaware flung out their October banners where no man was present to see or to enjoy. Far away in space there are worlds to-day burning

in splendour on which the eye of man, aided by his most powerful instruments, has never rested. The light plays in sevenfold beauty before our eyes, but science is guessing that there are beams in light, the involved colours of which may transcend in beauty anything we can yet know. The sophist thought man was the measure of the universe, Socrates warned him that the robe was too large for his wearing. Why, then, were all these things made? Why this waste of power, of skill, of beauty, where no intelligence of man is present to see or to admire, no heart of man to adore?

Important as man is, certain as it is that these works of creation minister to our intelligence and to our adoring pleasure, yet they are not made for us primarily, or for us alone. Nor man nor angel may be present to gaze on the gems in the unfathomed caves of ocean, the flowers blushing on the desert, the colours burning on unseen worlds; but God is there. He walks the unfrequented solitudes and looks on these unvisited creations of strength and beauty, saying, "It is good," finding delight in the evolution of his own purpose. Our little and conceited question as to why they were made is drowned in the rushing answer of our text, "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Only God, said Socrates, is the measure of the universe.

And we ourselves, as part of nature, are here to-day not for our own sakes alone, but for the pleasure of God. We are here not even that we should work for him, or praise him, or heap costly gifts on his altar. "Our goodness extendeth not to thee." Our wisdom makes God no wiser, our wealth makes God no richer,

our worship makes God no holier; all these might scarcely be missed in the Hallelujah Chorus of the universe rising to his throne. We are here just because of God's joy in communicating what is best and richest in his own nature; that he might have the joy of that wondrous being in whom he should see the reflection of his own reason, his own holiness, his own love. God made man in his own image and placed him in the garden not only that man might walk with God and share the noble companionship, but that God might walk with man as one nearest to himself and share his rational and moral companionship. How this should hallow and solemnise and sweeten our life! In a thousand ways God is necessary to us; but this is the wonder and the glory of our life, that in some way we are necessary to God. "For thine own pleasure we are and were created."

As by induction and inference we rise from our own motives to the motives of God in his works, so by deduction from that let us come down again to ourselves. This is not an easy world. We are met on the threshold with the pertinent inquiry, What have you come to do? We are expected to take a full part in private and public affairs. Our example and effort are demanded for the kingdom of what is good among men, and for the kingdom of God in the world. Why should we take part in the public affairs of our city? Why should we use what power and influence we have to bring order out of disorder, justice out of injustice, honesty or honour out of dishonour, righteousness out of the chaos of civic political corruption? Is it because then we shall be taxed less, because we know that public vice destroys public prosperity and ulti-

mately reacts on our private welfare? Certainly our efforts may well be engaged by these utilitarian motives, but such motives seem low and poor in the atmosphere of this text. Those who have nothing to lose and nothing to gain are often the foremost in sincere effort to bring about just and honourable conditions in society, because there is in them a divine instinct, a natural love of order, of justice. They seek them and ought to seek them for their own sake. It is the outflow of the soul finding its supreme joy in the expression of what is best in itself. It is the music of the brook singing as it runs to the river, of the river as it runs to the ocean whence it came. We too have it in us to make things in our own image, and to find in doing so our own greatest joy. This puts us on God's side of things. We are moved by the very joy of doing right and conquering wrong. It is the joy of the Spirit of God brooding on chaos and bringing forth light and life and finding that it is good.

III

GOD'S MOTIVE IN HIS WORKS OF GRACE

Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.—Revelation iv. 11.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—Matthew iii. 17.

WE were asking what was God's motive in his works of Nature and of Grace. Our text takes us at once above all earthly measurements and beyond all earthly horizons to heights where we hear those spirits in heaven answering our question, "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." The prime motive of God, then, in all his works is the Creator's own joy, not only in the thing made, but in the very making of it. This general principle of the text is illustrated throughout the Scripture in three particulars. On a former occasion we saw how it is illustrated in his works of nature: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." Let us today see how it is illustrated in his works of grace.

First, in sending Christ to this world.

As on the material universe the chaos of darkness rested, so by the act of sin there came over the spiritual world the darkness of moral disorder. From this point of sin there is no more mention of the universe as such

in the Bible. God permitted man to look upon his handiwork, to follow his stately steps, to think God's thoughts not only after him but with him, until man sinned; then the inspiring scene is excluded from these pages. What God is doing in the far depths of space during these latter ages we do not know. Man needs to know nothing more of that until he first discovers some way of recovery from sin. Nor shall he look again upon the new heavens and the new earth which God is now creating until his eyes are cleared from that dimming of sin. Only the first few pages of the Bible are thus taken up with the work of creation. All the rest of it is taken up with the work of grace and redemption. That is God's work now upon the earth and among men, and that is man's first field of contemplation.

God was not willing that man, his last and best creation, the being made in his own image, whom he found very good, should be forever lost to him. And as over the darkness of material chaos God's Spirit brooded until there came forth light, so from this moral darkness the same Spirit brooded until there came forth that Sun of Righteousness which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, Jesus Christ, in whom all the hopes of man are centred.

What, then, moved God to send Christ to the earth? That man should rejoice at the coming of such a Saviour is no wonder; that Mary and Simeon and Anna should break forth into Magnificats of joy, that the wise men should follow the star across the desert to find him, we can understand, for he is the source of our life, he lights our eyes with the light of salvation and floods our future with the light of eternal life.

That the angels should hover over Bethlehem and chant their Gloria in Excelsis we can also understand, for men are their royal cousins. But what moved God to send Christ to the earth and to man? Unredeemed human nature scarcely finds any analogy here. Looking within, there is scarcely any suggestion in our own motives to lead us to the motive of God. Hence with wonder Job and David ask, "What is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou visitest him?" If on that day that man sinned the destroying angel had set his right foot upon the sea and his left foot on the earth and had sworn by him that liveth forever that there would be time no longer, and had destruction immediately followed, we could understand it. There are analogies for that in our own nature. But when instead of such a destroying angel there came down Jesus Christ, and angels of mercy chanting peace and good will to men, we must ask God himself to tell us the motive for such a miracle of grace. And here in Ezekiel he answers us, saying, "I do not this for your sakes, but for mine holy name's sake." There is the principle of our text again. God was moved to send a Saviour, not by any argument or compulsion from without; not by any prayer or plea for mercy on the part of man. His purpose was formed or ever our lips voiced a prayer for mercy, or ever we were born, or ever the world was made. For as in these teeming worlds above us God's creative energy went out into incarnate forms of majesty and beauty, so we have God's redeeming energy going out self-moved in that incarnate form of love and pity, Jesus Christ. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

Whether, then, he is calling the sun of nature from behind the clouds to flood the earth with life and light and beauty; or is sending the Sun of Righteousness from behind the clouds and darkness that are around about his throne to flood the souls of men with light and life and the beauty of holiness, God is moved from within, from his own joy of saving, for his own name's sake. "For thy pleasure He was and is sent." Whatever other joys may spring from it, whatever other beings may delight in it, it is primarily from God's own joy in doing it.

Man may or may not look on the sunset, look on the hills green in spring, golden in autumn; but God is there, and looks well pleased. The river is glad to turn man's mills, to carry his ships, to bear up the strong swimmer, if he will. Yet, if not, still hear the river ever singing as it goes, pleased in the rush of its own plenitude. Hear the sea sounding in its league-long surf its pleasure in its own power. We may listen or not, it is there, has been there before we were born, before man came on the earth. Men may or may not look upon Jesus Christ, and accept him as their spiritual light and life. They may be indifferent to the wisdom, the moral beauty, the marvellous love and self-sacrifice in which he lived and died. To you and me Christ may be a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness that we should desire him. But God is there, and looks upon him and rejoices in him as "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Christ may come unto his own and his own receive him not. Men may despise and reject him. But this world is a small part of the spiritual universe, and man is a small part of the intelligent spirits that throng

that world. Hear still those principalities and powers in heavenly places chanting their glad appreciation, "Worthy the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Let us think of this work of grace in the salvation of the individual sinner.

A material universe in darkness, and light comes—the sun. That was a great day for the world. A spiritual world in darkness, and light comes—the Sun of Righteousness. That was a greater day for the world. Practically greater than these, if possible, was the hour when God's Spirit brooded on our own souls and led us out of spiritual darkness into the light of eternal life and sent us on our way rejoicing, saved. Saved! who can measure the meaning of that word? Who can tell the eternal issues involved in it? What moved God to save you and me? Was it that there was something in us more unworthy of his attention, something of ability or character or innocence above our fellows? We ourselves would be the first to disclaim that.

> "How many hearts thou mightst have had
> More innocent than mine,
> How many souls more worthy far
> Of that sweet touch of Thine."

We never would have known the reason unless God had himself revealed it. Here in Deuteronomy it is written, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you." Just so. A woman's

reason—"He loved you because he loved you," and woman's logic is the only logic in which love's motives can be expressed. Here, again, we have the principle of the text—just the joy God has in saving us. Not so much our prayer as God himself stimulating to the prayer. Not so much man seeking God as God seeking man. Herein is love, says John, not that we love him, but that he first loved us. In the fifteenth chapter of Luke we have the story of the shepherd going out into the wilderness to find the sheep that was lost. Finding it, he brings it home on his shoulder, and there is joy in the fold. That shepherd is Christ and the lost one is you. That you should rejoice in being found and saved is natural; that there should be joy among the angels over you is natural; but as we look more closely into the story it is not the joy of man, nor of angel, that is emphasised, but of the Good Shepherd himself. "Rejoice with *me*," he says, "for I have found the sheep that was lost."

> "And all through the mountains thunder-riven,
> And up from the rocky steep,
> There rose a glad cry to the gate of Heaven,
> Rejoice, I have found my sheep."

Thus the shepherd rejoiced in saving the wanderer more than the wanderer in being saved. In Hebrews we read of Christ enduring the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before him—the joy of saving the lost. We may interpret our text: thou hast redeemed us, and for thine own pleasure we are and were redeemed.

Surely now out of all this I have a prevailing word of encouragement to those seeking to be saved. It is

always the burden of the awakened heart that it has nothing good enough to offer as a price for salvation; no argument sufficiently strong to arrest the approach of divine justice; no plea sufficiently eloquent to constrain the coming of mercy. But the motive to our salvation does not lie in anything in ourselves at any time or in any circumstance. It lies in God's own love of loving and saving. Hence there are no conditions of fitness prescribed, "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." "Come, buy, without money and without price." He waits, then, for no satisfaction, no argument, no plea from us. These he finds in his own heart. His saving mercy is not by price nor by constraint, but by the outflowing, the overflowing of his own loving nature. It all hinges not on your ability to buy, but on your willingness to accept.

There is a sure word here also for you who are Christians. You were not *saved* for anything in you. Neither are you *preserved* in the Christian life for anything in you. Preserved! this is a weighty word. Look into the years before you, look into the temptations, the trials, the changes of life before you. Grant that you believe in Christ and are really a Christian today, is there any possibility, probability, certainty that you will preserve your faith and integrity throughout all these dangers? One might well hesitate to enter such a course. You are not altogether dependent upon yourselves. You are not primarily dependent upon yourselves. God has an interest in you beyond your own worth. Because he loved you he saved you. Because he loves you he will preserve you. In the twenty-third Psalm, David chants this Christian con-

fidence, "he restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for"—well, what for? "for *his name's* sake." When David was a shepherd a lion or a bear came into his fold and stole one lamb from his flock; the young shepherd at once gave chase and grappled with him; he took the lion by the beard and made its jaws release the trembling lamb. Why? Not primarily for the lamb's sake, not that he would have one less or more; but for his own sake. It was *his*. He had counted it into his flock when born. He had branded it with his own name. He had taken it under his care as one of his. He would not thus be challenged or robbed. And you—Christ died for you; counted you among his own when you believed in him; took you under his care as your Good Shepherd. And the lion, seeking whom he may devour, seizes on you to destroy. And why should Christ interfere to preserve you? Among so many intelligences in the spiritual world is man of such great account? Among so many men is one more or less of such great consequences? No, not for your sake, but for his own, he will not be challenged, he will not be robbed. In that great shepherd-chapter of the New Testament Christ says, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The word *hand* there is the closed fist. The love that will not let us go. The ultimate safety of a child in a dangerous place is not so much the nervous grip of his arms about the mother's neck as the protecting grip of her arms about him. The Christian's final safety is not so much his grip on Christ as Christ's grip on him. Thus, then, in nature God worked in power and rested not until

there was a well-ordered universe "very good." In the spiritual world he worked in love and rested not until Christ came, the Beloved Son in whom he was "well pleased." In the world he works in righteousness, and will not rest until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Christ as Lord; until there is a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." In our own souls he works in mercy, and rests not until in every quality and grace of character we shall be blameless, perfect, like unto himself. And all for his joy in making, his love of loving, his delight in saving.

Not forgetting for a moment that there is much appointed for us to choose, to do, to strive, and to endure, I would fain lift your eyes to-day to the prevening power above our will, our effort, and our power. I would surprise you in your tent, armed and watchful, waiting for the conflict of to-morrow, as Joshua, wakeful with the responsibility he was carrying, was surprised in his tent by the vision of the man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand and saying, "*I* am the Captain of the host of the Lord." How the great soldier's heart must have been cheered by the knowledge that such a General was on the field.

> "Standeth God within the shadow,
> Keeping watch above his own."

With that vision in our eyes let us go back to the work assigned us, both in our own hearts and in the world, uniting with these high spirits of our text saying, "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."

IV

GOD'S ABUNDANCE AND ECONOMY

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.—John vi. 12.

LET us think of God and of God's ways with men and the world. All of God's ways are too many, too minute, too intricate for our clear seeing. A spider's web is often composed of four thousand fibres. Our senses are scarcely sharp enough to count them or see them. Who, then, can trace the intricate network of God's providence with the world and with men? Yet in the spider's web there are a few coarser fibres, radiating from the centre and anchoring it in place, on which all the finer fibres are woven. In God's providence there are certain conspicuous principles on which all the details depend. Our text gives us two of these principles, God's Abundance and God's Economy.

Let us think of God's abundance, "As much as they would . . . they were filled." In the olden time when a prince went along and purchased anything by the way, he gave not only the coin necessary to cover the cost, but flung his whole purse to the merchant. For such abundance alone befitted a king. The King of kings is not less royally bountiful. When he gives, when he works, when he pities, when he loves, the

recipients always have "as much as they would." They are filled, and always there are twelve baskets of fragments left over.

Is it in the creation of material things? We have no instruments to discover, no reed to measure, no figures to sum up the abundance above us. Is it in the creation of man? Not all the worlds above us are equal in value to one pulse-beat of the life with which he has endowed us. To life he has added sensation, consciousness, reason, imagination, memory, and hope; and then that harp of a thousand strings we call the heart, with its affection, its friendship, and its love. The whole projected on an immortality of existence. We were looking not long ago at the first locomotive that crossed the Western desert, and drew the first train to the Pacific coast. What a thing of power and beauty a locomotive with its train is, as, charged with power, vibrant like a living thing, it goes panting up the slope, plunging into the tunnel, skimming along the high bridge, bending around the curves, around the shoulders of the mountain, gliding again down into the valley, and sweeping out upon the plain, while now and again we hear the rush of its wheels or the beating of its powerful heart! Is there anything like it? One thing; the man, as God created him, endowed him, and set him on the track of life. Here you are to-day at a station; out of a six-days' run, the vibration of your week's work still beating in you; you can scarcely sit still because brain and heart are charged with such abundant forces. As men go about the train sounding the wheels, renewing the oil, refilling the tanks, and preparing it for another hundred-mile run; so God has given us the Sabbath as a stopping

place for the replenishing of these forces; preparing us to start again to-morrow, and another morrow, and so many to-morrows. That locomotive we saw grew old, it rattled and wheezed, became useless, idle; they put it on a side track, built a shed over it; then put it into the museum as a curious specimen of what *has* been. But you! you will go on; your present activities are only little runs in the shop-yard where your Creator made you. At present he is just trying you, getting you into working order. One of these days he will open the switch to the main track, and then on, and on, thinking, feeling, willing, achieving, enjoying, forever. He has filled our cup of life to overflowing.

Is it the providence of God—the measure of his care over man during this life? Then look again at the scene in our text. "Now there was much grass in the place." Yes, it was April, the country was carpeted with lush grass and many-coloured wild flowers. "Make the men sit down," he said, sit down on that springy, perfumed carpet. And then his own disciples, those kings and princes of his palace, girded themselves to wait on them. With his own hand he broke the bread, blessed it, and passed it on. That scene is renewed every day. "His allowance was a continual allowance, given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life." That is what an earthly king did for a favoured subject. We are the favoured subjects of one still more bountiful.

When we rise above the things of the body to those of the soul we are met by a similar abundance. The great ones of earth are guarded in their tents by sleepless sentinels. When Jacob lay down to sleep the

angels kindled their camp-fires about his tent. More than angels, God himself watches over his people and slumbereth not nor sleepeth. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? Fear ye not, ye are of more value than many sparrows. As to the salvation of our souls; God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. When a country is in peril the patriotic mother is willing to give two sons out of four, or one out of two; but when we were in peril God gave his *only* son. When Christ did come he gave his best, his all, his life. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. As to the world to which we are going; behold, not only a place but a home, a Father's house, many mansions. Its walls are made of precious stones, its gates are made of pearl, the river of life goes singing under its ever-living, ever-bearing trees. And all these are not the best; but only symbols of the best.

"Then again, I've juist been thinkin'
That when a-thing here's sae bricht,
The sun in a' its grandeur,
An' the mune wi' quiverin' licht,
The ocean i' the simmer;
Or the woodland i' the spring,
What maun it be up yonner,
I' the palace o' the King."

Our text reminds us, however, that ample as the abundance may be there is no waste. When this hungry multitude were fed by Christ with the loaves and fishes and were filled, immediately he commanded the disciples to "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." The prince or bishop in olden times swept along the street clothed in robes so rich and ample

that they fell in heavy folds and flowing train behind him; but he was immediately followed by some page holding up the costly train lest it should trail unnecessarily in the dust. God's abundance sweeps before us in flowing plenty, but economy comes as a page to lift that abundance out of the dust of waste.

Although in the creation of the universe God has flung into space worlds and systems of worlds beyond all count, there is none useless, none forgotten. "He bringeth out their host by number, he calleth them all by names." As in a company of well-organised men each is known to the commanding officer by number or by name, so, Isaiah tells us, God has given to each world in that glittering host a number and a name to which to answer when the roll is called. Each world has its place to fill, its part to play. In all the ample avenues of space, in all the teeming worlds that throng its ways,

"Nothing walks with aimless feet."

In the glittering procession of the night sky neat-handed economy holds up the train of abundance.

In the creation of this world God used abundant material and ample time. As the bee knows how to pack the greatest amount of material into the least space, so God has packed every corner of the earth with some form of riches. But science is telling us with increasing emphasis that there is no waste. If we had looked we could have seen a thousand pages of economy gathering up the fallen leaves of autumn and the falling fruit of summer into their baskets—nothing is lost. The country blacksmith will gather up the iron cuttings from the other side of his anvil

and throw them under the bellows, until in winter leisure he can weld them into new forms of usefulness. No careful workman is so frugal as God. The sun poured out its wealth of light and heat on the earth millenniums before man came, before any living creature could appreciate its warmth. Yet there was no waste. The plant and the tree gathered up the wealth and compressed it and stored it; and behold, the treasure-houses of forests, of coal, of oil, serving the present industry and comfort of man. The flame of your log, the red glow of your coal, are the suns of a million yesterdays shining on your hearth. The page economy came after the long feast of sunshine and gathered up the fragments—nothing is lost. What disappears in one form reappears in another. The White Mountains and the Adirondacks are getting perceptibly less each year, wasting down. The geologist could tell you when New England and New York will be a plain as level as any Western prairie. Storms lash the mountain side, frost disintegrates the crags, time decays them; but along comes economy in the form of rains and rivers and spreads out the fragments on the floor of the valleys—so many baskets of fragments in which we raise our wheat, our fruit, our roses. The poet dreamed and science proves

> "That not one worm is cloven in vain,
> That not one moth with vain desire
> Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire."

For always the Prince of Abundance is followed by the Page of Economy.

In the creation of man we saw the same abundance. God created him in his own image, equipped him with

all spiritual faculties, endowed him with an endless life, and gave him the freedom of the universe. But here, too, economy follows abundance. What ample centuries God took to fill our valleys with soil we can only surmise; what miracle of power produced the living seed we can only guess. But although God gave the soil and the seed, he will not plough, or sow, or reap. We must do that. He gave us the cotton and the flax; but he gave us no spinning-wheel, no weaver's loom to turn the raw material into fabrics. We must do that. In the midst of all God's abundance we will starve with hunger and perish with cold unless we observe the law of God's economy. In that vision of Ezekiel where God's abundance is presented to us as moving on large strong wing we read the pregnant sentence, "Under the wings was the form of a man's hand." Evermore the economy of man's hand must be under the wing of divine abundance.

Man is as much helped by this law of economy as by the law of abundance. By it we have attained to our present civilisation. If God's abundance alone marked his ways with us we would be to-day a band of naked savages, lying under some breadfruit tree, waiting for the overripe fruit to fall into our mouths. When God would raise a people above the level of mere bread, into eminence of mind and character and usefulness, he first places them in the brick-fields of Egypt, the swamps of Holland, the granite hills of New England, where God's abundance is strictly limited by his economy; where the divine wing must be accompanied by the man's hand. Out of this law have come the spindles, the wheels, the mills, and all that inventive and industrious spirit behind them.

Modern fortunes are made, not by taking what is easily reached of God's abundance—that day is past; but by gathering up the fragments—the by-products that once were waste. Out of the cotton seed, once thrown away, men now make as much as out of the cotton itself. We find ourselves where we are to-day because God, in doing enough, did not do too much for us. One father, out of love for his son, will work and plan and heap up treasure for him; will give him all the money he can spend and have him grow up in idleness, often enough to his ruin. Another father, with equal abundance but wiser economy, says, "I will train that boy to be wise in the use of the wealth I must leave him." He educates him, disciplines him, gives him only the money he earns; he must be at the office at eight o'clock, and take his lunch in the short nooning allowed the other men. In due time we find under the wings of the father's abundance the form of the son's hand, strong, trained, and steady. That young man lives to bless his father's economy —no less than his abundance. That is God's way with his children, whom he would lead to character, to usefulness, and to enjoyment.

This law of economy operates in the sphere of our salvation. God gave abundantly; gave his only begotten Son, gave him to the death for us all. And Christ, in carrying out the saving mission on which he was sent, spared not himself. He endured the cross for the joy of saving men. There was no horizon to his redeeming love. He would draw all men unto him. So he travailed in the abundance of his love until at last, with bowed head and breaking heart, he could say, It is finished. That is God's abundance.

As soon as that word, It is finished, fell from his lips, God's economy immediately appeared to prevent any waste. Up till that moment men might buffet him, mock him, put thorns on his brow, scourge and crucify him. But when the Roman soldier was sent to break the legs of the lingering sufferers, he broke those of him on the right and on the left. Shall he thus add unnecessary sufferings to Jesus? No! It is finished. No more of that; no waste of suffering. In burying the crucified they flung the poor broken bodies into criminal graves, unmarked and unhonoured, in the Potter's field. Shall they cast the body of Jesus into this Potter's field? And "make his grave with the wicked in his death"? No! It is finished. No more of that. Joseph of Arimathea —the angel of God's economy—put the sacred body into his own new tomb. There was no waste of indignity.

Let the grave now do its work of corruption; let it disfigure and disintegrate the bodies. Shall the fair lineaments of the face of Jesus thus be a prey to the worm? No! It is finished. No more of that. The stone was rolled away and Jesus rose from the dead. God would not let his Holy One see corruption. There was no waste of humiliation. Thus God's economy held up the train of his abundance lest it should needlessly trail in the dust of waste. Christ suffered enough for us; but when he reached the limit of enough he suffered no more.

A similar economy follows the application of this abundant salvation to our own souls. God opens overflowing treasures of mercy and of grace. There is enough for all; but there is no waste. The blood

of Christ is shed for us; but it is not to be trifled with, trampled on, or applied indiscriminately. Economy follows the cross. As God gave the sun, the rain, the soil, and the seed, and required that we should plough and reap or die of hunger; so God gave us Jesus Christ, and requires that by personal, intelligent choice we receive or reject him, or be forever unsaved. He is not thrust upon any man. "He came unto his own and his own received him not; but as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Behold, he says, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in. What an "if" is there! It is God's economy holding up the train of abundance out of the dust. A theory of universal salvation, however appealing to our sentiments, violates a law that marks God's ways in all his works of nature and of grace. Such a theory, if operative, would reduce us to spiritual savages under the tree of the bread of life, waiting for that to fall which we were too indifferent to gather. In a true sense we must work out our own salvation by this co-operation of choice, of repentance, of faith, and of affection toward Jesus Christ.

Men often say in respect to their personal salvation that they are waiting until the divine influences upon them are increased, until the wind of the Spirit blow in their direction. God's saving influences are flowing under us and blowing over us to-day in as abundant measure as they ever may. If we are not saved, it is not because God has failed to give us the necessary abundance; but because we have failed to gather up the fragments of time and opportunity and means of grace with the necessary economy. The wind may

blow and the tide set out, yet the ship rides idle in the harbor unless the anchor is taken up. After the anchor is shipped the blowing winds and flowing tide will carry the drifting ship to rock or shoal unless the sailor lays a guiding hand on the tiller. Thus under the divine wings we must ever put the form of a man's hand. Admiring the Prince of Abundance we must walk with the Page of God's Economy.

V

"WHAT IS MAN?"

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.—Psalms viii. 3-5.

DAVID as a shepherd lad sitting on the roof of his sheep-cote keeping watch over his flock by night, looking at the glory of the stars in that Oriental sky, thinks of the scene as a piece of tapestry woven by the fingers of God. Feeling something of the magnitude and majesty of the scene, thinking of the greatness of him who made and upheld it all, he felt in contrast his own littleness and wondered how such a God should think of such as he. And now as a man, risen by strange providences from the sheep-cote to the throne, from the condition of a shepherd over a few sheep to that of a king ruling over many men, crowned with honour and dominion, sitting of a summer evening on the roof of his palace looking at the same stars, he felt something of the greatness to which God had led him. His mind hesitates between the littleness and the greatness of man.

What is man? is a question asked at the dawn of history, asked by Job, by Socrates, by Buddha, asked

by thinking men in every age, asked wherever men are thinking to-day; and still the answer hesitates between his littleness and his greatness. Carlyle could say, "When I gazed on these stars have they not looked down upon me as if with pity out of their serene spaces, like eyes glistening with heavenly tears over the little lot of man." Pascal, brooding over this theme, concludes that man is "A feeble worm of the earth and the judge of all things, at once the shame and the glory of the universe." A little while ago and the students of nature were telling us that man was but a little lower than the monkey, child of the mollusk, a thing of earth and returnable to indistinguishable dust. Now comes Alfred Russel Wallace telling us that in all the majesty and magnitude of the heavens this little globe on which we live stands supreme in that it alone contains life, that among its many forms of life man is supreme, that in this universe the two greatest beings are God and man. Thus the scientist at the end meets the philosopher at the beginning of the century, where Cousin said, "The greatest word in language is God and the next greatest is man." The many answers to the question, What is man? may be summed up in two: looking at man from one side he has been stamped a worm, from the other an angel; these two may be but the different sides of the same fact.

Let us think to-day of the greatness of man. For it no longer requires a sermon or any argument to set us thinking on his littleness. That obtrudes itself upon us from every side, stares us in the face at every street corner, looks up at us from every lurking corner of our own souls. To view the mass of the

earth's population from this point is a humbling sight. Pessimism never lacks for sufficient facts to illustrate its dismal theme. The littleness of man is abundantly exploited. There are weekly newspapers widely read that tell us on their title page that the littleness of man is their special theme. All that is vain on the avenue, vile in the slums, immoral in society, selfish in business, corrupt in politics, is there magnified and emphasised. We are so many shadows so many shadows pursuing. The theme of man's littleness, once supposed to be the special theme of the pulpit, is taken from it; it is left to us now to strive to remind the oppressed and depressed souls of men of something of their remaining greatness.

There is a real sense in which man is little. Pessimism is not without some foundation in fact. The biographies of men are often a record of sorrows. When any great one came to call his fellows to goodness, to moral greatness, they opposed, persecuted, exiled, or crucified him. The earth is wrinkled with innumerable graves, the paths of men lead to the dust. Our life appears to be

> "A life of nothings, nothing worth."

In the shadow of this littleness many are born and live and die. But there is also a real sense in which man is great, so great as to be second only to God. Granting that man is a being in which much of what was best is burned out in the fires of passion and of vice, as in the autumn woods you have seen your last night's genial camp-fire reduced to grey ashes in the morning, yet even in such ashes there are buried coals of living fire. You may

scatter them, trample them, extinguish them; or you may gather them, blow on them, see them becoming red, heap dry leaves on them, and see the curling smoke suddenly burst into white flame. Every old hunter knows the latent greatness of hot ashes.

Man's greatness is seen in the constituent elements of his nature. Admitting that he has lost the moral image of God he still retains his natural image. Though he is fallen, he is yet a fallen spirit; though he has sinned and though sin may control the use he makes of his powers, yet sin itself cannot destroy these spiritual powers of a man. Genius may turn from noble directions and spend its greatness on things that are low and vicious, but the genius is there. A Byron may be intellectually as great as a Milton, the genius of a Napoleon destroying the liberties of an empire may be as great as that of a Washington setting a continent free. Let us distinguish between the faculties themselves and the use we make of them.

There are three faculties of our nature modelled after those of the infinite God—reason, affection, and will. Every man who can think and who by thought can follow God in the creation of the universe, re-creating it for himself—every man who to such thought can respond with feeling, either of admiration or of criticism, of adoration or of blasphemy—every man who under the stimulus of such thought and feeling can will and do, either in harmony with or in opposition to the will of God, manifests therein a Godlike greatness in his nature. Our souls so constituted are immortal, and immortal by virtue of these powers. It requires no argument to prove that a rose is fragrant, it is fragrant because it is a rose. There is no

argument in the Bible for the immortality of man, there is only the statement that God created him a living spirit, and because a spirit immortal. His spiritual nature carries immortality with it as surely as the rose carries its fragrance. The infirmities which mock our powers, limiting their exercise to a few hours, are limitations of the body. Death, that sarcasm of life, which limits these powers within the insignificance of a few years, is a barrier only to the body. The wind and the rough sea may shatter and sink the boat; the boatman need not sink, but swim to the shore and out of the wreck build him a better boat in which to continue his adventurous voyage. Infirmity may shatter and death dissolve the body; the soul, with its powers of reason and feeling and will, does not sink, but swims to another shore, builds for itself out of the wreck a nobler body to pursue its voyage to an eternity of existence and of the exercise of these God-like powers. From such a point of view not the littleness but the greatness of man looks down upon us. True, yet what is it all worth since man has sinned and lost the moral image of God?

Man is great even in his sin. It is only a great being who can sin. Satan had never been an angel of darkness had he not first been an archangel of light. The creation of a devil, as such, is theologically, morally, philosophically impossible. Man had never been a sinner if his origin were low, his very sin speaks the greatness of his moral origin. It is because we were created with that greatest of all powers, the power of a will free; it is because we were endowed with that greatest of all gifts, an individual personality; it is because we were created

with that greatest of all privileges, the privilege of self-government, self-determination at the turning points of life, that makes it possible for us to sin. The tree may grow up tall and stately, it is beautiful, but not virtuous; it may grow up twisted, dwarfed, misshapen, it is a pity, but it is not a sin, for it is not endowed with personality, it is not free to choose and determine for itself; it is the product of resistless necessity; we look at once for outside influences to account for its misfortune. The animal may be vicious and do much harm, it is not a sin. But because man has these free self-governing faculties, because he can think and reason, because he has that moral sense called conscience, because he can distinguish between right and wrong, between ought and ought not, because he can choose the right or the wrong, his declination from the right is not misfortune, it is sin.

It is a mournful fact that the very faculties of our nature which, in their proper exercise, would lead us into the greatest glory are just those faculties which can work out our own greatest ruin. The engine and the propelling shaft are just those which distinguish the great ocean steamer from some little fishing boat. By these internal powers she can make her way against contrary winds, she can mount over otherwise resistless seas, keeping to her true course and in the proper exercise of these powers she can come to her desired haven with speed and safety. And they are just those powers which, when they go wrong, most surely rack and wreck her. The power, the precision, the velocity by which she might make her harbour with success, are just those powers that

drive her most disastrously upon the rock, that tear up her steel sides and send her most swiftly to the bottom. It is by that which is great in her that she is most surely lost. It is exactly by the gifts of greatness that distinguish us, in their proper or improper use, that we work out our own glory or our own ruin, our own happiness or our own misery, by these we make our own heaven or our own hell. Heaven is heaven to us not because any robe of joy is thrown over our shoulders in which to walk angelic among the angels, but because we have chosen the good and carry with us these powers of greatness by which, out of the material of goodness, to weave our own angelic garments, as the caterpillar weaves its own diamond-studded butterfly wings. The harps the saints are said to play in heaven are not things of wood and wire put into their hands, but the harmonious play of these powers of the soul, tuned like an Æolian harp to the winds of the good, and whether the winds be soft or loud, whether they be laden with the perfume of summer fields or harsh and laden with morsels of ice from the mountains, the music they waken in the harp is harmony. And hell is hell not because any fires are kindled about us, but because we have chosen the evil and carry with us there these same weaving powers to fill their shuttles with hate of what God loves or love of what God hates. Hell is conscience tortured by the robe of our own discords, of our own weaving out of the poisoned material of evil.

The greatness of man is seen in the greatness of the salvation provided for him. When we are looking at all the influences acting on man and in him let us not overlook that influence we call the Gospel of

Christ. It is one of the real things in human history. Whether making for the greatness or the littleness of man it is a pertinent and potent influence. If we are looking out upon the sea judging of the ships that have been launched upon it let us look not only on those which the seas have scattered, the rocks gored, or the winds blown upon the shore; but also on those gallant barques standing away on the horizon, their lithe masts bending to an acre of sail filled with favouring gales, walking the water like things of life, going somewhere and apparently in safety. Looking upon the sea of life, judging of men born into it, let us look not only on those who through passion and vice and selfishness have made shipwreck; but also on those whose souls have caught the breeze of the gospel and who in straight courses or tedious tackings still keep their sails full, going somewhere and apparently in safety.

When we think of the gospel let us remember that the central fact of it is the Incarnation, God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ and dwelling among us, taking on our form, our nature, stooping to our level and not ashamed to call us brethren. Shadows of that coming fact fell on the minds of prophetic men at different times and places. Ever as they asked themselves, What is man? the question enlarged itself and lost itself in that shadow. The Greek gods were thought to make their central home on high Olympus; but men thought they sometimes saw one of them walking in the streets of Athens in the form of a man. Little as man was there would sometimes come a hero so brave in deeds, so wise in words, so beautiful in form, that men thought he must have a

divine father. When among the Hebrews of this Old Testament the high priest went once a year into the Holy of Holies of the temple where burned the Shechinah,—that flame of the divine presence,—he thought he saw the holy light fashioning itself to his eyes in the form of a man. Among simpler peoples it was the story of some great king coming down from his throne and mingling with the lowly and the low in search of some prodigal son, and finding him led him back to his true place and birthright. As men saw him go back with the king they realised what greatness had been among them unrecognised. These were forecastings of the greatest fact of human history, that a day would come and did come when the infinite God would veil his glory in the human nature of Jesus Christ. The wonder of Bethlehem was not that a heavenly babe was found in a manger; but that that child was Immanuel, God with us. The wonder of Abraham was not that an angel should come to his tent door; but that that angel was God in the form of a man speaking familiarly to him and partaking of his hospitality. The wonder of John was not that heaven was so great and beautiful, and that God on the throne should shine like a jasper; but that this God should at last come down from his throne, pitch his tent among men and dwell among us, and that on going back to his throne he should sit down there in the central place of power and glory and dominion in the form and in the nature of a man. When, therefore, we would judge of the littleness or of the greatness of man, let us look not on this man or that man there; but on the face of Jesus Christ, in whom are gathered up all the majesty, the

power, the possibilities of greatness that are in man. Let us be judged by our one true representative.

If the Incarnation as the preparatory step of our salvation speaks the greatness of man, much more, to our immediate senses, does the price that Christ paid for our redemption. We measure the worth of a captive by the price asked for his ransom; we measure the liberties we enjoy in church and in state by the price of battle and of blood paid for them. Christ coming and undertaking to ransom us had to lay down his life. Rich, he had to empty himself of his riches and for our sakes become poor. The Lord of power, he had to empty himself of his dignity and for our sakes become one despised of men. Matchless in character, he had to empty himself of moral reputation and for our sakes be counted a sinner and numbered with the transgressors. Lord of life, he had to empty himself of the last drop of it and bow his head and break his heart on the cross to pay our ransom. How great must man be who could be redeemed only at such a price!

The ultimate greatness of man springs from his union with Christ through faith. Christ, having paid our ransom, was raised from the dead, received up into heaven, and is set on the throne of power; on that throne he appears in the transfigured nature of a man. It were easy to find men to-day in the lowliest places of the earth, degraded creatures, bearing scarcely the semblance of a man; but we can rise in the scale of manhood from that low level until our eyes rest on that representative Man on the throne in heaven, and these two are vitally connected. When we accept him as our Saviour and our Lord he takes

us up into fellowship, friendship, kinship with himself. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. "To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." All this may very well lead us to respect and value ourselves as men redeemable; to consider the loss and the gain at stake in our acceptance or rejection of Christ; to consider the value of our fellow-men, however fallen, however low. In each there is this latent greatness waiting our sympathetic effort to be put in touch with Christ and in him to be redeemed, transfigured, enthroned in the inner circle of heaven.

VI

A LIFE PURPOSE

He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.—Luke ix. 51.

MAN always has been and always will be a hero worshipper. As the generations of the past come before us they are gathered about some military hero in the Forum, some hero of learning in the Academy, some divine hero in the Pantheon. We are moved to deeds, to learning, or to goodness, not by the contemplation of bare principles, but by the inspiration of some real person who has proved himself great. Seneca advises one who would improve himself to think of a Socrates or a Cato looking down upon him. The Greek fathers took their boys to the field of Marathon to impress upon them the men and the deeds that made them free.

All the principles of Christian doctrine and life and prospect of hope are gathered up for us as Christians, not in a creed, nor in a church, nor in a Bible; but in the person of Jesus Christ. All else are but means to lead us where at last we can see him. We are effectively moved to faith and good works in proportion as he becomes to us more and more a living person, and as we look more and more at his example and feel its stirring inspiration.

Christ's life was shaped and swept on by the power of a definite purpose. He steadfastly set his face

to go to Jerusalem. At the moment of our text he is at the north end of that Holy Land, entering on his final journey to Jerusalem; there to meet and accomplish the last requirement of that purpose on the cross. Not now for the first time did that purpose shine before his eyes. Jerusalem was in his thoughts from the beginning of his life. The shadow of the cross fell on all his days. During his childhood in Nazareth he was learning of Jerusalem, wondering what it was like, with a dim intuition that his own life was bound up with it. At twelve years of age he saw it for the first time. It absorbed his young interest; even then it was burned into his heart that there he would engage in his Father's business. Even then he forgot Nazareth and Mary, as if he were already deep in his life's purpose. So did the boy Hannibal go to his father's camp, put on his father's war-boots, and try to lift his sword, feeling that the purpose of his life too was to conquer Rome, and that he should enter on that purpose at once. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh good-naturedly at the generous haste of such boys. There followed eighteen years of obscurity in humble Nazareth; years of silence, of dreaming, of rooting of purpose; those silver years in which every young heart asks itself, What am I sent here for? What am I good for? To what purpose shall I put my life? At thirty years of age he wakes from dreams to action; his purpose is well formed; his eyes are clear to see it; his will to choose it; his energies are girded to begin it. He went down to Jordan to consecrate himself and to be baptised into that purpose. Then went into those forty days of temptation, where every earnest soul

must go, to meet all that is involved in it; to see what he must refuse, what he must endure, what he must suffer, if he is to reach that purpose.

His purpose was to use his life, and if need be to give up his life, to save men from the power of sin here and the consequences of sin hereafter; to contribute what in him lay to establish men in righteousness here and in happiness hereafter. Many influences arose to divert his steps from that chosen course. He was tempted to use his powers for his own personal ease, personal fame, personal aggrandisement; to use his powers for the making of bread for the mere body; to use them for his own popularity, for his own possession of the things of this world. For these things, as is natural to a young man, he was "an hungered." His answer to all this was that high word God, and God's work in this world. Friend and foe alike put themselves between him and his purpose to persuade or dissuade him from his Jerusalem. Nor are such friendly and unfriendly influences without power on a generous young heart. His answer to them too was that word God—"Thou savourest not the things that be of God." His own weakness, incident to his human nature, came between him and his purpose. When he came nearer to Jerusalem, and stood closer to the cross, perceiving now all that was involved in it, he hesitated in the way and would fain have prayed, "Save me from this hour." But he reasoned down this weakness, "for this cause came I into this hour." These are his footprints in the path to Jerusalem when the ground was soft and his heart was heavy. Nevertheless, hard or soft, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem

and to the cross; never pausing until at last he could say with triumph, "It is finished," and saved a world.

Every true life is shaped by some permanent purpose; it has some Jerusalem to which it is going up. Columbus saw by faith a great continent beyond the ocean and through unnumbered difficulties from the sea, from the timidity of men, from the sinking of his own heart, he steadfastly set his face until he reached it; and on his knees in the name of God planted the cross of Christ on San Salvador. That was his Jerusalem. George Washington saw a great republic beyond the Colonies, and through personal discomfort and privation; through battles and victories and defeats; through misunderstandings and despairings, he steadfastly set his face until it was accomplished. That was his Jerusalem. David Livingstone as a young man was a weaver, sitting on the loom, casting back and forth the commonplace shuttle; but through the moving meshes of the web he saw the dark continent of Africa; one hundred and fifty millions of souls of men crushed in ignorance and superstition. He heard the groans of slavery, saw the burning of villages and all the hell of man's inhumanity to man. Above that, coming down upon it, he saw a possible Christian civilisation quenching the fires, breaking the fetters, illumining the darkness. Coming down from his loom he steadfastly set his face to go up to it. And for long years tramped, tramped through the trackless forests, and on his knees died praying for it. That was his Jerusalem. You have known Christian men deeply engaged in business who definitely confined their business to certain hours and gave the other hours, their

wealth, their influence, their presence, to some mission school or hospital or refuge for misfortune. And kept at it steadfastly through their years until at last each could say, I have at least done this much of God's work in the world. That was their Jerusalem.

Before every young heart God raises the vision of some Jerusalem on its hilltop. Not, indeed, the same to all men, nor the same to men in all times. It was only one that could be a Christ. It was only at one time that a Christ could die for the world. Only once could a Columbus discover the one continent and a Livingstone explore the other. There are some things done forever. Here and there men could say, This is finished.

Constitutional character and the circumstances of the time determine what is to be each man's Jerusalem. God's work in this world is not provincial. The industrial army he employs to build the structure of civilisation is not made up of one class or corps of men. One set of men lays the foundation of a large building; another sets up the steel beams; another faces them with the marble; others paint and decorate the whole; and along comes someone at last to fill it with the thrift of business or the sweetness of home. But all contribute to the perfection of the one structure. The character and circumstance with which God has endowed you may determine you to business and the making of a fortune; to art, or science, or literature, or statesmanship; but whatever it is, a path opens out of it that leads to some Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem to which Christ so steadfastly set

his face was a city in which the sacred and the secular met and mingled together. The temple on one hill nodded to the capitol on the other; the place of prayer stood in the shadow of the place of business; the altar of sacrifice was near the Academy of Learning. In the life of Christ the sacred and the secular met together. On his way to the cross he fed the hungry, healed the sick, took little children in his arms. He was not a recluse or a "religious." He walked the streets of Capernaum and talked with merchants in their offices, with farmers in their fields, and fishermen on the shore. "Truly this was the Son of God," said one, and "Is not this the carpenter?" said others. In pursuing his more sacred purpose he sanctified the secular side of life. The woman baking bread had his notice as well as the woman sitting in religious contemplation at his feet.

No greater harm has ever been done to Christian men than when the church separated its minister wholly from the people, calling him a priest, and its women from the family, calling them nuns, putting robes black or white on them; calling them sacred and others secular. I wonder how intelligent men can encourage or endure the invidious distinction. Did not God long ago in his Word address all Christian men and women as his "kings and priests"? There are those indeed called to a more specific religious work; but they themselves are no more sacred than others because of that. Every man's life and labour is appointed of God and has a Christlike aim in the sweep of God's economy. You indeed may be set to a more specific secular work; but your secular, everyday life has a sacred side, out of which a path

leads to the direct work of establishing or increasing among men the reign of righteousness here and happiness hereafter. It may not be ours to discover a continent, to establish an empire, or to bring in the salvation of a world; but some Jerusalem worthy of ourselves, of our fellow-men, and of God is open to us; as the plant that has its roots in the ground, its leaves in the air, has somewhere in its heart a blossom that feels the invitation of the sun.

By giving way to inward weakness or to outward temptation we may let this high aim go for our own ease, or fame, or aggrandisement, and go out into the universe as driftwood. Or we can steadfastly set our faces to it and make every new step of gain, of learning, of influence, point to it, and at last, however devious and circuitous the path, reach it and be able to say at the end, I have finished something for the good of man and the glory of God in the world. This is the difference between man and man; between the man whose life is like one of those salt lakes in the treeless West, into which many crystal streams come from the melting mountain snows, but out of which no stream flows to irrigate a valley or to give drink to man or beast; and the man whose life, receiving such streams of wealth, of learning, of goodness, gives out some stream of benevolence to bless the lives of others with the gospel of Christ and the righteousness of God.

One of the saddest sights in society is the multitude of people, decent people, well endowed and well circumstanced, who have no such purpose. As you look down on the street from a window you will see some going with eager and steady purpose to the south,

others to the north, or east, or west; but between these an easy-going, dawdling company attracted by this or that passing attraction, lingering or going at haphazard. It is sad to think of the multitude of good people, even Christian people, who have no fixed purpose to walk with Christ to his Jerusalem, and share with him in the redemption of the world. There are many whose highest ambitions and aspirations for themselves and for their children are limited by the horizon of the world and worldly things; whose lives are not swept along in any straight path, or even in an upward zigzag line to some complete purpose, where at last they could say, I have done this for man and for God. People rather whose lives are swept around and around in uneasy indecision like eddies in a river. This eddy, this whirlpool of worldliness, that thrusts out its white-toothed swirls to snatch at us, to draw us all into its vortex! To see our children falling into it—to see our young men and young women drawn from the free-flowing channel of Christian worship and work into this vortex, is to see the falling of a snowflake on the river, a moment seen, a moment white, then gone forever! This is the pitiable waste of life; waters coming down from the clear mountain not reaching the sea, evaporating on the desert. This is the garden in May, the cherry tree loaded with blossoms, so many not coming to fruit. It all seems so pitiable because the opportunities of doing good were never so numerous, the inspiration of God never so great.

Time was when it was thought that one could walk with Christ to his Jerusalem only as he fled from business to become a monk, only as she fled from

the home and marriage and children to become a nun. But is it not seen on every hand that the men and women doing the most and the best for Christ, following him the most closely in the path to his Jerusalem, are Christian men and women otherwise buried in the rush of business and the cares of home? There is no High-Church bishop in England that did more for the kingdom of Christ in his generation than that busy politician, Mr. Gladstone. It is well to remember that Wilberforce, who rid the British empire of the stain of slavery, who established schools in every parish, who rescued the Sabbath from desecration, was a business man. Mr. Williams, the founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, which has been the means of lifting many thousands of young men into life and hope and honoured usefulness in the kingdom of Christ, was a business man. The women doing most for the kingdom of Christ, pushing its conquest to the frontier of our own country and to the centres of heathen lands, are not those women who have gone aside from domestic cares to shine in special eloquence on stage or platform, but those little circles of busy housewives gathering for a few hours a week in the lecture-rooms of churches, sewing a little, reading a little, looking at the map of the world a little, reading little papers, praying a little for the kingdom. The sum of their littleness is to-day teaching a million heathen children in the principles of a Christian civilisation, is healing the bodily infirmities of a million sufferers through their medical missionaries. Thus they find some door in their offices and in their homes opening on to the path where Christ is steadfastly going

to Jerusalem, in which they seek to follow him. No such variety of opportunity ever opened upon apostle and martyr and statesman and merchant and mother and maiden, as opens to young men and women to-day. No path to Jerusalem ever ran straighter than that which runs from your door. No appeal from God was ever more distinct than that calling upon you steadfastly to set your faces to go to it. Christ needs you where you are in business and in the home to-day as much as he needed the twelve apostles and the Marys and the Marthas of nineteen hundred years ago.

VII

ATTAINING TO OUR PURPOSE

He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.—Luke ix. 51.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.—Matthew xvi. 21–24.

AS we have already seen, the whole of Christ's life was ruled and overruled by one mastering purpose. That purpose comes out in our text in its most definite expression. To go to Jerusalem was to suffer and die in all self-sacrificing love for the salvation of men, for the bringing in of a kingdom of righteousness here and happiness hereafter. Any life that is to make the most of itself must have some fixed purpose. Any Christian life that is to make anything worthy of itself must have some Jerusalem in which it shall do and suffer for the good of man and the glory of God.

We come to the consciousness of our purpose gradually. The mother may at once form a plan for the life of her growing boy. Through her hopeful

eyes she may see him in some far-off to-morrow standing in a particular place of usefulness and honour. But the boy himself can as yet form no fixed purpose for his life. He begins with dreams like Joseph, he passes from dreams to hopes, and from hopes to small achievements, like David slaying the lion and the bear. It is of the nature of a boy that he should think himself immortal and omnipotent. When he reads of Cæsar he will be a soldier, when he comes to Ivanhoe he will be a Crusader, when he comes to Patrick Henry or Daniel Webster he will be an orator, when a circus comes to town he will be a rider on three horses abreast, or a clown. His Jerusalem is a dissolving scene; each new day presenting some new world to be filled or conquered. A quaint boy often meets me on the street, and I asked him last year what he would have for Christmas; he was perfectly clear that a drum was best of all things, and his father gave it to him, as all the neighbours knew. Some weeks later I met him beating the drum very listlessly. I mentioned the change that came over his mood, and he said, "Oh, yes, the drum is all right; but what I do want is a tug to draw ships on the river." What his ambition may be for this Christmas, who can tell? For the young god feels himself competent to reach any Jerusalem that may rise upon his vision. That boy of Nazareth thought he found his Jerusalem at twelve years of age in asking and answering of questions with the doctors in the temple, and immediately set himself to his Father's business; little thinking, oh, Holy Boy! how different the real Jerusalem and the fulness of his Father's business would be. Not until thirty years

of gradual planning and purposing did he clearly come unto that for which he was sent and steadfastly set his face to go to it.

I say this for the inspiration of you yet young, who feel your powers and your plans fluctuating from one purpose to another; who have not yet found the one path that calls up and concentrates your energies and your enthusiasms; who are wondering if you are more or less fickle and changeable than other people. These very hopes and disappointments, these warm plannings and soon dissolvings, are but the training and disciplining of God for that some one thing he has for you to do, and which some time before you are thirty years old will be clear enough to you; if then happily you be willing to set your face steadfastly to go to it. And I say this for all you Marys who have boys like this to bring up or to teach; they often inspire you with large promise and as often disappoint you; not because you expect too much, but because you expect it too soon. Try to imagine the anxious days and wakeful nights that Mary of Nazareth must have had during those thirty years before she saw her boy finally walking out of the village with a fixed purpose and steadfastly setting his face to go to his Jerusalem.

I am speaking to some no longer young who have ceased dreaming. At last all the warm imaginings of youth are crystallised and confined within some definite circle. The young man's roving imagination is chained to a desk; he is harnessed to business. There he sees he must spend the days and years to come. Somewhere there he must find his Jerusalem. If he is to serve God and his fellow-men, if he is to

have part with Christ in the redemption of the world, he must find some path opening out from that business life leading to Jerusalem. If now he will make business, not the supreme end of his life, but a means to some higher end; if he will make it tributary to what he sees to be right and good and charitable and Christian in the world; if he will give himself to business with all fidelity for the eight or ten hours a day, and then give himself, his influence, his means, his prayers, his talent to some line of Christian service; then, in the midst of his business life he has found the path to Christ's Jerusalem and is partaker with him in redeeming the world.

And you, oh, dreaming Mary! the winged imaginings of youth are now cabined and confined within the narrow boundaries of a home. The Angel of Annunciation has appeared to you and has revealed your fixed purpose in life. The moving multitudes that once swam before your fancy are reduced to the two or four children at your feet. That is your real world. Somewhere there lies your Jerusalem. If you can bring up that family in the fear of God; if, like Hannah, you present them at the Tabernacle door for the service of God; if you can send them out into the world men of honour and women of grace; if you steadfastly set your face to go to that Jerusalem; then, your life is as surely tributary to the kingdom of God as that of any Miriam leading the chorus in front of the army, or any Mary pouring the spikenard on the Saviour's feet and filling the world with her perfumed fame.

I am indeed thinking of you on whose vision God has finally let down some more specific Jerusalem;

whom he has called to some unique service; whom he has called, as he did the few fishermen of Galilee, to leave all the boats and the nets of business and the friendships of home, and to follow him in the special ministry of the gospel. If now you steadfastly set your faces to it, how close you are to him; how surely are you in the path with him; to what thrones in heaven does such a path lead! Going back, then, to our homes and our tasks let us pray, not that our Jerusalem should be more or less high, that our lot should be cast in larger or smaller places; but rather that we may do the Christian duty that lies nearest us; that we may do it day by day, that we may do it in his Name; nothing doubting but that at last we shall have a share in the triumph of his last words, "It is finished."

No one reaches his Jerusalem without difficulty. The ordinary currents of life will not drift him that way. The ordinary impulses of human nature do not blow in that direction; Jerusalem is reached only against wind and tide; there are trial, self-denial, self-sacrificing to be faced. To every earnest soul setting his face to such worthy purpose there must be those forty days, or forty months, in the mount of temptation, in which many influences seek to divert his feet from the path that leads to Jerusalem. Twenty years ago what gracious vision of goodness rose upon your soul? What warm resolution to do some definite thing for your Saviour? How is it to day? Difficulties have come between. The world, with its demands upon you, with its flattering offers to you and to your children, of wealth perhaps, of position in society perhaps, has come between. The flesh, with its subtle

sophistries about health or ease or pleasure, has had its influence. The devil, indeed, with his suggestions that you could use your time and your talents more profitably in some other purpose, has met you by the way. Rather let us hope that you have resisted, that you are still persevering on the way to your Jerusalem. No wonder indeed, for that was to be expected of you, being the man you are.

When we see Christ steadfastly setting his face and going up, putting one difficulty after another behind him, one flattering offer after another refused, we wonder for a moment how he could do it. But when we remember what he was, when we recall his clear mind, his clear-cut views as to God, that he was God's man for the hour and the task; when we consider his convictions as to man and man's supreme need, his loving heart and sympathy for such need, our wonder at his persistence ceases. Rather would we wonder if any difficulty or pain or even the cross itself could have frightened *him* back. That he should go on until he could say, "It is finished," seems the only thing consistent with what he was in the loyal soul of him. Given the character of George Washington, for example; given the patriotic conviction of his soul; given the conviction that he knew himself as doing God's particular work in that particular day; that he was doing the one thing most needed for man at that one time, and we can readily understand how through all those thickening difficulties that gathered in his way he kept right on to his purpose until the old bell rang out that "It is finished." Given your own character as a Christian man or woman; given the conviction in

your soul that Christ has really saved you; that he has made you one of his own; that he is preparing a place for you in heaven; given the conviction that he needs you to-day, and all the days, to help him in your particular place in bringing about the reign of righteousness, of the knowledge of God, of the way of salvation to men, and the wonder is not that you steadily overcome this and that difficulty and temptation and steadfastly set your face to this Jerusalem. The wonder would be if you did not do it.

Let us therefore pray, not that our Jerusalem should be less high or the difficulties less great; not that our lot be cast in some easier place, or that we be exempt in any way from the self-denial and cross-bearing necessary to reach our Jerusalem. Rather let us pray to be stronger men, fit to fill our places, and to conquer the circumstances of our time, until some day we can say with Christ himself, "Holy Father, I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

VIII

THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPH OF LIFE

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.—Acts xx. 22-24.

PAUL feels himself set to a definite purpose in life, something worthy of himself. He is determined to finish his course successfully. Each of us is called of God to live to some definite purpose, to add by our lives to the sum of the good in this world, to do something and to be something for God. To accomplish this purpose Paul saw that he had to pass through many trials, temptations, difficulties. He is looking back upon those through which he has already come and forward to those he saw he yet must meet. He knew that bonds and affliction awaited him if he pursued his present purpose further. He saw his life as a very stormy one. His friends sought to persuade him to change his course, to compromise a little with his purpose, to adapt himself prudently to the ways of the world in which he found himself, to be less straightforward and so escape those bonds and afflictions that threatened. He was

not indifferent either to the dangers of the way or to the kindly interest of his friends; but he answers, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus." Then the calm conclusion of our text: "None of these things move me." It is difficult to get up to the level of Paul; he is the most determined, uncompromising, straight-on man in this book of great characters. Yet there are ordinary human steps leading to this level; all who will can rise.

"These things" of our text have not passed away with Paul. Trials are behind, bonds and afflictions are before every man that will make a worthy course across this life. When you build a ship for the North Atlantic you must take storms and icebergs into account, and build accordingly. When you would build a boy for business, for honour, for goodness, for Christian service in this community, you must take "these things" into account. Last year's icebergs have melted in summer seas, but new ones have formed and will meet the sailor of this year. The North Atlantic is ever the same, a scene of storm and ice. The particular trials that overtook Paul may not fall on any of us, but others will come bearing other names equally disturbing to our souls. This world is ever the same, a scene of many trials. Only a few are exempt, only a few are permitted to stand with their hands at their back and their backs to the fire looking out upon the storm. There are such people; we are glad when old people can do this, but the young people who can do it, or who do do it, are not to be envied, but pitied. Most men must go out

and meet the storm of "these things"—oppositions, competitions, disappointments, temptations—meet them and make their way through them as best they can, and become men, and all the better men, for meeting them.

"These things" move some men mightily; they seek to edge their way out of the storm, they change their course, compromise with their original purpose, choose some less strenuous way through life. Some young men form a purpose to go to college; when the bonds of mathematics and the afflictions of Cicero's orations come between them and their purpose, these things move them out of their course, they compromise with their purpose and look for an easier way. Some men go further, finish their preparation, face their profession, meet the difficulties incident to any such beginning, complain, flinch, fall out discouraged, despairing, scarcely living, driftwood on the streets.

Some men like Paul are not unduly moved by "these things." These are not spared the storm nor does the storm beat less hard upon them; yet they keep their faces to it, keep to their purpose firmly, often bent like trees, but like trees well rooted, recover themselves; often like William Tell going through a pass of his native Alps on a narrow path cut in the face of a precipice, the mountain wind blowing a gale against him, unable to make progress against it; unable to stand against it, he lay down in the path; but he lay with his face to his goal and crawled to it. Men knowing their full share of the trials of life are yet able to say, each in his own measure, None of these things move me. Most of you here belong to that number. Your life in youth was not cast in easy

places; your present life is not spent in sheltered places. Most of you were cast as young men into this or some similar stormy community to make your own way. You have been met repeatedly by the storm of "these things" in business, in home, and in your Christian life; yet you are here to-day with your faces to your purpose, your purpose well in hand, able to say after as before the storm, "None of these things move me."

How is this explained? Take the life of such men as Job, and Joseph, and Daniel, and Paul—men who are set before us as examples of how much the human heart can bear and not break, what bonds and afflictions it can endure and not be unduly moved. Take the men and women of your own acquaintance and observation on whom these things have broken with full force, and yet they are cheerful, sunny, sympathetic people reaching a middle life of high honour and an old age of charity and faith and hope—people whom it is good to know, people who show into what rich coinage the rough ore of human nature can be minted. How is their triumph accounted for? By the fact that if life has its scenes of trial, life also has its sources of strength in which to endure and triumph over the trials.

After all, if you will think about it, this life is a scene of compensations. On the whole, "these things" are balanced by other things. On the whole, life is not so bad as we are taught to expect it, the fears of pessimism are not realised by healthy men, our young fears were larger than the experienced facts. "Oh, yes!" said a coloured woman; "I have had many troubles in my life, most of which never happened."

When they do happen we find that there have been compensating preparations in which to meet them. If nature sweeps the Norway and the Oregon pine trees with its north wind it lays the protecting moss on that side of the tree. If nature allures the animal to the Arctic, it wraps and haps it in furs. Man is not neglected in this distribution of compensation; no trial has overtaken you more than is common to man; no trial is put upon you more than you are able to bear; with the trial there is some way of escape, of compensation. Both God and nature lay burdens on us, for life is a discipline for character in ourselves, for service for others; but neither God nor nature has any pleasure in seeing our shoulders stoop too soon, or our hearts break untimely. It is possible for us to bear "these things" and not be moved, for God and nature have ordained sufficient sources of strength to enable us to bear them.

There are outside sources: The young spear of wheat beginning to grow in the bleak winds of November or March finds itself supported by a little barrel of flour in the grain out of which it springs. The young caterpillar waking up to begin its life finds itself providently deposited by its winged mother on some green leaf on which it can feed while yet too weak to forage for itself. Take our own children; you can count up "these things" of trial that beset the child to an extent that would make you sigh with pity. They come into a world fraught with pain, privation, dangers to body and to mind. They are wrapt in no furs, furnished with no weapons, provided with no stored-up food in themselves. How can they bear these things and not be moved? how can they

bear them and be happy? Yet they are happy; scarcely is the tear dry on the little face when the wreathed smile of an angel comes there. For the child also draws its first strength from outside sources. "God hath set the solitary in families." God lets down upon the child in normal society the protection and provision of home. This is the necessity and the sanctity of the home; not only that it is Christian law, not only that it is moral law, but simply that it is natural law.

When young people begin business, domestic or Christian life, there are kindly ministries from friends, little sympathies, words of good cheer from without, to help them bear the first on-coming of "these things" of trial, and by these they meet them and are not unduly moved. That is what the Christian home and the Christian church are and should be to those beginning the Christian life. By this contact with other Christian people, by this prepared provision of the means of grace stored up for them, by the stimulus of your presence or companionship or example in the home and in the church, they should be strengthened to pass over or through the first temptations and difficulties they must surely meet. It is as natural for us older Christians to provide a church for the children as it is for nature to provide for the growing grain, for the butterfly to provide the green leaf for its young, for the father to provide the home shelter for the children born to him. Thus you will notice these spring days in the park, in the fields, by the country roadways, that God has let down some outside protection and provision upon all young growing things, as he lets down the refreshing dew upon the tender

grass. And God, through us, if we would work with him, would let down the Christian home and the Christian church upon the young souls born into the realm of eternal life.

There are inside sources of strength. Neither God nor nature spoils the child. By nine o'clock nature withdraws her morning dews, leaving the growing things to find new sources of strength in which to stand unmoved in the sultry or the stormy noon. Not now the outside dew, but the inside sap. Nature, giving the sprouting grain an outside supply for its first days, now leaves it to send its own roots into the earth, its green leaves into the air, and by its own inward activities transmute them into life and growth. The first green leaf exhausted, the caterpillar must now move off to find a new leaf for itself. From the children of men too God withdraws the early baptism. The youth must one day leave home and its protection and provision, and by the exercise of his own powers wring a living for himself. If now he is to meet "these things" and not be unduly moved, if he is to meet them like a true man with courage and strength and triumph, he must develop the sources of strength within himself.

God has made it possible for each of us to develop these inside sources. When we follow a man like Paul, or other noble men and women who have met these things and triumphed over them, we readily discover that they found their strength in these developed inside sources. When some great trial comes upon us, straining the cords of endurance to the limit, well-meaning friends recommend us to travel, to go to the country, to the minstrels, thus to find new out-

side sources of strength. If this were the best advice, Paul would have said, "None of these things move me, because, when they come, I go to the amphitheatre to see the gladiators wrestle, to see the charioteers race. I go to a feast with boon companions and find refreshing in the flow of wit and song and pointed anecdote." In the greater moral trials of life this is never sufficient. Paul looked not without, but within, for the necessary strength to endure and overcome the trials and the temptations in his way. When Ulysses and his sailors had to pass the island of the Sirens and hear the witchery of their alluring song, to protect themselves from turning out of their course by yielding to the temptation Ulysses stuffed the sailors' ears with wax and had himself lashed fast to the mast—outside support. We cannot always be deaf, however. Temptation is often so hot as to melt the deafening wax, so strong as to snap the binding cords. When Orpheus went that way and the song of the Sirens fell on his ears he was not unduly moved, because he had a musical instrument of his own and was well trained in using it. Striking the sounding strings of his lyre he drowned out the tempting song by a sweeter music of his own. Over all the sounds of trial, of temptation which would intimidate or allure Paul from his purpose he heard the overflooding music from some rich source within himself. This is our ultimate strength in life as against "these things."

Here exactly is the weakness of this present day. Every age has its own strength and pre-eminence. The strength of our day has been the discovery and application of the forces of nature, by art and science,

to our daily living in all its branches. We have turned the bullock-cart into the automobile, the tardy sickle into the steam-harvester, the postman going three miles an hour with letters into the telegraph and the telephone. Yet it is always true that from the greatest strength falls a shadowing weakness. Our fathers had but few outside sources on which to rely. Not long were they allowed to lie in the cradle, not long to play in the nursery. Nature was rugged and rough with them. The old farmhouse stood far from its nearest neighbour, drifts of snow or swollen streams often lay between. When the winter night closed in there was no public place of amusement, no stirring procession of multitudes under the electric lights of the streets; but moonlight and shadows on the country road. If the family would pass a genial evening they must develop the inside sources of the home, of the hearthstone in the log cabin, and find the comedies and tragedies of life on the stage of their own minds and hearts. No newspaper or magazine allured them out of themselves. There, in their own little world, at their own fireside, they thought out their politics, their literature, and their theology. In education the schools were poorly furnished, the teacher but poorly trained, the text-books but few and serving the successive members of the family in turn. If they were to be educated they must find their education by the painful development of their own powers of memory and reflection. You have seen pictures of the poor schoolhouse in which Daniel Webster or Henry Clay was trained, or, going a generation further back, we may think of the simple schools in which George Washington or Patrick

Henry was educated. Yet out of such schoolhouses came leaders who founded states, wrote constitutions, built a republic, grappled with the diplomacy of Europe; out of them came orators whose eloquence, though dead on the printed page, still thrill the reading soul. Gather them out of this primitive schoolhouse, closet them in the Colonial Congress in Philadelphia to fashion, out of their own minds, their own destinies and that of their nation, and what was the result? Hear what Lord Chatham said of them in the House of Lords: "When your Lordships look at the papers transmitted to us from America, when you consider their decency, their firmness, their wisdom, you can but respect their cause and wish to make it your own. For myself I must declare and avow that in all my reading and observation—and it has been my favourite study—I have read Thucydides and have studied and admired the master states of the world—that for solidity of reason, force of sagacity, wisdom of conclusion, under such a complication of difficult circumstances, no nation or body of men can stand in preference to the general congress at Philadelphia." By contrast with this: At a convention of leading educators a few days ago it was complained that they could not get the young men in college to think. This is not to be wondered at. When you have given a boy from eight to sixteen years of age a go-cart, a tricycle, a bicycle, a little automobile, or five cents to take the street car when he has to go a distance of ten blocks to school, why should you expect him to be a good walker? When you have surrounded the boy in school by the ingenious multiplicity of outside supports,—apparatus, variety of books, endless explana-

tions, charts and diagrams, specialists and specialties, —why should you wonder that you have made it impossible for the dull boy and unnecessary for the clever boy to think for themselves? The same speaker at that convention said that it was easier to get the country boy to think than the city boy. Exactly. That country boy was brought up in a cross-roads school less fatally furnished; he was trained in greater poverty of outside sources; nature and necessity sent the lad to the sources of thought within himself. Outside sources of information may paint the boy as the setting sun gilds the westering windows; it is only the kindling fires on the inward hearth of his own thinking mind that can illumine him with permanent light.

In religion, the churches of yesterday were bare and cold, no fresco on the wall, no art in the window stole the eyes from the inward vision of spiritual things; no organ rolled its music to lead the people in their praise; no gifted voices in a selected choir lifted them out of themselves on the waxen wings of Icarus; no grace of rhetoric made theology easy. They were left to the development of their own inward sources of praise, of prayer, and of thought. And what Homeric characters they were! Jonathan Edwards in barren Stockbridge made himself the first philosopher of his age.

It may well be feared that the church of to-day is doing for the young people just what the schools are doing for them, surrounding them with ever-increasing outside religious props and stays—societies, clubs, brotherhoods, guilds—and now, to add to this, comes the threatening addition of a scientific pedagogy

for the simplicity of the Sunday school. Some of you were brought up in a Sunday school where there were just two outside sources of help, the Bible and a question-book without answers. You learned to know your Bible, you came out of that school into the church and into a Christian service that has filled the world with Christian philanthropy. The Sunday schools of our children are furnished with a Valombrosa of lesson leaves—primary, intermediate, quarterly—and the teachers with a variety of helps, ready-made expositions, to be familiarised in the hour between breakfast and Sunday school. Ask the average scholar to turn to the second chapter of Zephaniah or of Titus and see the vain turning over of unfamiliar pages. What can you expect? How should they cultivate the inward sources of memory and reflection when you have excused them by supplying them with all conceivable outside supports that make memory and reflection superfluous? Do you remember that solemn parable of the seed falling on stony ground, quickly growing on the shallow soil and as quickly withering before the heat and the drought of the growing day? Because, having exhausted the supply of the outside source, "it had no root in itself." As Christian men let us lean less and less on these temporary and childish outside supports and develop these inward sources of thought, of reflection, of conscience, of high duty with which God has endowed us; that amid all "these things" of task and of trial we may rise as the sea-gull rises against drowning waves, blinding spray, baffling wind; rises into the calm of the upper air by means of its own well-disciplined wings.

IX

THE CROWN OF CHARACTER

He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.—Hebrews xi. 27.

THE human heart has not yet lost its vision of goodness nor its desire to reach it. "I know the good and I approve it, too," was said by a pagan in the world's darkest moral hour. There is no normal soul that cannot repeat that sentiment. The Bible is based on the idea that what is good can be attained only through personal effort and can be maintained only by continued effort. The best can neither be imposed nor imputed. Endure is one of a class of stern words of frequent use in this Book which we cannot ignore. They set before us high ideals to be won only through stress. Life is not a pastime. There is much to do, to bear, to suffer, in order to reach them. There are hindrances and oppositions to be met in the way. Character is the result of conflict.

Chief among these words are these three—choose, strive, endure. Choose is the initial step, that necessary "I will" which alone ushers into the arena. The will is the most sacred faculty in us. It is the engineer's hand on the direct and reversing lever. Divine grace itself waits on the joint action of man's will. Strive is the enthusiasm of the first steps in

the new direction. Not every man who says, I will, goes on to strive. Of the two sons in Christ's story one of them said, I will, but went not. He flinched at the word strive. There is a crowd of hesitants on that threshold. To will is present with them, but how to strive they find not. Endure means more than strive. When the act of choice has passed over to the effort of striving, when the enthusiasm of first efforts has cooled down to an everyday temperature, when first successes are followed by partial defeats, then all hope lies in the stronger word endure.

Strive is the lad going out to the wheat field on the first harvest morning, girt as a man for a man's work. Sure in his own strength, he leads the way and buries his scythe deep in the heavy grain. Filling the cradle with sheaf after sheaf, he slyly looks back to see how far behind he leaves his rugged but slower father. Endure is that same father in the heat of the day, still bending rhythmically to the scythe, still laying down at each sweep an average sheaf, half blinded by the sweat of toil; but keeping right at it to the end of the swath, to the end of the day, till the harvest is done; while the lad by four o'clock of the first day is panting exhausted under an oak tree, wondering if it were not better to be a grocer's clerk and to go now. For the making of the harvest the young man's fervour is good, but the old man's endurance is better. Behind them are the finished and the unfinished swath, and it is the swath that tells. To send a young man out on an important mission in the sunny morning, to know that though storm and difficulty meet him he keeps right on until the task is done in the shadows of the evening—that is the most valuable

thing in any man in your employ. That man has the promise of the earth and he only has the promise of heaven, "for," saith the Book, "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Blessed is the man that endureth. He shall receive the crown of life." Abraham "after he had patiently endured obtained the promise." Endure, then, has more of stress in it, more of value, more of character in it than any word in our language. Endurance is the crowning virtue of character.

It is not by any accident of rhetoric that this word endure is linked with the name of Moses in our text, for, of all the characters in the Bible, or in all biography for that of it, none more fitly illustrates it. There may have been men more brave and more eloquent; but in this homely virtue no man stands nearer the summit of moral greatness. He came there not by chance. He was not swept there by fortunate circumstances. He aimed at it by deliberate choice, he attained to it by earnest striving, he maintained it by prolonged endurance. If he had chosen to take life easy few had better opportunity. If he had been content to go with the drift of circumstance he might have possessed the treasures of Egypt and filled the throne of the Pharaohs. He could easily have reached the summit of that kind of greatness, and instead of filling an unknown grave in the wilderness of Moab he would now be an embalmed mummy in the museum of Cairo, the object of the pilgrimage of the learned and the curious. But when he came to maturity of thought and moral responsibility, he weighed all these material things and over against

them and above them he saw a moral duty, a moral ideal, something better worth living for.

Though a prince by adoption he was a Hebrew by birth. His compatriots were with him in Egypt; but while he was on the way to a throne they were slaves. While he sat in the lap of luxury they were grinding out a starved existence. Did he owe them anything? Are not such social inequalities common? Why should he permit pity for them to blur his own prospects or to cloud his own comfort? Could not an argument be easily made in behalf of self-care? The cry of the men of his own blood, the yearning of his own Hebrew heart, the prompting of his enlightened conscience as his brother's keeper, drowned down all such arguments. He saw the self-ease of the one and the self-denial of the other choice, and as the result of his calculation he despised the riches of the one and chose rather to suffer the affliction of the other; not in haste, not in mystic passion, but clearly seeing the greater "recompense of reward."

What shall we think of this resolution to lay down such material advantages for the sake of a moral ideal? What did his own people think of it, those for whom he denied himself? They doubted his sincerity, impugned his motive, called him a meddler, and said they would have been better off if he had let them alone. It was "this fellow Moses" with them. Let no man deceive himself. There is no peculiar premium in this world on such lofty self-denial. What did his young companions think about it? Counted his choice Utopian perhaps, called him a crank perhaps, one of those impractical fellows

who declined to grasp a fortune within reach for the sake of a romantic, religious ideal in the air. What did his young college chum, afterwards Rameses the Great, think of it? One would like to know. Thereafter, the royal robes and crown despised by Moses fell on Rameses. The young man would think that a great gain to him. Yes, and after thirty-five hundred years of time—and time goes on and history comes up for judgment—Rameses lies yonder a mummy in a glass case. A bit of embalmed clay is all the world has of him, or from him; whereas the name, the influence, the spirit of Moses fill the world for all time. His example has inspired successive peoples to freedom; his wisdom lies at the basis of all wise legislation; his moral laws lie at the base of the kingdom of God. At the time of his choice what do you think of it? After thirty-five hundred years what do you think of it?

Some such choice lies before each of us to-day. Some form of treasure, of position, of throne, on the one hand, and on the other the voice of your own conscience, the cry of other men's needs, the Spirit of God calling you to some moral duty you owe to yourself and to your fellow-men. You are between contending purposes and examples, to be a Christian or not, to be an out and out Christian or not, to take up Christian duty wholeheartedly or not, and you find it difficult to decide. The things that are seen thrust themselves between you and the things that are eternal.

For gain or loss this man's choice was for his moral duty, and, having made it, strove to make it good, and then through eighty years he distilled out of

mind and heart the bloody sweat of this word endure. Often weakened by his own natural timidity, and praying God to relieve him and send a stronger man to the task, he yet endured. Tempted by wealth, by position and by power, he yet resisted and endured. Threatened by royal power, banished from the royal presence, a fugitive from royal wrath, but he endured. Tried by the clamour of men and by the solitude of the wilderness for forty years, he yet endured. Bowed down by the pusillanimity and ingratitude of those for whom he made the sacrifice, he yet arose again, and again resolved, determined, and endured until he led his people to the threshold of assured liberty and saw the promised land of his dreams and of his choice. So much can a man in dead earnest do. Next in power to the spirit of God is the spirit of a sincere, determined, enduring man.

I suppose no other case of human endurance is equal to this. Paul, perhaps, comes nearest it. This is the high-water mark made by the flood tide of what a man can do, and it is good to walk along the shore and mark the fretwork made by its waves, congratulating ourselves that it was made by a man, a man of like passions and of like grace with ourselves. Each of us, listening to what is best in us, and above us, is called to choose, to follow, and to reach it. Nothing reached by other men is denied to us. The lists are still open, the recompense of reward is just as great. Most surely everyone setting his face that way will meet his own measure of these outward oppositions and inward weaknesses of his own varying moods; the outward temptations to lower his ideal, to expect less of himself; outward discouragements

from man's ingratitude and man's pusillanimity; and some turn back, and some keep right on, passing from choice to striving and from striving to endurance and from endurance to the recompense of reward.

Look now at the other clause of our text: As seeing Him who is invisible. However impressive the influence and eager the heart may be, no man can thus finally triumph in the strength of his own choosing, striving, and enduring. These are necessary. Our first duty is to choose the best, then to give ourselves, and to quit ourselves like men, reward or no reward, God or no God. Whether God is or not, we are, the man is. His own conscience is, so far forth, a God to him. One thing is sure, the very forces of the universe are on the side of him who sees the right and strives to do it. Nothing evil can befall a righteous man either in this world or in any other. Through these natural energies we can do much. We have never proved how much. Let us not belittle our own powers. A man determined is almost invincible, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence; the violent take it by force. So proved the Syrophœnician woman. Almost invincible, but only almost; these natural powers are not sufficient for all the task to which we are called. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. We do not lack for the resolution to will, to be, to do, nor do we lack for the fervour of the beginnings; but in this required endurance, in this forty years, eighty years, of endurance, we often fall by the way. Some here to-day can readily enter into the poet's meaning when he sings:

"No, I this conflict can no longer wage;
The conflict duty claims—the giant task—
Thy spoils, O virtue, never can assuage,
The heart's wild fire—this offering do not ask."

And some here to-day can go with him through another verse:

"True, I have sworn—a solemn vow have sworn,
That I myself will curb the self within;
Yet take my wreath, no more it will be worn;
Take back thy wreath and leave me free to sin."

Are not the failures of life found just here? In commercial life, educational life, professional life, Christian life we often fail. It is not for the lack of choice, not for the lack of tl first strivings, but in default of endurance that we say, "Take back thy wreath." Here lies the tragedy of many a crippled life. Here lies the tragedy of many an unsuccessful life. We would not or could not pay the price of endurance.

It is evident, then, that we need help from without, from above, not only to begin, but to continue in a right life. Some inspiring power must come down upon our failing spirit. You may have seen the battlefield of Waterloo, or a picture of it. You remember how Wellington marched his men under the shelter of the little hill. They knew what was coming. All the weight of the French army was concentrating on that hill. Yet they marched steadily; they knew their general, their own soldierly spirit, the expectations of their country, and with eager hearts they marched to the place. And now the order comes not to march, but to stand, to form the hollow

square and to hear the thundering tread of the unseen cavalry mounting the other side of the hill; to hear them and not to see them; to feel the earth quivering beneath their feet under that unseen advance and just to stand. To see Marshal Ney and his cavalry appearing on the crest, descending on them like plumed demons; to see them coming and yet not rush to meet them as flesh and blood fain would, but to wait; to see the awful avalanche of maddened horse, burnished arms, infuriated riders, rank on rank, wave on wave, like tempest-surge rolling to the beach; to see it coming and yet not move; to meet the shock of it, to meet successive shocks of it, and throughout all just to endure. How can flesh and blood do that? Patriotism, think you? Soldierly spirit, think you? A wise general behind them, think you? Yes, these must be there, but something else must be there to pour its inspiring influence upon their straining strength. In the centre of that hollow square, moving back and forth, were three or four frenzied men thrilling the hearts of their comrades with the martial pibrochs of their nation, the music of their Highland homes and Highland hearts. The inspiration of a thousand years of victory swelled on the notes of those bagpipes. Strike down those pipers, hush their music, and the endurance of the hollow square would have melted away into defeat. They endured as seeing the invisible.

Think not that the chief stress which comes upon the virtue of man is that of the battlefield. These are struggles we can see and applaud. There are hotter and fiercer Waterloos in our own hearts; the conflict between duty and pleasure, between principle

and passion, between the spirit and the flesh. We wrestle against principalities and powers. The destinies of Europe hung on the endurance of that hollow square. The destinies of eternity hang on our endurance in this inward battle now waging. And to succeed we must call upon what natural powers we have and look for further help. The strain of the prolonged conflict is too great for human power. We need the music of some Gloria to come down upon us from above. If the Bible is based on the idea of striving and enduring, it is also based on the idea that man must be and is empowered from above.

What is the music that can thus alone sustain our hearts in moral endurance? Moses did not turn his back upon the riches of Egypt, set his face to a promised land, and endure untold opposition without some such music filling his ears and flooding his heart. He was human and had our limitations, yet endured and conquered, because above him, around him, vibrant, inspiring, stood the vision of the ever-present God. He endured as seeing Him. God assigning him his task; God commanding the march and the halt; God bidding the chafing spirit stand and wait; God filling the hollow square of his heart with the music of his presence burned in his vision. This is the power by which all such heroes rise to the summits of character. Joseph in the moral battle of Egypt saw God and triumphed. Daniel in the moral battle of Babylon saw God and triumphed. Paul, before Nero, saw the Lord standing by him and triumphed. Luther, before the Emperor, saw God and triumphed. "Come," said he, in his day of trial, "let us sing the Psalm, God is our refuge and our strength."

"Come," said John Wesley, in his struggle for religious liberty, "the best of all is that God is with us." "I saw God at Chattanooga," said a veteran after the victory.

By this alone can you and I endure the issues of our less conspicuous lives. Only as something of that music is in our souls, only as something of that vision is in our eyes, can we do and, having done all, stand. Above the rush of commerce on our streets, God. Above the clamour and the strife of tongues, God. Above the temptations of the flesh, God. Above the timidity of your own heart, God. This is what the pulpit owes above all else to the pew in this rushing centre, to keep clear to its eyes the vision of God; and not the God of thundering Sinai only, but also the God in Jesus Christ, the God of sympathy, the God of love, the God of patience, himself tempted, tried, triumphant; Himself ready to succor us when tempted; himself at the straining point of endurance, saying and praying, "Let this cup pass from me." Well knowing from kindred experience the critical moment in which to reinforce our straining endurance. No man ever lost the battle or was forsaken in the conflict until he blinded his eyes to this vision of the invisible and dulled his ears to its music. Out of all distrust and despondency let us lift up our eyes to those hills of God, whence cometh our aid, and ply

> "Our daily task with busier feet
> Because our secret souls a holy strain repeat."

X

VICARIOUS SUFFERING

The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.—Revelation xiii. 8.

THIS text leads us to the central theme of Christianity—vicarious suffering. Underneath the Sierra Nevada there runs from north to south a vein of gold-bearing quartz which miners call the mother-lode. Here and there along the range it appears on the surface. Beginning at that point they dig down and find the precious metal. Vicarious sacrifice runs beneath all this Bible as a mother-lode. In this text it rises to the surface with a slope and trend that lead us to the foundation of all saving truth.

The word vicarious means, one acting or suffering in behalf of another. We as Christians depend for our salvation not upon anything *we* have done or suffered; but upon what has been vicariously done and suffered for us by the Lord Jesus Christ—"The Lamb slain." As vicarious sacrifice is the mother-lode of the Bible, so the cross of Christ is the richest vein of it in the range. It is the one place where it becomes conspicuous and certain. Prophets and priests had long studied the ways of God with man, and knew that somewhere and at some time the divine purpose and method of redemption would rise with

clear certainty. Croppings of the great truth were constantly found to cheer their search and buoy their hopes. "But these all died, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them." But now he hath "made known to us the mystery of his will; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." That which prophet and priest had for age after age looked to see and had not seen, at last appeared in the cross of Jesus Christ. The mother-lode definitely and conspicuously revealed itself in the sight of all men. When Paul and John speak of it, it is with the rapture of those who have discovered something for which men had long looked. Abraham and Moses and Isaiah had watched the growing purpose of God as men watch some slow-growing plant, wondering what flower and fruit it would finally bear; but died before the century plant came to the blossom. But Paul and John at last found the great plant in full bloom in the cross of Christ. Henceforth their words were all eloquent with it, their theology based on it, their faith clung to it. It is the one thing about which they think and speak and write. To them it was the final solution of all the purpose and method of God in the salvation of men.

There are those who stumble at this doctrine. They do not become Christians because, they say, they cannot accept this doctrine of vicarious suffering. They ask, Why should there be a Bible and a Saviour and a Cross? Why should the salvation of one be by the sufferings of another? Why should there be the tragedy of Calvary, with its agony and darkness and

earthquake and blood, simply to lead a human soul to the worship of God? In a word, Why should the salvation of one be by the vicarious suffering of another? This seems to them to be quite aside from the natural order of things and the ordinary experience of men. The answer to that question is found in the fact that the cross of Christ is not altogether unique, not something entirely different from the preceding course of events in earthly experience; but the full development of a process that, according to our text, began with the foundation of the world. The cross is not something foisted in upon the natural course of events, but something which grew upon the earth; not a post, but a tree which has its roots wrapped about all the course of events and its tap root imbedded in the centre and core of things, the foundation of the world.

Let us, then, trace the roots of the cross to "the foundation of the world." The metaphysicians in theology would say that this word "world" means that the cross has its roots in the eternal purpose of God. Doubtless that is the ultimate fact. But we might get swamped trying to follow these giants through the metaphysical side of the theme. I prefer to illustrate it from a side more within our reach.

Let this material earth be the "world" of the text. The roots of the cross go to the foundation of it. For a long time the students of nature were busy with the surface and circumference of the earth; eager men travelled over continents to discover new rivers or mountains; and crossed seas to discover new continents. In our day it is the centre of the earth, the beginning of it, the "foundation of the world," that

is the object of their eagerness. In the course of their discoveries in that direction some of them have assiduously attacked the cross. Finding it yonder set up in the rocks about Jerusalem they have dug about it to undermine it and let it fall as the last symbol of superstition. They have given repeated warnings to us who have taken refuge in it to stand from under, lest we be crushed beneath its falling weight. But the deeper they have gone the more they have revealed the massive quality and the downward reach of the roots by which it stands—roots that, so far, penetrate deeper than their furthest search. Let the more common rocks—those nearest the surface—be "the foundation of the world." Let us examine them, and let us begin right where the Roman soldier is digging the hole in which to set up the cross. As we do so, we find it is limestone. But what is limestone? Examine it and you will find that it is a grave, a cemetery, filled with myriad shells of extinct life. Take a piece of it and draw a line on the blackboard; under a microscope every grain of that white line is a skeleton. All that rock was once instinct with life that roamed the sea in pearly shells, or crept in the ooze of oceans all unknown. They filled out their purpose, died, and fell to the bottom of those ancient seas. And thus for years untold and in multitudes beyond our arithmetic to number; until in the fulness of his time God upheaved that sea bottom and it became dry land. And that limestone appears not only here and there, but all over the world. "The great globe itself which we inherit" is all one vast burying ground, thick with the dust of departed millions. There are places where it ap-

pears more prominently, and one of these is in the mountains round about Jerusalem, where the Roman soldier dug the hole for the cross of Christ. Standing there by that soldier as he throws up the crumbling fragments, we can say with the poet:

> "Tell me, thou dust beneath my feet,
> Thou dust that once had breath,
> Tell me how many mortals meet
> In this small hill of death?
> By wafting winds and flooding rains,
> From ocean, earth, and sky
> Collected, here the frail remains
> Of slumbering millions lie."

Thus living beings struggled, suffered, and died in numbers and through ages utterly beyond our ability to count. With what purpose? Was all this life and struggle and suffering in idle wantonness? was it chance? was it pain without any worthy purpose? That would be an awful doctrine to teach or to believe. Nay, every tiny shell had its purpose; every ephemeral form had its work; every pang of suffering had its meaning; every agony of death in that limestone looked to some great result. What was it? Stand in front of any sea cliff and read the answer. You will see that one age of life came and suffered and died to make a fitting platform on which another could accomplish its mission and fill out its destiny. And that struggled and died to make another possible. And thus up from the foundation of the world through, not only one or two, but in some places a thousand strata. Standing there we see that each succeeding form of life could live and carry out its work only as some preceding life suffered and died

for it. The law of that cliff is, One for another and all for man. These dying myriads make the soil of his Eden, the cement of his building, the marble for his art. You cannot make a grain of your wheat grow unless you plant it in the mouldering remains of some life that died to give it growth. Your wheat, your barley, your fruit, your flowers, are all planted in blood; they live and grow and are beautiful only as they send their roots down and take hold of the vicarious suffering of other lives that died that they might live. Men may object to the doctrine of vicarious suffering in theology; in nature it is put beyond doubt by that limestone rock. Men may object to secure the life of the soul in this way; it is beyond doubt that there is no other way of getting bread for the body.

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the raiment wherewith we are clothed, are all fraught with vicarious suffering. Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible with you that by the same law—even the blood of another—man comes by the bread of life for his soul? As we see them planting in that limestone rock outside Jerusalem, not a grain of wheat for man's physical life, but a cross on which one more vicarious death will take place in the interest of his soul, we see that that cross, with the sufferings on it, is not aside from God's purpose in nature; not something foisted in upon it; but one with all the mysterious dealings of God written all down into the rocks. It is the fitting climax of a process that has its beginning in the foundation of the world. The first fossil that lies in that first stratum is a prophecy of Christ. Every

layer that rises above another is looking for the crowning death that will complete the purpose; that will justify it and give it meaning.

If man had continued sinless the sufferings and death of these lowly creatures had been enough to meet the wants of his innocence; they had made his garden and his home. If man had remained holy that limestone rock about Jerusalem had never been rent to receive a cross; but man sinned, and "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Man's needs go further than bread and fruit and flowers can supply. Something else, something better, is necessary, and that something better comes by the same law, and by the same path of vicarious suffering. That something better is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God slain for man's sin; through whose blood we obtain eternal redemption. In placing the cross in that limestone rock, then, we see God laying the foundations of the earth, for man's use and comfort not only, but also for an altar on which the great sacrifice for his sins may be offered. And all the myriads of life that struggled and suffered and died would surely miss of their full meaning if *they* only died. That would leave man only half redeemed; it would supply the needs of his body and leave his soul to perish. Hence the cross of Christ, rooted in that rock of death, is the grand continuation, the fitting climax, of all the vicarious suffering which had been going on from the foundation of the world. And which in its purpose and power makes a higher platform on which man's soul can live and reach its destiny of redemption and glory. Infidelity would have to remove all books of theology, all the pages of

the Bible not only; it would have to remove the thousand strata of that rock before it could undermine the cross or get rid of the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice. For not only on the cross, but on every shell, is written the words of our text, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Shall we go deeper than this limestone rock? Shall it be claimed that this is only the surface and not the foundation of the world? Very well, let us go deeper. We soon get away from the limestone, but not from the roots of the cross. Shall it be the carboniferous rocks that are the foundation of the world? They are old forests and the fossil remains of primitive plants that lived and grew and gave up their lives to make the world of animal life possible. They also lived, drank in the sunshine, and were buried to make it possible for others to live. It is still the mother-lode of vicarious sacrifice. We are not yet below the roots of the cross. All this power that drives the wheels of our industry, all the genial fires that save us from the rigors of winter, are possible only as these forests lived and died for us. The same law of vicarious sacrifice goes down through all the black coal-fields. On some of these black rocks you can see the forms of ferns; but if we looked closer we could see the form of a cross. As they burn in our fires we can see strange things in the blaze; but if we looked closer we could see in every flame of wood or coal the words of our text, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." You would have to go thousands of feet below Calvary and remove all the carboniferous rocks before you could undermine the cross.

Deeper yet? Very well. Down until we strike the aqueous rocks. We are now in the presence of mountains thunder-riven, broken by tempest, disintegrated by fierce storms, washed down by floods, sorted and assorted by restless seas; giving their life to make a soil for the forests. It is the same law, One for another; and on every bit of sandstone we read, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Deeper yet, until we come to the igneous rocks. Down there the pick strikes through and into the primæval fires, the very core of the earth. We see fierce struggle of chemical elements gradually yielding up their heat and first fiery life to form the solid crust on which all the higher life of earth depends for its continuance. It is the same law of surrender, of sacrifice. All through that heaving mass lying there at the foundation of the world, deeper than the effort of man has yet gone, we see wrapped the roots of the cross. In every cooling wrinkle of that exhausted fire we read, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The oldest fact in nature is that of vicarious suffering.

Let the life and history of man be the "world" of the text. Let it be, not the material, but the social world; the roots of the cross go to the foundation of it. When God laid the foundations of the material world for man and man appeared thereon God pronounced all as "very good." If man had remained innocent there would have been no more suffering or dying. But he fell, and had to win his way back through that word "subdue." Through measureless struggle and suffering man has, so far, subdued the earth; has reared up fabrics of education, of legisla-

tion, of religion, and has made not an uncomfortable dwelling place of this rude earth.

We are here to-day in the enjoyment of law, of liberty, and of religion. But will you tell me which of these privileges so dear to us, so necessary to our well-being, came by any other path than that of vicarious sacrifice? Men come to this continent with speed and safety only because thousands of sailors had previously struggled with storms, suffered privations, and died in the abyss of the Atlantic. Every ship sails through the blood of men who dared and died for us. Your way to heaven may not be by vicarious suffering, your way to this continent certainly is. And coming to this continent we build our homes and cultivate our fields in peace and prosperity. Before we could do that armies of pioneers had to die of malaria, Indian arrows, and wild beasts. The paths through our forests and plains that are now safe and shady highways were first marked out by the graves of pioneers.

We are here in the enjoyment of many privileges as citizens; they are possible only because armies have marched and countermarched and made centuries ring with blows and battle. The most pathetic scene we have ever witnessed was that of the veterans of the Grand Army marching past bearing the old battle flags; flags torn and tattered and riddled with shot; flags that seemed in their dim colours to be still carrying the smoke of battle in their waving folds; flags that in their stains are still eloquent with the suffering of men that carried them to the front and wrapped them about their bodies in death. Our schools, our courthouses, our halls of legislation, are possible only

because brave men all through the years were willing to carry such flags in and out of the bloody conflict.

> "I sometimes think that never blows so red
> The rose as where some dying Cæsar bled."

Such is the law of our civilisation; such is the price of our freedom. All our privileges are rooted in blood; all over those flags as they passed we could read: "I set my face like a flint." "His visage was marred more than any man." "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

We are here in the enjoyment of religious privileges, none daring to make us afraid. You are under this roof to-day in undisputed religious liberty, only because back of us there are Christian heroes and martyrs who were willing to resist the power of despotism and of superstition, and to die in the attempt. We have stood where eighteen thousand men lie in martyrs' graves to make the Presbyterian Church what it is. From that place every hill and heather bell in sight was baptised with the tears of women and the blood of men who wept and bled for you and for this church. Men may refuse the mansions of heaven on the ground of vicarious suffering; there is confessedly no other ground on which to build the mansions of earth. It lies at the foundation of every privilege of life. You cannot take up a book to read, nor roll up a ballot to vote; you cannot sit down in a pew in church, nor open a Bible to study, nor stand in a pulpit to preach, except as someone has gone before you to buy the privilege with his blood.

Beneath us there lies the igneous, aqueous, car-

boniferous, and limestone rock that lived and died to make our fields and our homes. Overlying that rock there is a layer of human life sacrificed to make our fields free and our homes safe. Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that by the same law our souls should rest for their immortal privileges on the sufferings and death of another? Surely since we can trace in the arrangement of dead matter, of organic life, and in all the events of the human world, one continuous system of vicarious suffering, carried on for the well-being of others, the cross of Christ, by which our souls are saved, is not something foisted in upon the nature of things. It is something eternally rooted in it. It is the continuation and fitting climax of all that came before. Infidelity would have to remove the crust of the earth and quench the interior fires; infidelity would then have to destroy every book of human history, before it could undermine the cross or get beneath its roots. For on every page of history is written, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The innermost fact of history is that of vicarious suffering.

Let the religious life of man be the "world" of the text. Let the Bible be the exponent of that life. The roots of the cross go to the foundation of it. All this long sweep of history, of poetry, of prophecy, of ritual, of sacrifice, is sometimes thought to be too large and complicated for our religious necessities. There are those who would cut all out except the Sermon on the Mount. But just as God has left all the record of early storms of fire and of rain; all the successive layers of the life that struggled and suffered beneath the rocks of Calvary, so has he pre-

served all the layers of moral struggle; all the successive eras of revelation and of worship, that we might see them finding their meaning and their fulfilment in the cross. The Bible without the cross would be a plant without a blossom, a tree without fruit. The cross without this Old Testament would be a carnation blossom without the plant, or root, or soil that gave it birth and development. The cross is not something different from all the Old Testament, but the continuation and climax of it. Isaiah's eloquence is awakened only as he anticipates the cross. David's harp sounds its sweetest harmonies only as it is waked by the coming of the cross. The laws and ritual of Moses, all the lambs led to the altar, all the incense waved in the tabernacle, all the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat, have meaning only as they point to the Lamb of God. All the captivities, the wanderings, the sufferings of the Hebrews are answered only in the coming of the Great Deliverer. Down through all this Book the cross sends its roots until, in the first page of it, at the very foundation of this moral world, you find it written, "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." And Christ himself settled this question when, on his way to Emmaus, he found the two disciples doubting that Jesus was the Christ because he died on the cross. The cross was to them, as to many since, a stumbling block. "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" said he. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things

concerning himself." Thus the Saviour in his first sermon after his resurrection lifted up the layers of the Bible to show his disciples that the roots of the cross went all the way down to the foundation of it. You cannot take the cross out of the Old Testament without rending apart every book and every page in every book. You cannot take the Old Testament from under the cross without cutting away its roots and letting it fall a meaningless thing among the rubbish of the world. The cross is the climax of the whole Book. Not only here, but on every part of it is written, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The innermost fact of the Bible is that of vicarious sacrifice.

We see, then, why the cross is the central theme of Christian doctrine; why it is the enthusiasm of Paul, the poetry of John. We see why it has been the glowing theme of the Christian Church, that by which it has swayed the thoughts and secured the affections of men. Why it has survived the years, outlived opposition, produced such results. Why it is still the foremost banner in the march of religion; the sign in which men conquer, both in themselves and in the world.

I have said these things at length for the consolation and enthusiasm of you who have fled to this truth of the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ for your own salvation. I want to feel and to cause you to feel that in laying hold of the cross we have hold of that which goes to the foundation of the Bible, of history, of nature, and of the eternal purpose of God. When God plants a cedar tree on stormy Lebanon he gives it mighty roots, roots that take

hold of the rocks, penetrating through the crevices thereof, widening them and pushing the lateral rocks aside, seeking to lay their grip on the very foundation of the world. You can take shelter under it with safety. It will fall only when the solid earth is upturned. The cross is not two pieces of wood hastily knocked together and set up in a hole in the ground for a temporary purpose; it is a tree; it is God's rooted cedar. Nor till the memory of the Bible has disappeared from the earth; till the records of history are reversed; till the strata of the rocks are subverted, need we fear its fall or cease to sing:

"In the cross of Christ I glory."

XI

THREE WAYS OF MEETING SIN

And led him away to crucify him.—Matthew xxvii. 31.
And went and hanged himself.—Matthew xxvii. 5.
And he went out and wept bitterly.—Matthew xxvi. 75.

SIN is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Put the emphasis on God. Every man in his honest hours knows that he has sinned against God. Sin must be met and settled for in some way. How to meet it has been the most serious problem of all ages and nations. Men tried many ways and in general reached the conclusion that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. There have been peoples without temples, but none without altars; peoples without elaborate religious service, but none without some sacrifice for sin. These experiments are not without meaning and value to us, for human nature is ever the same; but we must pass them to-day.

The Word of God tells us that there are three and only three ways of meeting sin. These are summed up in our text: "They led him away to crucify him." "He went out and hanged himself." "He went out and wept bitterly." I have chosen these verses from three representative characters. However widely different they may have been in their origin, however widely their paths may now diverge, in our text

their paths cross and come together in one tragic point. As in old lands and old times where three ways meet, there might be found on one corner a crucifix where men knelt to pray, on another a gallows where some criminal paid the penalty of his crime, and on the other a guide-post pointing to a safe destination; so where these three paths come together in our text we find Christ on the cross, Judas on the tree, Peter weeping bitterly. Each of these has come here to meet and settle for sin. It was sin that nailed Christ to the cross, that hanged Judas on the tree, that sent Peter out in bitterness. Let us look at each in turn.

I. Christ on the cross.

A company of soldiers come out of Pilate's judgment hall, accompanied by a noisy rabble, conveying a doomed prisoner bearing a cross on his shoulders. They move along the narrow streets of Jerusalem, out through the north gate to a little green hill. There they laid the cross on the ground, the prisoner on the cross, and sent the nails through the quivering nerves of hands and feet. As they lift the whole into an upright position we see that it is Christ, his trembling and anguished body hanging on four great wounds, about to die. Why should Christ die? The affairs of this world are confessedly under the reign of law not to be trifled with. One of these divine laws is that death can come to man only by the path of sin. It is written, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." It is written again, "The wages of sin is death." We can easily account for the death of the two thieves on either side of Christ; one of themselves indeed accounts for it,

"We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." But Christ had no sin. He was declared innocent by all who knew him. By friends most intimately associated with him by night and by day. Men justified by friends may yet be condemned by enemies, whose eyes are sharper for defects, but the officers of the law sent out to arrest Christ came back without their prisoner; the Pharisees, trained in keenest analysis of human motive, tried him and tested him to catch him in his words without success; in their final trial of him no true witness could bear testimony against his character. In his trial before the more just Roman court, Pilate's wife warned the judge, her husband, to have nothing to do with that just man; Pilate himself declared Christ innocent and washed his own hands in protest against the accusation. Judas who betrayed him declared that he had betrayed innocent blood. Friends and enemies may justify a man who yet may know himself condemned by his own conscience; but Christ out of a good conscience could challenge the world to convict him of sin. Friends, foes, and our own conscience may be deceived, but God is not deceived; his pure eyes may trace some hidden wrong, yet three times from heaven came the assuring voice, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." For nineteen hundred years the character of Christ has been with us, examined in every kind of light, under every kind of prejudice; his deeds, his words, his thought, have been put into the crucible of criticism seven times heated, yet no alloy has been found. By the higher moral standard of this day he stands as white and as innocent as by that of that far-off day.

Men have denied his divinity, his miracles, his wisdom, but never the purity of his character. Suffering and sorrow jangled the chords of his heart, but sin never laid its discordant hand on the strings. Christ is the one and only sinless man of human history. Yet Christ died, and died the most excruciating form of death ever invented by the ingenuity or applied by the malice of men. To make his death doubly sure the Roman soldier sent his searching spear into his breaking heart.

Grant now that death comes only by the path of sin, that Christ had no sin of his own, and yet that Christ died, and you have an enigma the most profound ever proposed to the mind of man. How do we account for it? Was it one of those casualties of history where the prejudice and passion of men hurried him and hustled him to the cross, a thing to be regretted by all the world as we regret the taking off of a Socrates, a Savonarola, an Abraham Lincoln? This might be a satisfactory answer if men and the passions of men were in supreme control; but God is in this world's affairs; God allows man a wide margin of prejudice and of passion, but not the power to annul any of the great laws by which history is governed. Man may shut out the light from his own window, or darken the window of his neighbour, but he cannot prevent the sun from rising at its set time to-morrow morning. Men could harass and mock and scourge Christ, they could not kill him if in some way he was not vitally connected with sin. Pilate saith unto Jesus, "Whence art thou?" but Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate saith unto him, "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power

to crucify thee and have power to release thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above." Thus Christ appealed with confidence from the pitiful passions of men to the irrefragable law of God. Not the passions of men, not the hate of ecclesiastics, not the power of the Roman army, not the ingenuity of Satan himself could have lifted up Christ on a cross if he had had no connection with sin. Yet Christ died and died not only with the permission of God, but also by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Christ had no sin of his own; he had lived in all well pleasing with God. By what law, then, of justice or equity did God permit men to nail his clean hands to the cross or to send the thirsty spear into the well-springs of his innocent heart? Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? There is but one alternative. The law of God must stand; since death can come only by sin, Christ died not for his own sin but for the sin of others. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." For our transgressions he was wounded, for our iniquities he was bruised, for our peace he was scourged, the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us. God hath no pleasure in the death of men, to prevent it, in his great love wherewith he loves the world, he gave his only begotten Son and spared him not, but delivered him up to the death for us all. And so did Christ love us that for the joy of saving us from sin he endured the cross, despising the shame, bearing the awful penalty of the law for us until he satisfied its infinite demands. He set his face like a flint and flinched not until in the fulness of atonement he bent his head in death, saying, "It is finished." This, then,

is the first scene of the three. Let us name it, God's way of meeting man's sin, and let us hang it up for the present and turn to the next.

II. Judas hanging himself.

If now, leaving Christ on the cross on the north side of the city, we pass to the south we will come to the brink of a valley in which the refuse of the streets and the offal of the altar is thrown; to keep it from poisoning the air it is consumed in perpetual fires; on the brink a blackened tree from which Judas hangs dead. At the point of our text Jesus is the most innocent and Judas the most sinful of men. What this man's beginning may have been we may not know. How he came to be a disciple we need not wait to answer. Suffice it to say that he was a disciple, a member of that little church first gathered by Christ, an unconverted member indeed, for the church of Christ on this earth was not and is not perfect; there are tares among the wheat, the seed may fall by the wayside and be trodden under foot, men may resist and strive against and quench the Spirit. He was treasurer of that church, dispensing their money for their slim necessities and slender charities. Christ gives every man the opportunity of serving him in the line of his own aptitude; Judas had a financial aptitude. He could not preach like Peter, nor write a gospel like John, but he could finance the church. The trustees of the church are as surely the servants of Christ as are the elders. Christ can use and sanctify any aptitudes devoted to his service. What was Judas' purpose in lingering in that little church? in spending his time over the few dollars in its treasury? Judas shared the opinion common to all the disciples,

that Christ was some great one in disguise, one of power, of influence, of command over men, the coming conqueror of all the enemies of the Jews. He would one day throw off his disguise of lowliness and proclaim himself what he was, the king and deliverer, the Messiah of his people. He would set up his throne in Jerusalem and rule the world; the revenues of many nations would pour into this Hebrew capital. And if a king he would have a cabinet, and who would be the secretary of that treasury? Judas, of course; and so he clinked the few coins in the leathern bag both in contempt for what they were and in anticipation of what they foreshadowed. His green eyes glittered with the covetous vision. As Christ came near the end of his earthly life he declared plainly to his disciples that they were mistaken in their opinion. He was going to Jerusalem indeed, not to reign, but to suffer; to set up a spiritual, not a material kingdom. Judas' castles in the air were rudely shaken; what was a spiritual kingdom to him? A spirit of disappointment and discontent took possession of him; he had deceived himself, and now would blame Christ for that deception; yet he hoped against hope and followed a little longer. The hosannas of the triumphant procession of Palm Sunday reassured him. He followed until the time of the Last Supper. There he heard Christ tell more plainly that he would not be accepted, but rejected of men, that he would be crowned indeed, but with thorns; his royal robe would be purple with his own blood red from the scourge; he would be enthroned indeed, but on a cross; lifted up not among the great ones of the earth, but between two thieves. Judas saw his vision of gold melt

away, his castles vanish in thin air; he had played a losing game; he will make the most of what is left. If Christ is so foolish as to throw away his own chances and the disciples' prospects there is one man sharp enough to see the end before it comes, to sell this leaking ship before it sinks. He remembered that the Pharisees had offered a price to anyone who would guide them to a place where Christ could be taken quietly. Abruptly leaving the holy table he went out into the night and to the Pharisees, saying, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" and he sold to them for thirty pieces of silver him whom they could have had to-morrow for nothing. They counted the coin to him on the table; Judas sweeps it all into the leathern bag, congratulating himself that he was that much to the good, and, putting the bag in his bosom, led the Pharisees and the Roman guard to Gethsemane, and in the quiet solitude of the olives indicated the Lord by a traitor's kiss.

This is the culmination of this man's career, the maturity of his awful sin. How insidiously sin matures. No man comes to a sin like this in one step, but step by step; twice did Christ warn him, but now the deed is done. He saw them take Christ off to the trial and the cross, while he by another path and alone sought his own room, put the silver under his pillow, and lay down to sleep. "Sleep no more, Macbeth hath murdered sleep!" The little child, weary with his playthings, will lie down in their midst and fall asleep and in his sleep smile as if angels were his playfellows. The labouring man, having earned his bread in the sweat of his face, will plod homeward

in the evening, eat his frugal supper, commend his children and himself to God, and lie down to honest sleep. Judas with his head on that little bag of silver, the price of blood, will sleep no more in time nor in eternity. Sin is now matured and must be met. How shall he meet it? How shall a man meet his own sin? By regret? Yes. Hear him in his restless sleeplessness, "I have sinned," "My punishment is greater than I can bear"; hear him trying to pray, "Mine iniquity is greater than can be forgiven!" By undoing the deed? Yes. The tardy morning comes, he rises and hastens to the disciples that they may hide Christ again; but on the street he meets a rabble vociferous with the cry, "Crucify him!" What, is he condemned already? Too late to undo! By restitution? Yes. He hastens to the Pharisees, offers to return the money if they will but stop the proceedings; "I have betrayed innocent blood"; they spurn his money and him. In the stunned silence that followed this rebuff he hears the distant clamour, "Crucify him!" and with the deepening conviction that it is all too late he flings the hated money clanging on the pavement and goes out. Regret, undoing, restitution all hardening to remorse, out to the black tree on the brink of the valley, out to the outer darkness, down to his own place. Poor Judas!

Take the first scene away—Christ on the cross—and all men must die here with Judas and go with him to the same place. The wages of sin is death; either Christ must die for me or I must die for myself. There, then, is the second scene of our text. The first is God's way of meeting man's sin in self-sacrificing love. The second is man meeting man's own sin in

eternal remorse. Let us look at the third scene—Peter weeping bitterly.

There is no Christ here, no remorseful death, only a few tears; yet Judas has gone down and Peter is in heaven. What, then, becomes of the law that links death to sin? Is there partiality with God? What becomes of conscience? Is it different in different men? Does it drive a Judas to the tree and demand of a Peter only a few tears? Perhaps Peter was not a sinner. Let us not try to get out of it that way, for he himself said, "I am a sinful man." Perhaps he was not such a sinner as Judas was; Judas betrayed Christ, Peter only denied him. There is no such difference as this between the sins of these two men. A just jury would find Peter guilty and certainly hang him side by side with Judas. Let us see: Both these men were disciples of Christ, but Peter was one of three taken into most intimate fellowship and friendship to share his Master's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, to share his Master's sorrows in Gethsemane; his honour as a trusted friend was involved. Both promised to be loyal to Christ, but Peter swore with an oath that if all men forsook him yet would not he, he would follow him to prison and to death; his plighted troth was involved. Judas betrayed his Master to his enemies, Peter surrendered him to the same enemies—Judas for thirty pieces of silver, Peter for nothing. Judas was tempted by the Pharisees, men of standing, men who had power over his body and his soul, men whom he had been taught to fear; Peter was tempted only by the jibe of a chattering girl whom he could have silenced with a frown. Judas was away from the presence

of Christ, who else might have steadied him with a look of remembrance or an appealing look of pity, away from all the disciples, who else might have strengthened him by example; Peter in his denial had John standing by him, he was in the same room with Jesus, not more than fifty or sixty feet away, within sight and hearing of what was taking place before the High Priest. He heard those false witnesses, and might have shouted in his own impulsive way, "It is not true!" He saw Christ's judges rising from their seats and smiting him on the cheek and their followers spitting on him and mocking him. What an opportunity for Peter to distinguish himself, to take his place as a man by his friend's side to shield him from the shameless blows; but Peter turned his back on Christ and said, "I do not know him," swore, "I never knew him." Judas betrayed his master at midnight, when reason and conscience are nodding; Peter denied him in the dawn of the fresh morning, when the recuperative powers of nature were regirding men with strength of mind and body. There is no mitigation of Peter's sin, nor is it any less than that of Judas. Loyalty, honour, friendship, conscience were equally violated by both. Both surrendered Christ to his enemies, and Peter did it in more aggravating circumstances; both realised that they had sinned—betrayed or denied innocent blood; in both conscience is hot with accusation that morning; both realised that now in some way they must meet the sin. Thus far they kept step together, thus far their paths have converged to the same point; but from this point their paths at once diverge. Judas went out and down by the path of remorse to

his own place; Peter went out and up by the path of repentance to heaven. Where, then, is the law of sin and death? Can mere repentance annul that eternal law? Can a few hot tears take the place of blood and wipe out his sin? Let us not deceive ourselves with such sophistry as that; let us face the law more honestly. Take that first scene—Christ on the cross—away, and Peter's repentance would have speedily hardened into Judas' remorse and carried him to another branch on that blackened tree. But Peter turned his eyes to Christ on the cross, remembering what he said, that he would give his life a ransom for many; that in their last evening together he said, in "my blood" there would be "remission of sins"; that whosoever repented and believed in him would be saved. It was not Peter's tears that cleansed him from sin, it was the blood of the Christ to whom he looked; it was not Peter's repentance that paid the penalty of his sin or made atonement for it, it was Jesus Christ to whom he looked in repentance and in faith. If Judas instead of going to the Pharisees had thus turned to Christ, if instead of trying to meet his own sin he had turned to God's way of meeting man's sin, who knows how different the result might have been? This is the difference between man and man. Judas chose to meet his own sin; Peter, an equally great sinner, fled to Christ. And there is the third scene of our text: Man accepting God's way of meeting sin. In which of these two paths are our feet to-day? To which of these ways of meeting sin are we looking?

XII

SHALL THE MAIN QUESTION BE NOW PUT?

My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.—Romans x. 1.

MAN is first of all a religious being, he is human only as he is religious; a man without religion is a violin without strings. Religion is the absorbing theme of this day; it has been and will be that in every day; nothing so touches the strings of human life; it has filled the world with its inquiries and with its discussions. You cannot have a political convention, a war counsel, an association of science, or a woman's club without the question of religion coming up practically or impractically. All this is possible, and at the same time it is possible that the first and fundamental principle of religion be overlooked. It is possible to ask many questions about religion and not ask its main question. It is possible to have a pew in church, to be helpful and sympathetic toward the church, to take a willing and cheerful part in its work, and in general to be on the churchly side of things in the community, and yet fail to give the primary aim of the church due consideration.

It is possible for the pulpit to occupy itself with social reforms, charities, education, industries, and yet

overlook the vital principles which underlie all these and which alone can make them effective. The main question of all is this, Are men saved or not saved? There is no religious interest but has its germ stated and started in these letters of Paul. He discusses questions of church and state, of home, of marriage, and children, and servants, and slaves; questions of doctrine and polity; questions of amusement and of worship. Nothing that is human is indifferent to this inspired man; but the burning focus of his earnestness, the passion and prayer of his heart, was this, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved."

Let us look into this matter as individuals. What though we should be interested in all practical Christian work; what though we should give time and money freely; what though we should be educated in current questions of religious doctrine up to the last notch of information, and not be saved! We would be like those carpenters busy in building Noah's ark, yet never entering it for their own salvation from the impending flood. Here we are this morning, friends and strangers alike, coming out of many conditions, in many moods of mind; yet all interested in one phase or another of religion. That is what brought us here; but are we saved? Are our names in God's book of life? If that scene of judgment, that final crisis of human life, which surely comes, should come to-day, would it find us on the safe side of things in that other world? That is the main question. To be interested in religion and not be saved is to be swimming in deep water about some great passenger ship, discussing her lines, her

build, her power, her passengers, her destination, while we ourselves are hastening to the point where with spent breath we sink in the sinister engulfment of the sea. We have our likes and our dislikes in religious things. There is one man whom we would hear and another whom we do not care to hear; there are forms of worship acceptable and pleasing to us and others which are not. We go about nicely balancing these little things on exacting scales; and yet they are only the mere accidents of religion, they are only the paint on the ship, the figurehead on her bow, the flag at her masthead. Let us get below these accidents to the timbers of oak on which life depends. Jesus Christ is only one of many, only a sentimental person of history like the good king Arthur, unless he is our Saviour. The church is only a club, a social convenience; the minister and the sermon and the services are only a dull form of amusement, unless they are a means to lead you to Christ that you may be saved. Let us look at this matter as a church.

The main desire and prayer of the church should be that those who come under its influence might be saved. Christ came into this world to save. He established his church to save. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to fit the church to save. When under the first influx of his inspiration Peter and those with him stood up to begin the great work of the church three thousand were saved. Christ turned the church to the one work of saving. The gospel entrusted to our care is capable of many applications to the various phases of human need; it takes a living and practical interest in the whole man, the

whole community, the whole world; it touches with power questions of politics, of society, of charity, of education, of war, and of peace. Nevertheless, its main aim and end in this world is that men might be saved. The gospel is first of all "the power of God unto salvation." So thought Paul. A college, a seminary, a mere professor, student, literary dilettante, may be supremely interested in other phases and applications of religion; the passion of the pastor and of the church must be this of Paul, that men might be saved. Paul was not indifferent or unappreciative of what morality yet remained in the natural man, and of what truth remained in pagan religions; but he stood in the world at the time when these had had full play without interference for four centuries, and they left men without God and without hope in the world. They are not without interest in themselves, but they have no power to save. There is intellectual delight and sentimental pleasure in these other phases of religion and philosophy, but they have no value to you and me until we are saved. A certain physician, an oculist, who had a sunny office, works of fine art on the walls, and the latest scientific instruments for his work, was fondly speaking of these things to a friend visiting him. An old Scotch lady, blinded by cataracts on her eyes, was led into his office. Instantly forgetting his friend he led this woman into the consultation room, and advised her that an operation was necessary and must take place on the morrow, which was a Sunday. She declined on religious scruples to have the operation on that day. He left her to think about it. What discussion between conscience and her desire for sight

took place I do not know. She carried the conflict to the arbitration of the Word of God and the example of her Saviour Jesus Christ. After an hour's meditation and prayer over the question she called the physician back to her and said, "The Lord of the Sabbath opened the eyes of the blind on that day; I am willing to have the operation." Returning to the office from time to time for attention the doctor finally removed the bandage one Easter morning, and she could see. She looked at him, at the furnishings of the office, at the sunlight pouring into the room, and exclaimed: "How beautiful! Were all these things here that first day I came?" "Yes, madam." "Were these pictures on the wall?" "Yes, madam." "And the sun as bright that day?" "Just as bright." "And were you as good-looking that day as you are to-day?" she smilingly asked. He admitted it. "Then why did you not tell me about all these things that day, for I love such things?" "Madam," he replied, "my care that day was to give you sight; nothing that I could tell you about them would be of much importance until you could see them. Now that you have your sight I will talk to you about them as long as you please."

When Christ and Paul went about among men they went in the spirit of the physician. Their interest and their sympathy were as wide as human experience; but the passion of their hearts and the burden of their prayers were that men's eyes might be opened to the light of eternal life. Whatever interest Christ expressed in other things it was always that he might lead up to this: Son, thy sins are forgiven thee. It is only as men are saved that all "these things" re-

ceive their real value to them. Let us take first things first. Lectures to blind men on the laws and the beauty of light, on the marvels it produces on summer fields and winter hills, are not without value. But the lecturer who, having in his possession the salve that would give them sight, spends his strength in speaking to them on the philosophy, the history, the efficiency of light, is cruel. He appears as one without human sympathy. He puts last things first. He is a simpering dilettante, not an earnest deliverer. He is an oracle, not an oculist. He is a parrot, not a prophet. He is a rédacteur of words, not a redeemer of men.

There is pressing need in the church for second thought on this. Statistics of all the churches during the past few years have been alarming; they have showed a marked falling off in the numbers added to the church by profession of faith. The finances have been in good condition, the activities of the church have been normal; but fewer than usual have been converted. The mere formalities of the church and the formal observance of stated worship have not been neglected. The churches in which form, formal observance of rites and repetition of words, is the all and in all have not felt this alarm; but the true churches of Jesus Christ, whose passion is and should be that men be saved, felt the shrinking in the numbers of such, and gave the matter their serious attention. It was found that the churches had been so engrossed in questions of criticism, in discussions of creed, in social entertainments, and in all the puttering things of the kingdom, as to neglect the main business of their existence. They hastened to correct the grave error

and to give themselves to their legitimate work, preaching and watching and labouring in the passion of Paul, that men might be saved. As a result the statistics of the last year in such churches show the abundant blessing of God upon such labours. The number added to the church on profession of faith has once more risen to the highest degree in the history of the church.

Two things may hinder this concentration of the church and the individual on the main question. The church stands between two inimical forces. This, however, is nothing new, the church is always in the midst of such forces. First, there is the influence of ordinary human selfishness. We know that in mechanics every body in motion seeks to come to rest. Inertia, not motion, is the law of things. There is a moral inertia into which we gradually fall, in which we become content with our own salvation. Thrust into such a multitude as surrounds us in a city like this, the very mass of the masses blinds us to the thought of the individual. The impossibility of affecting the mass as a whole reacts upon us and makes us indifferent to the individual. We think we do well when we take care of ourselves in the crush. We often feel this selfish attitude into which we are growing, and deplore it; we sigh for the old-time courtesy and consideration, "preferring one another."

This self-care spreads into all our relations, social and religious. A stranger from some warm-hearted country community coming to church in the city wonders why someone does not speak to him. The old resident, battered by the unheeding, unnoticing multitude for six days, coming to church on the seventh

wonders why anyone *does* speak to him. The man who never speaks to or is spoken to by his neighbour in the adjoining apartment wonders why he should speak to or be spoken to by his neighbour in the adjoining pew. Both are human and humane; but custom has bound the sweet influences of neighbourly sympathy as frost binds the waters in ice. It is in the heart of each to speak to one another, to help one another, but each is the victim of a vicious fashion of the place and time. Something of this subtle selfishness we all feel, though we cannot put it into words; it seriously hinders us in any personal effort for the salvation of the individual.

Secondly, there is the suffocating influence of mere worldliness. The church is in the world, necessarily mingling with it. It is difficult to keep clear any line of demarkation. The world has its own conventional ideas and standards of conduct concerning which it is very exacting. It permits and encourages earnestness in business, sensational excesses in pleasures, and the most wasteful extravagance in amusement. It has some interest in religion; but religion at its mildest, in its most formal character. It frowns at anything like earnestness here; one will do business with you knowing you to be a Christian, he will sit by you at some pastime and talk enthusiastically about it. Sitting on the opposite side of the table from you he will express and permit you to express the most vigorous convictions on politics, on business, on art; but if you say anything about practical religion, about the salvation of his soul, you are immediately frowned upon as in "bad form." It is as if in an asylum for the blind we could speak on every subject except on

the cure for blindness, as if on a sinking ship we could speak on everything except the means of escape. "Bad form!" what inhuman paganism lies under these icy words. What discussions in the diplomacy of devils must have preceded the putting of such deadly influence into two such compact words. Paul silent before Felix and Drusilla, because to speak on religion would be bad form. Elijah politely silent before covetous Ahab and atrocious Jezebel, because to speak for God would be bad form. Of all the hindering influences on vital Christianity in ordinary society to-day this is the most active and deadly. We are in the world, mingling in that society, affected by its forms and customs. Our Christian life and service are subject to the same deadly formalism. The same frost congeals our interest in and sympathy for the salvation of men. To keep a clear view of the importance of the personal salvation of our children, our friends, our acquaintances, requires a degree of Christian warmth, of watchfulness, of resistance, and of self-denial not easily attained or maintained.

Let two things urge us to break these icy barriers: First, the danger to which the unsaved soul is exposed. The word of God lifts a very solemn destiny before the soul dying unsaved. It presents that destiny in language highly figurative indeed; but if the figure is so terrible what must the reality be? It limits the possiblity of salvation to this life; to leave this world unsaved is to have no warrant in Scripture for any hope beyond. From the beginning God has appointed the influence of one man upon another as the principal means of salvation. God, says John, pitches his tent

in the heart of a man. Ye, says Christ, are my witnesses. No book or books, no church as such, no institutional machinery however philanthropically conceived, can take the place of the spoken word of a living man to living men. The New Testament symbol of the Holy Spirit is a tongue of fire.

The other thing that should urge us is the blessedness that comes to the saved soul, that inward deliverance from the power of sin and the love of sin, as well as the consequences of it; that large reconciliation with God; that harmony with the powers that be, both in this world and that which is to come; that development of the best in us, every faculty of our nature elevated to its highest degree and projected on a path of eternal progress. Well may the desire and prayer of our hearts to God be that men might be saved.

XIII

THE APPEAL TO REASON

Come now, let us reason together.—Isaiah i. 18.

LET us think to-day about our relation to the gospel and the salvation of our souls, that we may come to a good understanding as to what we may expect from the gospel and what the gospel expects from us.

First of all, mark that the gospel which we preach is not a new thing. When a new star appears in the sky the astronomer knows that it was not created yesterday; but that it was of old, and came up out of the infinite of space into the circle of man's vision, and that it will go along shining on its long orbit until it has filled out its destiny. The gospel of salvation was not devised yesterday; it is as old as God. God's purpose of the redemption of men which was fully revealed in Jesus Christ, that star of Bethlehem cutting into our horizon nineteen hundred years ago, is as ancient as eternity; the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world was slain from the foundation of the world. The preaching of this gospel, heard in so many churches to-day, did not begin yesterday, nor with Paul or John. Its first voice is as old as man's need; no sooner had man sinned than God opened a way of salvation and appealed to him to enter

it and escape the wrath to come. Men long sailed the seas before there was chart, or compass, or lighthouse to guide them safely home; but no sooner had man lost his way on the deep of sin than God kindled a light on the home shore. When the fishermen on the Adriatic Sea are overtaken by the night, their neighbours walking along the shore in the darkness wave lights and call to them to sail that way and find safe landing. How many voices has God awakened, calling to us and appealing to us to sail toward them and find safe landing from the storm and peril of sin's deep! Here is the appealing voice in Isaiah as loud and clear as in Paul six hundred years later.

Mark, again, that this appeal takes different forms. These forms are determined by different times and circumstances. The specific appeal of one century or one generation is not that of another. Each age is moved by some voice of God peculiar to itself. This appeal takes on different forms to different men according to their varying constitutions, their mental and moral development. The appeal that would be effective to a primitive people in Africa is different from that which would be effective on an average business community in Europe or America. The appeal of the wind and the earthquake and the fire, in which God spoke to Elijah, that man of imagination and emotion, is different from that which was effective on the Ethiopian eunuch, that man of cold business training. This appeal takes on different forms to the same man according to his varying years and experience. The appeal that is effective on the young, the generous, the impulsive, standing in the morning of life, is different from that which is effective on men

and women whose enthusiasm and adventures are dimmed by long practical experience of things as seen in the afternoon of life. The gospel is one of the universal of life. It touches every man at some point peculiar to that man. God acts upon us in the gospel as he does in nature. Nature appeals to all in some way; but some are moved by its power, others by its beauty, or by its fruitfulness. Some are moved by the hills and valleys as they are white with snow; and some wait until nature puts on her spring styles, and bonnets her trees in blossoms of May. Some sleeping men are awakened only by the thunder, others are awakened by the first ray of dawn falling silently on their faces. So is it with the gospel; some are moved to thought and action on religious things by the threatening of divine wrath, others by the entreaties of divine love.

God in the gospel has appealed to you in some way particularly adapted to you. You heard that appeal. It awoke your attention, it aroused your conscience, it quickened your emotion into fear or desire. Some voice from the home shore has appealed to you to trim your sail and shape your course for safe landing. Some day you did put about ship, or stood hesitating at the helm.

Our text gives us the highest form of appeal—the appeal to reason. In the earlier pages of the Bible the appeals of God to sinning men are more dramatic, tragic, in form. They are addressed to the imagination, the emotion, as if men were yet only spiritual children. In Genesis it is the gates of Paradise closed, and the angel of the flaming sword. Later in the book it is God directing that an ark be built and

opening the windows of heaven in destroying flood. In Exodus it is the smoking of Mount Sinai, God wrapt in cloud and thunder and lightning, and man standing afar off trembling, none daring to draw nigh to the divine presence. In David it is the devastating plague. In Solomon it is the sensuous richness of temple, of ritual, of sacrifice, and of cloudy incense. All as if men could be moved only by the ruder, the lower motives of their nature. But here in Isaiah a new order of appeal is set in action. "Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the LORD hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me; The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." O that my people would think; "come now and let us reason together."

Evidently man is no longer a child in God's sight. His childhood passed in those earlier scenes. God then dealt with him as a child, spake to him as a child, appealed to him as a child. But now he has become a man, and God appeals to him as such, and on the ground of the crowning faculty of a man—his reason. God invites him into the calm of a judicial court where he may plead his cause and argue the issues between God and him; where he may justify his conduct or repent of it, not stunned by the thunders of any Sinai, nor unstrung by trembling fevers of God's judgment; but by the energy, the argument, the eloquence of reason. God will hear him before pronouncing final sentence; and God will base that sentence on man's own reason. Out of his own mouth he is to be justified or condemned. Evidently, then,

man is no longer a child in God's sight. When our children are children we deal with them on the ground of authority. Thus saith your father or mother. It is a matter of command and obedience without argument. We deal with them on the ground of *our* reason and experience, and reward and rebuke them without any formal or forensic trial. A wise mother does not summon a jury of neighbours to sit on the case of a disobedient boy. The father, as some of us remember him, was judge and jury and prosecuting attorney and jailer and executioner all at once. We were not permitted to quote from any book of logic or rhetoric; the less we said, the louder we cried, the sooner we said, "I am sorry," the better it was for us; and we do him reverence. But when our children grow up we use other forms of appeal. They are still our children; but they have now come to years, to discretion, to reason. They can see their actions in the same light as we do; they can assist in the judgment to be formed on their own conduct; they are supposed to have sufficient reasons for what they do or fail to do, and so we come to them saying, "Come now, let us reason together."

We see, then, how much like a wise father God deals with us. Coming to the age and exercise of reason he appeals at last to that, permitting us to set forth arguments to justify our conduct, or failing to do so to repent of it and cast ourselves on the mercy of the Court.

This appeal of reason is the specific appeal of God to us in these days. We are living in an age of intelligence. More or less we share that intelligence. We are living in a day when men engaged in busi-

ness are more and more coming together on a reasonable understanding. Arbitration often takes the place of litigation. War itself is slowly giving way before the rising light of intelligence. As nations come to know more of each other, as the best interests of national life are better understood, the more it will come to pass that nations instead of saying, Come now, and let us fight together; they will say, Come now, let us reason together. There are times in God's economy when religion rests its claims on this foundation of reason, and this, I take it, is one of these times. There are times when God's judgments are abroad in the earth and men are stricken into conviction, repentance, and conversion by the tragic appeal. There are times when God sends men, burning and shining lights, like John the Baptist, or John Wesley, or President Finney; when waves of religious excitement and illumination sweep men into the kingdom. Such days we have seen and may see again; but they do not last long, they pass away and the illuminating hour fades into the light of common day, and men are left once more to the calm of their own reflection and precision of their own reason. If I can at all read the religious signs of the times, the appeal of God to-day is principally this: "Come now, and let us reason together." "Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace." There is no unusual religious excitement in the air, there is no Boanerges of revival eloquence to stir communities into religious enthusiasm. Our lives and opportunities are slipping away, whether we shall be finally saved or lost will very soon be settled, and the only voice from God, the only influence which he brings to bear upon

us, is just this appeal of the text, "Come now, and let us reason together."

This may be the only form of appeal that shall ever come to us. Let us hope that God may take pity on the hardness of our hearts, the sluggishness of our reasons, and raise up some more concrete voice to stir us to action, but to wait for the coming of such may be to wait too long. Napoleon was making a forced march accompanied by his chiefs of staff, and coming to a river he asked the engineer how wide it was. The officer explained that his instruments had not yet come to the front. The emperor asked him again, rather sharply, for the width of the river. The officer then brought his military cap to the level of his eyes and marked where the line of vision fell on the opposite bank; fixing his attention on that distance he turned carefully and marked where that line fell on the bank where they were standing; he stepped the distance off and gave the emperor the width of the river. Thus in the absence of instruments of precision he fell back on common sense. In the absence of more stirring commanding voices let us listen to the voice of our own common sense on this matter of religion.

Let us indulge, however, in no vain regrets that this appeal to reason is God's specific way with us. This should be no calamity or deprivation. There should be no influence greater in its effect on us, being such men as we are. The prophet, indeed, heard God's voice in the rushing wind, the earthquake, and the fire; but he heard it yet more impressively in the still small voice speaking low in the court of his own soul, and wrapt his face in his mantle.

When God hushes the louder and the ruder voices of tragedy, of emotion, of the excited masses of men, and challenges us to the calm court of reason, he indicates that he counts us no longer children to be won by outside attractions, or compelled by outside alarms; but men, to be moved through intelligence, through the findings of reason, through the reasoned choice of our own wills. When in the Middle Ages the monk went into the pulpit to preach the brevity of this present life he took with him a decayed human skull dug from the ground, and held that up as his text, reminding the well-fed, well-clad, luxuriously living that all their beauty and all their luxuries would soon end in that. Are we dependent on such machinery to be reminded that the fashion of this world passes away? Have we not observation and experience sufficient on which to reach sane conclusions in the court of reason? Shall we postpone wise preparation for the great change until we are shocked into it by such barbaric means? When in former days men, ignorant, stolid, superstitious, came to the church the preacher must needs present some Dante's hell, and open as it were fissures in the ground under their feet, that to their imagination there might appear the very fumes of the lost world, in order to awaken them to the awful nature and consequence of sin. Is this the one necessary, is it the one highest, appeal that God can make to you and me? Are we yet so low in moral and spiritual development as to require that the church should be gotten up like a theatre and the minister like an actor of that lurid kind? Have we not observation enough of real life as to the nature and consequence of sin? Have you

walked these streets, these many years; have you gone out of the highways into the byways, and not seen men and women in hell? Have we not experience enough in our own distressed souls of the persisting, hardening, deadening influence of sin on what is best in us here and now? Do we not know by the findings of reason that one wrong act begets another, that this repeated forms a habit, that habit runs into character, and that character is fixed destiny? Is it not enough, therefore—is it not the most solemn form of appeal that God *can* make when he invites us into the quiet of the court of our own souls, saying, " Come now, and let us reason together."

When in more childlike ages the unread and uncultured multitude came to the church it was deemed necessary, in order to move their souls to thoughts of Christ and the salvation he wrought for man, that the priest should present the image of him on the cross, crowned with thorns, and with painted blood on brow and hands and feet. Is it possible that men of your intelligence and your ability to reason should wait to be moved to thoughts of Christ, to faith in him, to trust in what he has done for you, for such rude kindergarten appeals as that? Is there not a higher, a more convincing appeal to your reason in the moral beauty of his character as he walks in Galilee; in the large wisdom of his words as he speaks in the gospel; in the historic fulfilment of centuries of divine prophecy in his death; in the historic certainty of his resurrection; in the unparallelled influence that his life and death have had on so many souls of men and generations of time? There are those so poor in spiritual development that they can-

not pray unless they are assisted by a priest, a book, the solemn tones of the organ, and the rising column of incense. Is there not a higher appeal to your reason in that sense of need in your own soul; in the majesty of God recognised in his words and works; in the gracious providence of God in your daily experience, to bend your knees and open your lips in prayer? There are those so poor in spiritual energy that they cannot go out in Christian service unless they are moved by the excitement of a great convention; by the emotions of melting appeals; by ecstatic signs and wonders from God; who go out only as Jonah went to Nineveh. Is there not a higher appeal to your reason in the simple command of Christ; in the known needs of men; in the just conclusions of gratitude and duty? Now, it is to this highest motive, to this highest faculty of your nature, that God appeals in our text, "Come now," on sin, on salvation, on service, "let us reason together."

XIV.

OUR PROSPECTS AS THE SONS OF GOD

Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 John iii. 2.

"NOW are we the sons of God." Whatever we may have been in the past, whatever unknown experiences lie before us in the future, this at least is settled, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ we are the sons of God. The word is children, little children, the bairns of God.

Small in ourselves, surrounded by forces material and spiritual far greater than we are, and only a little while here at the longest, yet we are the dear children of God—God who is the master of all forces and of all years. Vexed with our own narrow limitations, burdened by our own mental and moral weakness, humiliated by the sense of past sins and awed by foreboding of future temptations, we are nevertheless the sons of God—God who is perfect in wisdom, holy in character. A great inheritance is stirring in our souls. Our little lives are linked in the bonds of this sonship to the Most High, bound to God not by such material bonds as bind the planets to the sun, or by such bonds of natural necessity as bind the

plant and the animal to their experience and their destiny; but by the longest and strongest bond of all, that of a Father's love to his children, love that is stronger than chance, than change, than death, a love that will not let us go. Let us be grateful for this, let us take shelter in it. It is the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, a covert from every tempest.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and——" That little word *and* carries with it the promise that we shall be something more than we now are. It tells us that now we are *only* children. Let us take refuge in that word *only* from the criticism to which Christian people are subjected by the world and from the criticism which we often pass upon ourselves. Take the Christian life as we see it in others, as we know it in ourselves, what a poor, lop-sided, unshapely, unfinished thing it is. The beginnings are there, but only the beginnings. It is like the first clearing men make in the forest and call it a farm. They fell the trees, burn the brush, put a fence around it, plant a few hills of corn or potatoes; but many black stumps stand between, and after many years some of the stumps are still there. One could easily criticise the farm and imagine a cleaner, better-kept field; yet it is a farm, receiving the sun and the rain, the cultivation of the plough and the hoe; but like ourselves it is only a beginning.

We pray, for instance; but how little we know or exercise the power of prayer as compared with Christ. We know something of righteousness and charity and sympathy and benevolence toward men, but how little we know of these graces as compared

with Christ. We know something of what a Christ-like spirit and temper ought to be; but how little of it we have reached in our own experience. There are some hours of deep insight and a few hours of high spiritual experience of communion with God, but how few, how uncertain they are!

> "Sometimes I catch sweet glimpses of his face,
> But that is all;
> Sometimes he looks on me and seems to smile,
> But that is all."

That we have attained to some degree of Christian character is not doubted, and some have attained to more than others, yet the best of us are but bundles of conscious weakness, prejudice, inconsistency; patches of Christian graces with black stumps of the natural man thick between. Sharp as the criticism of the world may be, it is not so sharp, so true, or so exacting as our own criticisms of ourselves. Paul as a young Christian thought he was the least of the apostles; later, the least of the saints; and still further on, the chief of sinners.

How can we explain this and still retain the hope and make the claim that we are saved men, the children of God? We explain it by the fact that we are *only* children, lisping instead of correctly speaking the Christian language; creeping instead of running in the Christian course; panting after a little effort in Christian work, often eager to begin, swift in doing for a little while, and as often going asleep by the work before it is done. We are all children. When we find fault with the child's lesson because he has not begun his sentence with a capital or ended his

question with an interrogation mark, the mother excuses him by saying, He is only a boy. Yes, but it is a great thing to be a boy, it carries the promise that some day he will be a man. The child that can as yet only stammer brokenly through a sentence, if in an educated home—who can only blunder as yet through a sum in long division, if in a good school, has perfect promise of some day speaking correctly and calculating the distance of the stars. Being in such a home and in such a school we can freely criticise his present attainments and yet cherish the prospect of seeing him receiving his diploma with honours. Only a child, but it is a great thing to be even a child in such a home and in such a school.

The young Christian who, trusting Jesus, trusts but feebly; who, praying, lifts but an imperfect prayer; who, trying to form a Christian character, makes many mistakes, is nevertheless on his way to all perfection. Only a child, but he is in a family of good training, in a school of inspiring teaching, in a company of spurring examples. Only a child, but it is a great thing even to be a child in such a home, in such a school as that of God. Certainly we should not be content to remain children and to make excuses for ourselves year after year that we are not far from the cradle, yet we have a right to take refuge in the fact from all the unfair criticism constantly levelled against us.

Being as yet only children, our present imperfections and inconsistencies are an argument not against but for a larger and higher perfection lying before us. There is much in men, especially in Christian men, which does not fit into this present scene. We are

all square pins in round holes. There is a painful disparity between aspiration and achievement; between the power, the divine power that is confessedly in us, and the production that follows; between the rare endowment of divine grace which we claim and the best development that any of us reach here. This disparity is not seen elsewhere under the sun. All other creatures correspond more exactly with their present environment, they come to their perfection here. The pine tree on the mountain side standing straight and tall is as symmetrically perfect as an angel's wing; the red deer standing alert in the woodland glade is as perfectly formed as a seraph, the oriole pouring out its morning song vies with Gabriel while he sings in notes almost divine. It is not so with man, with any man, least of all with any Christian man. There is this constant disparity between his faculty and his opportunity, between the inward ideal and the outward fact. When you have surrounded him with the best, when you have cultivated him by every means in your power, when you have thrown open every gate for his progress, and made the path plain for his feet, there are yet suggestions of energy, of aspiration, which stretch beyond to a further horizon. Having done his best it is felt that he could do better, that he ought to do better.

If childhood were the only sphere for your boy, if what he is or can be at twenty-one is all that is possible to him, then there is great waste in the education you give him, the plans you make for him, the hopes you cherish for him. For all these look forward to something far beyond twenty-one years and far bet-

ter than anything he can be then. If this little life is the only sphere of growth and action and character for the Christian man there is great waste in the divine economy, the end does not justify the means; the divine economy surely looks to something beyond. Aboard the ocean steamer there are fuel and food and spare pieces of machinery or sails; the presence of these can be explained by the needs of the voyage. Besides these there are many boxes and bales which cannot be thus explained. In your own stateroom there are satchels and bundles of robes, little comforts that are explained by your need of the voyage, but in the hold there are trunks—two or more—marked "Not wanted on the voyage." There is a great deal of room wasted if the full worth of the ship is to be measured by the mere voyage of eight days. The fact that these are in the hold tell us that you are going somewhere beyond the harbour, after the voyage is done. Arriving at the harbour you put off your sea-toggery and put on what was "not wanted on the voyage." For now the time has come when these fit the occasion. There is a great deal in man marked "Not wanted on the voyage," not developed or put to practical uses here and now. These are indications not of any permanent defect or imperfection, but of a progress to a richer development beyond this present life. Do not judge us, let us not judge ourselves, by what we now are; there is something more to come, something better to be, to do, and to enjoy.

All that we shall be in that future is not yet made clear to us: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." That is a strange sentence to be found in such a book

as this. The Bible is the gathered revelations which God has made to us by men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It is the only reliable revelation of the future. Yet here at its very close falls this sentence—What we shall be doth not yet appear. The way of entering on a saved life is made clear enough, but what the end and outcome of our saved lives shall be is not made clear.

Evidently the Bible is not a book that aims to gratify curiosity. It is not a map of the future world to which we are going, it is only a chart for our safe voyage there. The Bible is not a directory to the streets and parks and palaces of heaven, but a guide through the labyrinth of the ways of this world by which we may come at last to the gates of that city. It is in vain that we look for any detailed descriptions of life in that land. The place of our future life is obscure. Where we are to be after death and after the resurrection, whether in some distant world here or there in space, doth not yet appear. Imagination may reverently seek to anticipate the scene, but imagination settles nothing. The outward manner of our life there is not fully revealed. What shall the resurrection body be like? Shall the lame be lame, the tall tall, the short short? Shall the beautiful here be beautiful there, and the homely be homely? Shall those little children who left us for that land be there full grown? On these subjects the Bible is practically silent. Curiosity must gratify itself in other books, like Dante, Milton, Bunyan. When the schoolmen were curious about the appearance we shall bear in heaven, revelation failing them, they thought to solve the problem by logic, thus: In heaven man, both

in soul and in body, shall be perfect. The most perfect form is a sphere. Therefore our bodies in heaven shall be round. The Bible smiles and is silent.

In this the Bible shows its inspired wisdom; it would be a poor heaven which we could fully know and understand now. It would be a heaven fit only for the children we are, and utterly unfit when these things "not wanted on the voyage" are taken out to fit our growing souls. The boy thought that if he were a king he would swing on a gate all day and eat plum-pudding; that was his highest idea of an earthly paradise. When he came to middle life he would find the gate and the cake painfully monotonous.

God can reveal things to us only as our faculty of perception is sufficiently developed. We know that our faculties and powers of thought, of action, of happiness are as yet but imperfectly developed. Men had looked on the rainbow for centuries and could see only three colours in it, the other four colours were there, but the faculty of discrimination had not been sufficiently developed to detect them. Later men came to see seven colours in light, and thought they knew all that were there. The spectrum now shows us that there are beams in light which to our eyes are black. What wealth of new colours are in that black beam doth not yet appear; nor could any revelation of it be apprehended by us, for our perceptions are not sufficiently trained to appreciate them. What we shall be when God's work in us is complete, when these black beams shall open their beauty in that other world, doth not yet appear, could not appear now. There are things awaiting our perception and our

enjoyment which ear hath not heard, nor eyes seen, nor imagination conceived.

To encourage us on our way one ray of light is let down upon us from that misty sky. We know that "when it doth appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." From this it follows that we shall be where he is. Christ having undergone the changes incident to death and to the resurrection ascended into heaven, and in his glorified body is in some definite place to-day. There all who believe in him are with him, in answer to his own prayer, beholding his glory. And thither in due time we shall go to be with him. To be "absent from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord." We shall be like him in mind and ultimately in body. A thousand curious questions are laid to rest by that one statement of Scripture. In that day every faculty of the soul shall be full-grown, every power fully exercised. We shall be able to drink in the affluence of the natural and the effulgence of the spiritual world. We shall mingle in a society where public sentiment shall stimulate only to what is best. And to all such equipment of soul there shall be a body adequately adapted, like unto his own glorious body.

Splendid as all that prospect is, there is one thing still better to those who think of inward character more than of outward circumstance. We shall be like him in that we shall have no more sin. It is sin that limits and hinders us here. There we shall have no more conscience of sin. It signifies little where or what heaven may be so long as we are with Christ and are pure even as he is pure.

XV

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT?

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.—Luke xii. 16.

CHRIST spoke many parables, with few exceptions he explained none of them. It is of the very nature of a parable that it should be capable of varying explanations according to the difference of time and circumstance. These parables are for all times.

Instead, therefore, of asking only what the parable meant to those people then in Galilee, let us ask what the parable would mean if Christ stood on the steps of the Produce Exchange and spoke it to the men there yesterday or to-morrow. Christ was preaching the high things of the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the immortal and imperishable things of the soul; he was urging men to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all minor things would be added to them. He was urging men to look up out of the material things which engrossed them to the spiritual things which he was thus presenting, and to accept them, and to confess him before men. If they would confess him, no doubt, they would meet difficulties and oppositions, they would be brought before magistrates, and courts, and lawyers. That word "magistrate" rested in the ear of

one man in the audience, one whose mind was wholly possessed with worldly matters. His father died leaving a little estate in such a way that his brother received more than he did. He brooded over this. He went to court about it. He vexed the magistrate about it. Every person that came in his way was looked upon by him as one who might or might not be able to help him to recover more of his father's estate. If he went down to business, or into society, or into the synagogue he was thinking of that property. What led him to hear Christ we do not know. As soon as Christ said this word "magistrate" he heard no more of the spiritual intent of Christ's words. He thought only of how Christ might possibly help him to gain the lost acres. He saw that Christ was persuasive and powerful in speech and that he had influence with men. Could he not use him to this end? Covetousness had deafened him and blinded him to all higher things. He was impatient for the sermon to be done, and being done he pushed forward to Christ, saying, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Christ, still panting with the high spiritual principles he had been preaching, was shocked at such a display of covetousness in such a place and time, and looking at the man said sharply, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" and turned from him. He is one of the few men from whom Christ ever turned so sharply. Then turning to the disciples he said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And then told this parable of the rich fool to illustrate the nature of covetousness.

First mark the opportunity of doing good which this man had. He was already well-off. By thrift or by inheritance he was rich. He had invested his wealth in farming lands. He rented them out to tenants on shares, as the custom then was. There were good times in Galilee that year. Tenants worked the ground well, God gave timely sunshine and showers, there was a record-breaking crop. Rents were paid in kind. The tenants paid promptly. The warehouses in Capernaum were filled with much goods. Merchants were busy on 'Change. Much gratulation passed between them on the brains, the business tact that could make such fortunes. Our friend in the text stowed away all that his warehouses could hold and still more came. He stacked up what he could under the eaves. When it was all gathered in he saw that he never had such a prosperous year. As he stood looking at the growing pile he asked himself the question, "What shall I do with it?" There are men in New York like that. Their investments have paid, rents have increased, real estate has advanced, salaries are increased, farms and forests and mines have been productive. There are good times in the country and in the market, and this is the question, "What will they do with it?" So far everything is all right. There was no sin in the increase of this man's goods. He became rich in the most honest way—through the products of the ground. His gain was not through another man's loss. He had not advanced rents nor charged a larger per cent. on loans. Everybody was better off, and all the honest gift of Heaven to him and to them, and this was the question, "What shall I do with it?"

God who gave the increase had pointed out what he should do with it. However prosperous the many, there are always with us the children of poverty, of misfortune, of ignorance, of immorality. It was in his power now to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to teach the ignorant, to send the gospel to the perishing. He had the opportunity, which many men wish they had, of being God's steward. He had the opportunity in which many men, rich like himself, find their greatest joy, the opportunity of doing good to their fellow-men in the name of God. Men who through thrift, through inheritance, or through the unearned increase of wealth became rich have heard Christ speaking to them from the steps of the Chamber of Commerce on the things of the soul, of the real life of a man, and they have entered into his spirit and used their opportunities for that sweetest of all luxuries, the luxury of doing good. But now the question is, "What will this man of our text do with it?" Sudden or great alteration in fortune or in circumstance is the severest test of what a man really is. There are men in limited circumstances who will tell you that if they were rich they would foster every good cause. But let wealth come suddenly, abundantly, and it is not so clear what they will do. It will reveal very unexpected things in their nature. And this man is now under that test. Good times have carried men near to God in gratitude and in a sense of responsibility, and good times have carried mutitudes away from God in pride, in pleasure, in the selfishness of a little soul. How did they affect this man?

Mark the curious conclusions to which he came:

First, that he himself grew with his growing fortune. Of all the possible honest ways of becoming rich this man reached it in the easiest way. His fortune was the fruit of other men's toil. All he had to do was to sit in his office and give receipts for his rents as they came in. Yet somehow he thought that as his fortune grew he grew with it, that his real inward life, his worth as a man, grew with his growing goods. He concluded that a man's life consisted in the abundance of the things which he possesses. He is a common type. Some man buys real estate or inherits it, pays the taxes and lets it lie idle. His neighbours build all about him. Their improvements enhance the value of his lots. What was worth a hundred dollars becomes worth five hundred, and he fills out his breast and tells you what it is to be a wise business man. From being a moderate and modest man he swells out with the swelling advance of his lot. He grows with his growing possession, he identifies himself with it. Because the lot is worth three times what it was five years ago he concludes that he, as a man, is worth three times what he was five years ago. But Christ says, No. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. You may build your front door ten feet high, but you remain five feet eight. You may put a thousand new volumes into the library, but your education does not grow with the growing volumes. Your possessions are one thing, you, in the real life of you, are another thing. They may rise and you fall in the scale of worth. A man's life does not grow, nor does it shrink, with the changes of his fortune. A boat carried by the flood does not grow with the growing depth or breadth

of the water that carries it. But this man thought he grew with the growing flood of his fortune. Is he the only man who measures the growth he is making as a man, not by the development of virtue and the charity within himself, but by his increasing deposits in warehouse or in bank?

Again this man concludes that all he had was his own, to do as he pleased with it. "*My* fruits, *my* barns, *my* goods!" he says. He had many partners in the production of his crops, he consults no partner in the uses of them. His tenants toiled in the spring, in the summer, and in the harvest; God made the sun shine and the rain fall; the grain grew and ripened; but he consulted neither man nor God in the use he would make of his goods. "What shall I do with *my* goods?" he says. All he had was from God in the most direct way that God can give anything. The profits you make in business—the sweat of your brain, by buying and selling—the sweat of your attention, may be in some measure due to your own thinking, foresight, business genius; but this man's goods were purely from God; they came directly from God's hands without even the co-operation of any cleverness or business ability on his part. The seed was sown, and he slept and rose night and day, the seed sprang and grew, he knew not how, for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. But instead of looking on the piles of yellow grain with gratitude and acknowledgment of his dependence on the will of God, and asking, What shall I render to the will of God for all his benefits? he congratulates himself on his business ability and its results. "*My* goods," he

says, "*I* have much goods"; what shall I do with them? The goods are *his* goods, that is the first and last conviction of his mind; neither man nor God had any just claim on them, nor any voice in the uses to which he should put them. Is he the only man who by the labours of his fellow-men and the bounties of God became rich and showed an equal hardness, shutting God out of his business accounts and out of the distribution of the profits that accrued? Is he the only rich man who looks on his wealth and says, "*My* goods, what shall *I* do with them?"

Mark the ignoble use he makes of his wealth. It was his own, he had settled that with himself. He can do what he pleases with it, he had settled that with himself. The next step was easy, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow my goods." He will put them into a new house, palatial; new barns, capacious; new furniture, garniture, clothes, food, drink, *ease*. So the caterpillar crawls over the cabbage leaf, and climbs into a high place, and spins out of its treasure the white fibre and rolls it and weaves it about *itself*, with the hope of coming out of the cocoon a more perfect form of creature. But that is because he is a caterpillar—a bug, that has no conscience, reason, spiritual appetencies in him. But for a man to do that—to make a caterpillar of himself, a cocoon—is monstrous.

Where shall I deposit my goods? Was there no poverty, infirmity, misfortune, was there no ignorance to be taught, no suffering to be relieved, no immorality from which to save, was there no altar or temple of

God to be raised, on which he could lay at least a tithe of common gratitude for the undeserved goodness of God who gave him all? God and the soul! these are large words to most men; they are the supreme motives for most of you; but they are the smallest of all words and the weakest of all motives to one afflicted with this fatty degeneration of covetousness. What were the soul and its needs, its gratitudes, to this man? Hear him, "Soul, thou hast much goods," wheat, barley, beans, onions, hay; "eat, take thine ease." His soul was buried in material things, and he thought he could satisfy it as an ox is satisfied with barn-food. This was his ignoble choice as to what he would do with it. If you do not see yourself in this parable which Christ holds up before us, and I hope you do not, be thankful and pray that what you possess may never so possess you as that you shall ever see yourself reflected in this glass of covetousness.

IV Mark the tragedy in which such a life ends, for it does end. He sat all day at the warehouse signing receipts with no time to add up. He took the books home with him, lit the evening lamp, sat down at his desk to add up the long columns. "Soul, thou hast much goods." He divided the total by a thousand, by ten thousand, to find how many years it would last, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for *many* years." He leaned back in his chair; at last he has reached the prospect of long and easy happiness, "Soul, take thine *ease*."

The happiness men expect from material things is always a little way in the future, just coming, but never comes. There is a numbness in this man's

fingers, he lays his pencil down; there is a strange drumming in his ears, he sits upright in his chair; there is a blind rushing to the brain, his head falls forward on the desk. One hour, two hours; and the silent night deepens. He is not asleep, he is dead. "Soul, take thine ease," he last said. But God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." And this is the irony of it all—"Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" His goods go one way, he goes another way. The opportunity to use them, to enjoy them, goes to another; and whether to a wise man or to a fool, who can tell? And he, he goes out into the night, so empty, so poor, not a roof to cover his defenceless head, not a bite of the bread of life in his wallet to allay the gnawing of his starved soul, not a drop of the water of life to cool the tongue of his fevered conscience. It is all very well for a caterpillar to eat, to spin, to wrap all about itself. Out of the cocoon *it* may come a fair-winged butterfly; but for a man to do that is to be damned. Me? What have I to do with the destiny of this or any other man here? Hear what Christ, the justest of all men, says of such:

"The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou are tormented."

You have your own store, more or less, of goods, of talents, of learning, of influence. You too are the heir of God's bounty, the inheritor of man's providence for you. This is the serious question waiting your answer, What will you do with it?

Sermon 8 of
used in Riverdale
Nov 21/20

XVI

DRUDGERY OR DELIGHT

My meat is to do the will of him who sent me.—John iv. 34.

OUR text brings before us two leading thoughts, duty and the motives to duty. Duty may be declined, it cannot be ignored. This stern daughter of the voice of God meets all of us in the way. Duty is the last word we hear at night, the first to greet us in the morning.

> "I slept and dreamed that life was beauty,
> I woke and found that life was duty."

The duties of life that meet us are many and urgent. They spring from within,—the things we owe to ourselves as human beings, as self-respecting moral beings. They spring from without,—the things we owe to our neighbour as humane beings, as honourable citizens. The world on which we opened our eyes this morning is a scene of many wrongs, many wants, many woes. There are maladies of the body calling for the physician's skill; clashing of property and personal rights calling for the jurist's balanced attention; ignorance taxing the strength and the patience of the teacher; alternations of fortune and misfortune asking for neighbourly sympathy and charity; the awful havoc of sin calling for Christian aid to recover, to reform, to regenerate. No man liveth to

himself. We are like trees in a forest struck by some tempest, broken, bent, twisted, interlocked, bearing down or borne up by one another.

These duties are here to be done. We cannot safely evade them. Nor wealth, nor indifference, nor sloth can escape them. It is not a question of doing or not doing. It is a question of doing well or ill, cheerfully or grudgingly. There is a way of doing duty because we must, compelled to it by some unwelcome necessity behind us; we hear the rising bell with a sigh and face the waiting duty with reluctance. Then duty is drudgery, the crack of some whip behind us, the lash of it on our flanks, the soul is a slave. There is a way of doing duty as if impelled to it from within, as of one's own free will and supremest pleasure. Then we tear ourselves away from the task with reluctance at the ringing of the dinner or the sleeping bell. Outside urgency is unnecessary, the cracking of a whip behind is unheard or unheeded. Then duty is delight, very meat and drink. What is thus true in mechanical and mental tasks is equally true in the moral and religious spheres. Ananias goes to the altar and lays his sacrifice there, because by custom, by social coercion he must; gives it grudgingly and even then withholds part of it. To him God is a hard man, reaping where he has not sowed. Duty is drudgery to him. David goes to the same altar singing, "Then will I go unto the altar of God, my exceeding joy." To him duty is delight.

This takes us directly to Christ as we find him in our text. No man ever found his day so full of waiting duties. They crowded upon him in every hour, they overcrowded into his hours of natural rest.

He rose to perform them saying, I *must* work, and he performed them not as under compulsion of obligation, but as under the impelling of love. He came to Jacob's well that day tired, hungry, and thirsty, flung himself on the curb of Jacob's well hoping for that luxury of a tired traveller, a little space alone in the shade of a tree by the murmuring of water. Into his rest came this Samaritan woman with her questions and her needs. At once he was on duty again. His disciples coming with bread urged him to eat. "My meat," he said, "is to do," as if duty itself was his refreshment; not drudgery but delight.

Let us mark well this distinction. There was a secret behind the Saviour's words. If we could get at this secret it would transmute all the drudgery of duty into delight. What makes the difference? Is it that there is an uneven distribution of duty, giving you what is hard, to another what is easy? No one can say that, in the division of duties, only the easy ones fell to Christ. Many of his duties were done for indifferent, for repulsive, for ungrateful people. Yet it was his very joy to do those hard, painful, heart-breaking duties; even the enduring of the cross did not crush out his joy in duty. The difference lies in the motive. "The moving *why* they do it."

There are three degrees of motive:

First, the thought of self. Let us begin with that, for this is where we all do begin in fact. The world is large, but in childhood it is bounded by self, by the little body and its wants. Our earliest desires are selfish desires, our earliest pleasure is that of our own well-being. Above that there is a pleasure that comes to one's self from the mere fact of having done what

we know to be a duty. We may begin the duty with reluctance, but being done a reaction comes in a glow of gratified feeling, of self-respect. Here is a case of charity, let it be hunger, or want, or suffering; as we are men we feel that we ought to do something. We cannot pass and be at peace with ourselves. We therefore turn back and fling a pittance to the beggar, not so much to relieve his wants as to compose our own disturbed feelings. The root of the matter was the thought of self. Our first charities are selfish. The blacksmith making an anchor chain forges and welds it with skill and care because his own wages and self-respect as a mechanic are at stake. There is also the thought of future gain to self. "I know," said that steward of Christ's story, "I know what I will do. I will make a reduction on the bills of these small creditors of my master's." That seemed a work of charity to them, but the motive was self. "That when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive *me* into their houses." Me, me, canny man!

Yet let us have no quarrel with the motive of self. Christ did not despise nor condemn this man's motive or procedure. The motive of self is good so far. It is not sufficient for all the duties of life. Self can make a philosophy, but not a religion; a stoic, but not a Christian. Self-regard cannot initiate or carry on the highest acts and offices of life. Take some mother, widowed and poor. She works early and late for her fatherless children regardless of weariness or pain. Is her duty a drudgery? On the contrary, it is often a delight, a passion, meat and drink and fine clothes to her. She could not do that and

do it with such abandon from the thought of self. Out of self never rose such miracles. Selfishness would send the children to the asylum or to the street. There are duties lying close to every one of us where self must be sacrificed on the very threshold, where our own ease, pleasure, complacency must be imperilled in their performance. Granting, then, all that is right and good in the thought of self, we need a more powerful motive to carry us to the summit of duty.

That brings us to the sustaining thought of others. We pass from egoism to altruism. The widowed mother so toils and so finds delight in toil not because she thinks of herself but of her children. To see them decently clothed equally with her neighbours' children, to see them educated, fitted for honourable usefulness is more to her than all self-ease or pleasure. One refuses to plant a tree in the garden because he cannot hope to live to sit in its shade. Another, seventy years of age, plants a maple here, a chestnut there, an apple tree in some corner, seeing his children's children under them a hundred years to come, and is glad. He has found the power and pleasure of the higher motive. The blacksmith sees his chain on the bow of a ship overtaken by the storm on a rocky coast, the anchor cast and a hundred lives dependent on his forging, and he gives it a degree of care and examines the welding of its links with a solicitude that mere wages could not command. His swarthy face is aglow, his corded arm new-braced by the higher motive—the thought of others. Look at Paul, now in Antioch, now in Corinth or in Rome, with hungry eyes on distant Spain. Eager to reach the confines of the world, in tireless energy to preach

the gospel to the Gentiles. From what motive? Self? Self will be imprisoned, beaten, stoned, left for dead. I am willing, he says, to be accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake. Mighty was the word "others" among the motives of Paul. Look at Christ that day in Jerusalem when the Greeks came seeking him. Seeing them and their needs he saw also the cross behind them on which he must be lifted up if he would help them. Before that cross self was troubled and would fain be saved from that hour. But for their sakes he gave himself to that cross. A note of triumph, of reverent delight in his work, mingles with his words. For this taking thought for others is the nobler motive, sustaining a stronger strain and longer effort. Our liberties, our schools, our churches, our charities spring not from selfishness but from otherness. If selfishness is a philosophy, otherness is a religion. It is a victory of the soul over nature, and calls itself altruism, a new name for an old thing. Call it what you please, is it sufficient to carry us through all the duties of life? When men discovered altruism did they discover the whole secret between duty as drudgery and duty as delight?

I ask you in all seriousness, is there anything more disappointing than the returns for our toil and sacrifice for others? There is a side to human nature which one would fain cover with a cloak of silence; that marble-hearted thing we call ingratitude, the meagre returns from others for so much done, the grudging acknowledgment of so much sacrifice, the positive injury sometimes inflicted because in granting the nine favours you could, you refused the tenth which you could *not* grant. It is that widow's son now

brought to strength and independence by his mother's self-sacrifice, earning enough for himself and to spare and forgetting the mother that made him. It is Moses at the cost of all self-sacrifice leading those slaves to freedom and met by the sneering remark, "As for this fellow Moses!"

> "Blow, blow, thou wintry wind!
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude."

Ask Paul what he thinks about this. "Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?" Ask Christ what he thinks about it. Stung to the quick he cries, "Many good works have I showed you, for which of these do ye stone me?" How many have thus served their fellows, their country, and died of a broken heart, stung by ingratitude!

> "Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, he would not in my age
> Have left me naked to my enemies."

Once your own heart went out in warm sympathy and self-sacrificing effort for others; it was your joy. But now, in some of you here to-day, pity has turned to impatience. You did and have ceased doing because there came a day when your doing was impugned, your generosity doubted, your motive sneered at. You have overheard that satanic innuendo, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" You are angry and think you do well to be angry. Stung by ingratitude, men would have razed to the ground every vestige

of what they had built had they felt no higher motive than the thought of others. What then?

Great things have been done nevertheless for this world, miracles of mercy and of philanthropy, because above the thought of self, above the thought of others men felt a still higher motive. Moses endured, Paul endured, not growing weary in well-doing. Christ endured the cross, despising the shame. Thousands of men and women endured in doing and in giving in the face of injustice, of misunderstanding, and of coarse ingratitude, finding their very delight in thus doing and giving because they felt the higher and more powerful motive—that more than mortal motive—the thought of God. My meat is to do the will of *Him*, said Christ, to finish *His* work. That is the whole secret. Endured as seeing *Him*, said Moses. "The love of Christ constraineth us," said Paul. The missionary mother parting with her child at Calcutta knelt on the deck of the steamer, saying, "Oh, Christ, I do this for Thee," and went back to the jungles alone to finish her work. To all such this is God's world, and men are God's children; the relief of suffering, of want, of sorrow, is God's work; the redemption of men from sin is God's desire. In doing, in giving, in all self-sacrifice, they knew themselves to be fellow-workers with God. The river of benevolence might be received questioningly by those to whom they brought it, but even the cup of cold water would not be ignored or questioned by God. The bread cast on the waters might appear to be engulfed in the vortex of man's ingratitude, but if cast in the name of God it was found after many days, acknowledged and multiplied by his blessing. Out

of man's dour silence or ungrateful clamour comes the cheering voice: Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ye have done it unto me, and, Ye shall by no means miss your reward. The motive of self goes but a little way and lets duty drag on the ground of drudgery. The thought of others carries us farther, yet becomes discouraged by ingratitude. It is only when we carry our duty up to the light of God's face that we do, and doing mount on the eagle wings of delight.

XVII

PROPORTION

These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.—Matthew xxiii. 23.

THE religious people of Christ's time had laid undue emphasis and paid undue attention to one side of duty and neglected others equally important. There is a tendency in every man to become unbalanced, lop-sided, in his ideas and energies. There is a tendency in every large body of men to surge off in a one-sided direction. Politicians know and dread this tendency, every man catering to the public taste knows this tendency; what everybody wanted last spring no one may want this year. If now we translate this tendency into the word fashion we see more plainly what it means. There are fashions in politics, in business, in society, and there are fashions in religion that come and go with the passing season. Our text gives us the principle that corrects this tendency, "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." That is the principle of balance of energy, of proportion. Proportion is the principle that holds the balance between true progress and panic; between steadfast fidelity and mere fanaticism. Our text invites us to a point of view high enough to bring into sight the whole field of thought and action and all the interests involved.

I want to apply this principle to our religious life. There is no subject on which the prejudice and passion of the human heart are more susceptible than on religion. There is no subject on which it is more difficult to keep a just balance and proportion. It appeared to some people that the church was not making enough of the human nature of Christ and they swerved off, laying the principal emphasis on that one point. It appeared to others that the church was not doing full justice to the wideness of God's love, and they swerved off and laid universal emphasis on that one point. Some people, seeing that the action of the mind may affect some nervous diseases of the body, emphasised that simple and old fact of medical science into a whole religion, and away they went, stampeded. Christian women, perceiving the unique power of prayer, cloistered themselves as nuns and laid the whole emphasis of life on that one thing. Others, perceiving the value of merciful deeds, put the emphasis of their life on charity. Thus there is constant danger of the individual and of the church becoming unbalanced in their aims, disproportionate in their activities; so doing one thing as to leave others equally important undone.

Let us apply the principle now to one specific part in our Christian life. The chief purpose of the church in this world is to save. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, even the chief, and his church was ordained, organised, and ordered on the march to save sinners, the fallen, the lost. It is primarily not an educative, industrial, or benevolent, but a saving institution.

Mark now these words—sinners, fallen, lost. Men

make distinctions within these words. According to the Scripture all men are fallen and sinners, every soul of man needs to be saved; the man in the slums and the man on the heights; the child born behind the saloon and the child born in the lap of a moral home. The gospel has the same message for both; Christ, and faith in Christ, are necessary to the salvation of each. Preach the gospel to every creature, is the command of the perfectly balanced mind of the Master.

But it has come to pass that the words sinner, fallen, lost, are practically reserved for those who have been born at, or have fallen to, the bottom of the moral scale; for those who have reached the slums of a great city; for those haggard individuals who have thrown aside all moral restraints and proprieties, whose bloated faces dim the sunshine on the water front. This you very well know is the latest sociological fashion in religious activity, and the church is urged to turn from all other lines and give itself *en masse* to the slums. For if the church is in the world to save, and to save sinners, it should go where sinners are; and sinners, in the opinion of this lop-sided Pharisee, are found principally in the slums, in the tenements, in the red-lamped streets of the city. Have we not often read and heard what Jesus would do if he came to London or Chicago or New York? Has it not been repeated with blasphemous irreverence that he would confine his presence and his efforts below a certain line or street; that he would never be seen on the uptown avenues; that he would be seen persuading men from the damnation of the saloon and the variety-show, but never in the infant class

of an uptown Sunday school; that if he went uptown at all it would be to call every minister, Christian, and moral citizen to go down below the dead-line these Pharisees have drawn, and work for the souls of men that are fallen and lost. For so dear to Christ are the interests of those on one side of a street that he would utterly ignore those on the other side. This he would do, and leave the other undone.

Many are misled by this specious plea to a pitiful onesideness of religious activity. You can get people to go down to the settlements, to work among the tenements, and there to do real Christlike work, who would laugh at you if you asked them to take a class in an uptown Sunday school, because they wish to go where they are needed; they are needed below that dead-line, but they perceive no need of self-denying Christian work in a class of well-dressed boys and girls in the uptown school. You can get people to give largely for this work at the bottom of the slide who decline to do much or anything for uptown work. These things they do, and leave the other undone. Now certainly the vision of the multitude thus at the bottom of the moral scale is sufficiently impressive to arouse the sympathy and saving passion of every Christian heart. No one can look over that precipice and see the mangled souls of men without pity and the desire to help. No one can think of those young men who have swiftly scorched their way to the depths of moral degradation without wishing to call every possible agency to come to their rescue. It is a sight that moved the Saviour to tears and to miracles of saving. It is a sight that always moved the church to pity and to activity. It is a sphere

which the church never has, and never will, neglect. It becomes us as a church and as individuals to ask if we are doing our full share of that work. "These things ought ye to have done."

At the same time there is that which we ought not to leave undone. On this side of that dead-line there are many souls. The majority were born and are living to-day on the upper side of it. For every child born in the slums there are a score born in self-respecting homes, little ones who have not yet begun the steep descent. For every young man down there eating husks with the swine there are a score of self-respecting men who are yet far from that low level. Going downtown you would find many unhappy spirits below that line; but on your way down you will pass ten thousand who have not reached it. Does the church owe anything to those who have not yet reached it? Or is there nothing to do but to go to the bottom and wait until they have arrived there, and then do all that can be done to get them out and start them on the way back to morality and respectability? Would it or would it not be worthy of a Christian man or woman's energy to meet those gradually moving down the incline and persuade them to go no further? Would it be a Christlike deed to save young men not *in* that lowest fall but *from* it, and so influence their fresh young lives as that they may never have the bitterness of the repentance that came to the prodigal when he found himself among the swine? Would it be worthy of a Christian man or woman's interest to meet those little ones, standing like spring birds on the thresholds of their homes on the residence streets of the city, and tell them of God and of Jesus Christ and of

saving grace, so that they never would reach the bottom or go far down the sad incline? That you should follow with human sympathy and Christian charity some young man who went out of your office by the door of theft, or drunk nness, or gambling, we can understand; would it be worthy of you as a man, worthy your influence as a Christian man, to say a helpful word or support a helpful institution for the young men still at their desks in honesty and fidelity and yet far away from the door through which the others passed down and out into the night? The other, indeed, you ought to have done; should you have left this undone?

There is no little necessity for reflection on this matter of proper proportion and balance of attention and energy in church work in these days of classes and masses. There is nothing so illogical, so unchristian, so inhuman as this artificial and vicious division of men into the so-called classes and masses. It is a distinction of the devil and made for diabolical purposes. We can scarcely blame the demagogue of socialism or the professional politician for using this distinction for his selfish purpose when the church, or rather a few officiously claiming to represent the church, have filled the popular press with the clamour of it. There is nothing so suicidal for the church itself as to turn its whole saving agencies to one of these artificial sides to the neglect of the other. If we look into the example of Jesus Christ, that Leader and Commander of the church, we find that he made no such distinction; nor did he so confine his attention to one class or line of duty as to leave the other unnoticed or undone. His first disciples were young

men from what we call the middle class of society. They were self-respecting young men who lived above the dead-line. Some of them owned their own boats, their own homes. They went out each morning to do an honest day's work and earn a respectable living in a right manly way. When he found Nathaniel he was not eating husks with the swine, but saying his prayers in the shadow of a fig tree. When he found Matthew it was not in a saloon, but at the desk of a business man, a man of affairs. His first convert was a teacher, of the learned class. Joseph of Arimathea was a man of substance and of standing in the community. For the one Mary who was a sinner, who had reached the bottom of the moral scale, and who received his saving attention, there were a dozen other Marys and Salomes as far from her level as Bethany on Mount Olivet was far above the level of the Dead Sea. There is indeed the story of the prodigal, never to be forgotten; but there is also the story of the wealthy young man who had kept the commandments from his youth up and whom Jesus loved. Thus Christ fully illustrated the principle he commends to us, "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

This division of the community into the classes and the masses has had one specific and disastrous effect. It has left its impression on the so-called classes that they do not need the gospel in the sense that they need to be saved. Not feeling themselves included in the masses they feel themselves passed by, both by the demands and the activities of the gospel. Take your own or your neighbour's boys, for example; have you noticed that there are saving and helping

institutions for the souls of every class but this one? You notice that there are no evangelists rushing up and down these streets of homes asking how these young men can be saved. And the young men involved have not been indifferent to this public neglect. They have heard themselves excused and have gone out. No specific effort is made for their salvation until perchance they drop down by neglect to the bottom of the scale and turn up poor besotten prodigals; then indeed, if one is saved, it is heralded in public print that the son of a family on the avenue has been converted in a downtown mission. It is a merciful thing that there is someone there to save him. Would it not have been a more merciful thing to have prevented him from ever reaching the necessity of that mission? Where are the boys of such homes, well-to-do homes, to-day? Not in the slums, few of them will ever reach these; not idling their hours on the downtown streets; the city preacher, abundantly useful as he is, will not see them in his audience. And yet so many such, fine young fellows, are not in any church to-day, take no particular interest in the saving work of the church. Why? Because for one reason it has been drummed into them by this popular clamour that they do not need the gospel, that that is for the masses and they do not feel themselves as of the masses; because all the special and specific efforts are made for those at a social level which they know they have not reached and intend never to reach. But these young men, sons of wealth, sons of respectability, sons of education, sons of industry, have souls, and their souls know the power of temptation and of sin and the consequences of sin. They

equally need the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They need the preventive care as their prodigal brothers need the redeeming care of the gospel. The uptown church where they live, the uptown branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, which is an arm of the church, are the only institutions provided for them, the only preventive institutions in their behalf. Are not they, their moral welfare, their eternal future, of equal importance with those below the dead-line? Shall we so care for one as to leave the other uncared for? If as a body of Christian people we were going before God to-day to give an account of our duty and how we performed it, and we should report that we spent all our care and interest on the so-called masses, God would ask us where our own children are, where the boys and girls of our own neighbourhood are, and say, "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

It seems to me, then, that the teacher of an uptown infant class going before the sweet faces of her children is doing as great and as necessary work for the kingdom of God in preventing these lambs of the fold from straying, as her Salvation Army sister beating her tambourine on the street corner, speaking to the haggard faces of those neglected in their childhood, and because neglected fallen. It seems to me that the Christian man devoting what time and talent and means he has to spare for Christian work in leading, say, a young men's Bible class; in inviting the young men of his neighbourhood to a seat in church; in influencing young lives just beginning their career, is doing as wise and necessary a work

as if he had waited until those young men had gone to the bottom and then exerted himself with all the power he had to lift them back again. I submit this to your common sense. It seems to me that the up-town church, standing on the preventive side of human life, seeking to gather into itself the children and youth of self-respecting homes, leading them to the Saviour, training them in Christian living so that they never shall fall, is of as great importance, of far greater importance, to the welfare of this community and the kingdom of Christ than any rescue institution of any kind standing at the bottom of the scale. "These things ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone."

XVIII

THE MINOR MOTIVE

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David! my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me! But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.—Matthew xv. 21–28.

WE are asked periodically to contribute to the work of Foreign Missions. This raises pertinent questions in our minds. How much, if anything, ought we to give to such a cause? Let us search for a practical answer to that question. There are many texts in the Bible that present the subject of Foreign Missions at its maximum; I deliberately choose a text that reduces it to its minimum.

On any subject of importance we need to have a clear opinion, an opinion that shall warm into a conviction, a working principle of action so firmly held

that when the subject comes before us we may instantly know what we ought to do. Naturally we look for the best light and information in which to form that opinion. Now, if on any such subject our Saviour has expressed an opinion, we do well to heed it; because we are not likely to have any better light, or to come to a wiser decision. If, in addition to an opinion, he has left any personal example on the matter, we do well to take heed to that; because his example has never been known to lead any man astray. On any of these subjects the wisest question we can ask ourselves is this: What would Christ think, what would Christ do, in this matter? Men may think and do thus or so, and their example has relative value for us; but Christ's example is absolute in its value to us as Christian men.

That value arises from two sources: First, from his unquestioned wisdom. He had such a wide knowledge on all questions of life and duty. He had such a wonderful balance of consideration, not so doing one thing as to leave another equally important undone. There was such a symmetry in his sympathies, such an entire absence of impulsiveness or partiality. He never appears as the victim of one narrow idea to the exclusion of any other important one. The value of his example rises again from the fact that he is our Master. The very genius of a Christian life is to imitate his example. If, then, on any important subject we can find his opinion and example we will count them the greatest motive back of our energies. What, then, was Christ's opinion and example on the work of missions?

We all know the interest which Christ had in Home

Missions. He thoroughly believed in his own country and in the moral well-being of his own countrymen. We know how he went about their towns and villages preaching the gospel, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and converting sinners. Every corner of Galilee and Judea felt his presence and his power. To his own countrymen he sent out the disciples, two by two, that they also might go throughout the towns with the same purpose. He was a great Home Missionary. His people in all ages have felt the inspiration of that example and responded to it. This is the motive under which our own and other churches send a little army of missionaries into the highways and byways of our own land, seeking to make it and keep it a Christian land.

But did Christ have any interest in Foreign Missions? I am thinking not only of his command, "Go ye into all the world,"—that is taken for granted to-day,—I am looking for something more personal, and, if possible, more practical than that. He said, "Go ye," but did he ever say, "Come ye"? Has he expressed any personal opinion, has he left us any personal example, on Foreign Missions? Certainly this is a question which frequently comes before you, one on which you have an opinion, which is to you a working principle. Is that opinion formed in the light of Christ's opinion and example?

I most thoroughly believe in Foreign Missions; but never mind my opinion to-day. The church to which we belong has firm convictions in favour of Foreign Missions; but never mind the opinion of the church to-day. The editors of many of our daily and weekly papers have opinions about Foreign Missions; but I

have the temerity to ask you to put even them out of consideration to-day. And even the opinions of those casual travellers who skirt the shores of the world; who visit the chief seaports for a few days; who sometimes accept the hospitality of our missionaries, and return to write books against them and their cause—even *their* opinion I will ask you to put aside to-day. All these, no doubt, have their value, more or less; but I am speaking to you as to Christian men and women. I am speaking on the assumption that the opinion of Christ on this or on any other matter is more to you than that of the church or the world, of the pulpit or the press. I am speaking on the assumption that to you Christ's personal example and opinion are absolute and final. And that if on this subject of Foreign Missions we can discover his opinion and example, it will be sufficient for our prompt and loyal and liberal action.

I am not oblivious to the objections to Foreign Missions which exist in many minds, and I am anxious to deal with them, not merely in a religious, but also in a reasonable way. I am trying to find some common standing-ground, where we can meet without debate, without difference, and without doubt as to what our duty exactly is. I think I find such a common standing-ground in this proposition, viz.: If on any subject of duty we can discover what Christ thought and did, it has the right of way among the motives which seek to influence our action. And if I can present his opinion and example on this question of Foreign Missions, it will settle our minds as to what we ought to do.

Very well; we know that he was a great Home

Missionary; but in this text we find him passing the frontier of his own country, leaving behind the last village and hamlet of his own countrymen, and personally going into a foreign country. Phœnicia, in which were Tyre and Sidon, was as foreign to Palestine as India or Africa is to our country. This woman in our text was a Canaanite. There were Greeks and Romans and Jews in Phœnicia at that time, representatives of the more civilised foreigners, but this woman was a Canaanite, an aborigine, the native Indian of the country, a heathen, and as such was as foreign to Christ and his disciples as the Chinese, the Hindoos, or the Hottentots are to us. No distinction in race has ever been so sharp as that between Jew and Canaanite; the prejudices of a thousand years of antagonism and retaliation lay between them. The very antipodes of the social and religious world are brought before us in this text. We know that Christ met some of these people in his own country. "They about Tyre and Sidon . . . . came unto him," we read. He must have had some curiosity about them, some interest in them, for they were human, and he was never without interest in what was human. But here that interest becomes so marked, that, dear as Home Mission work was to him, he thought it wise to leave it for a time and go into a foreign country to see how it fared with them in their moral well-being.

So far, then, we are sure that Christ personally visited a foreign country; that for a time he became a Foreign Missionary. No doubt he left some sick folk in Palestine; some needy ones who missed him and who wondered when he would come back. I should not wonder but that the *Daily Press* of Caper-

naum had an indignant editorial headed, "Why This Waste?" going to show that if Christ were looking for sick folks and poor people and unconverted sinners, he could find enough in his own city to fill his whole time and attention without going off to Tyre and Sidon. And if the disciples had any spare shekels from their own necessity they could use them advantageously among their own citizens without spending them on Canaanites. Charity begins at home. When he has fed everybody, healed everybody, and converted everybody, and brought in a millennium of bread and health and religion to his own country, it will be time enough for him to go to Tyre and Sidon or China or any other foreign country.

All very plausible and persuasive to many; but Christ evidently held a different opinion, and, acting on that opinion, he left his own city and his own country for a time and went into a foreign country and visited a heathen people in the interest of their moral welfare. That opinion and that example are more to us as Christian men and women than all the reiterated opinions of the unknown editor of the unknown *Press* of Capernaum. Inasmuch, then, as we have that example, and inasmuch as the rule of our Christian life is to imitate his example, we cannot consistently be indifferent to the heathen, or to their moral well-being. You may raise the question, if you please, whether it is right for us to be Christians; but being Christians it is categorically imperative that we follow Christ's example and give his opinion precedence over that of all others. End of the first sermon on this text,

When he came into that country he found the people in as much need of his help as were his own country-

men. "And behold, a woman of Canaan came, and cried unto him, saying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David!" "Thou Son of David;" therein she recognised him as what we would call a Christian man; as having something she did not possess, but greatly desired; as having a power to help, to heal, to uplift, which she could not find among her own people. And she was right. He *did* have something far better, and we through him have something far better than any heathen people; something that has lifted us religiously, morally, socially above their level. Whether Christ will share it with her or not is not yet seen; but he had it. He stood there before her charged with it to his finger-tips, to the hem of his garments; power to heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, to raise the dead, to redeem the soul from its sin, and fill all the days of the present and of the future with hope. We have it in our measure, whether we should share it with the heathen depends on what Christ will do with this heathen woman. And she said: "Have mercy on me, O Lord." "Mercy!" It was the same cry that he had heard so often in his own homeland. Human nature is very much the same whether in Palestine or in Phœnicia. People in heathen lands may differ from us in colour, in dress, in social customs, but internally there is the same heart, the same conscience, the same sin, the same sorrows, the same cry for mercy, the same need of divine help. "Have mercy on me!" He heard that cry at the gate of his own Jericho, he heard it then at the gate of foreign Tyre, he hears it now from the gate of every city in every land under the sun. Whether he or we shall heed it or not, we certainly

hear it in increasing volume. I think we may safely conclude that a mountain range, a river, or a sea, however it makes a change of nation, does not make a change of human nature. However it may set limits to human sympathy, or divine help, it does not set a limit to human need.

So far, then, we are clear, that Christ had interest enough in foreigners to visit their country and see their moral condition; that when he came he found them in confessed need; that they appealed to him and claimed his help. That leads us now to the very core of this whole subject of Foreign Missions, and raises the one most practical question: What did he think, what did he do in reference to this claim of the foreigner upon his help? When that Canaanite, that Chinese woman, if you will, appealed to our Saviour, and laid her needs before him, he made no response. "He answered her not a word."

The disciples, like yourselves, were surprised at such action on his part, and rather urged him to do *something* for her that she might cease to trouble them. Mark his answer to them. As if it were not enough to refuse by silence, he will now refuse in very definite words. Looking at this woman who was a foreigner, a Canaanite, and pointing over the spur of Lebanon which divided his disciples and himself from their own country, he replied: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Never was the question of Home and Foreign Missions so sharply raised. Here is one whose wisdom, sympathy, and love were the highest; one whose outlook upon the world and personal duty was the widest and clearest, sharply deciding that his first duty was

to his own country and to his own countrymen, and leaving it, for the time, in doubt whether he owed anything to Canaan and the Canaanite.

Again the woman returns with her appeal, and, shortening it this time into the very pith of pathos, cries, "Lord, help me!" Again that pitiful cry for help! The most pitiful of all cries—that of a mother for her own child distressed. "If any of you know a mother's love," said a woman caught in a late railroad accident, "if any of you know a mother's love, save my child." How often do we hear that cry from heathen mothers! *We* are too old to learn, they say, too ignorant; we have been born and have lived and must die as we are; but our children! Raise them, educate them, save them out of this pitiful condition! Such is the appeal which now stuns the Saviour's ear. What will he do with her? He had interest enough in that foreign country to visit it in person. Coming into it, he found its people in moral need even as were his own people, tempted and sinning, troubled and suffering. And one of them comes to him and lays her human want upon his divine sympathy, and he is silent. Urged to do something by his disciples, he but waves his hand toward his own country: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Again there falls on his ear the pathos of the cry, "Lord, help me!" and I am asking what will he say, what will he do to her? He looks upon this woman, sees her trouble in her face, and gives an answer apparently still more decisive and exclusive: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." "Dogs!" That was the most contemptuous name that could fall from a Jew's

lips. It was the name the Jew reserved for those foreigners which he most despised; the most contemptuous name which one nation ever applied to another. No law of exclusion ever went further than this. It would appear that Christ was feeling for the lowest position which man can ever take on this matter of the moral welfare of the heathen. It would seem that he was looking down to see what possible opinion you or I might hold as against Foreign Missions, and that he came down to that level and then went a little below it; for whatever your opinion against Foreign Missions may be, you will find it difficult to put it into language so sharp, so exclusive as this: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs."

Why do I say these things in preaching a sermon on and for Foreign Missions? Because I have said that on this question I was to look for Christ's opinion and personal example, and that if I could find such, I was to present it to you as the guide for your conduct as to Foreign Missions. Now, so far as I remember, this is the only journey Christ made into a foreign country; the only time he came into personal contact with the heathen in their own country; and this, so far as we have yet seen, is the opinion he expressed and the example he set; and surely it seems to reduce Foreign Missions to its lowest ebb.

But, mark you, this is only "so far as we have yet seen." He is not done yet. Whatever in his words may be discouraging to us, they did not discourage the woman most directly concerned. Sharp as his answer seems to be, it was not decisive against Foreign Missions to *her* mind. On the contrary, she

caught in his words one broad gleam of such encouragement and hope as must have lighted up her face with warmest expectation.

"Cast it to the dogs," says our translation, most unfortunately. It was not the word for "dogs," but for "little dogs," he used. There may be little difference between these two words to our ears, but there was a wide difference between them to her Oriental training; exactly the difference between discouragement and encouragement, between a refusal and an invitation. In Oriental countries "dogs" are the most despicable of outcasts; no man owns them, or acknowledges them; no man feeds them, or shelters them; they are left to shift for themselves. If this were the word our Saviour had used, the woman would have turned away in despair, and Foreign Missions were impossible to us. But the "little dogs" have entrance to the house, the freedom of the home; they are the playfellows of the children and are permitted to share the children's bread. To *her* ear, then, there was just this difference between the words "dogs" and "little dogs." And on Christ's lips, familiar as he was with every shade of domestic life, there is also this difference between them. Catching, then, at this difference, she saw in it a gleam of light shining through the darkness of his refusal, and she took him at his word. "True, Master, it would not be right to take the children's *bread*—that is, the whole loaf—and cast it to the little dogs, to us who are foreigners; but the little dogs are given the *crumbs* that fall from the master's table. On thine own definition of what we are I plead for the little dog's crumbs. Now, Lord, on thine own opinion, help me!" Shall

I say that the Saviour was caught in his own illustration? But he meant himself to be caught. He left that link loose in his armour that the spear of her quest might reach his heart. Not at random nor at hazard did he choose the word on which she lays her hopeful plea.

Now the question at issue between them is put on the right ground. The relations between Home and Foreign Missions are properly understood and confessed between them, and taking the children's loaf and breaking it between his hands he gives her the crumbs, saying, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." She got all she asked.

What, then, from this text, exactly is the Saviour's opinion and example as to Foreign Missions? Just this, that they are entitled at least to the crumbs. Always, brethren, your first duty, your full table, is to the children; but the crumbs? Always your first duty is to the need lying nearest your door, this city, this country, we call home; but the crumbs? Foreign Missions are a legitimate appeal for the crumbs. Mark you where the Saviour has left the question in this text, the light which his own opinion and personal example have cast upon it. And in that light, and that light only, to-day I claim your interest and your energy. In the name of the "little dogs" I claim the crumbs.

The whole of the extensive work of Foreign Missions is carried on by means of the crumbs. Our Presbyterian Church gave seventeen millions to the "children" last year and a little less than one million to the "little dogs." Vast as the world is, much as there remains to be done, the church could yet send

the message of the gospel to every corner and to every individual in a comparatively short time if simply every one of its members gave the crumbs. I say every one. The prosperity of this work does not depend so much upon the size of the crumbs as upon the numbers of those giving them. The particular sin of the church on this matter is that so many excuse themselves, saying: The demands of Home work are so many and so urgent that they seem to require all we have. With the words and the example of Christ before us that excuse will not stand. The demands of Home work *are* many, give the loaf to the children; but for the little dogs he asks the crumbs. Or saying again, My income is so small! Very true, but he knows the size of your loaf, and asks only for the crumbs of that loaf, and there is no loaf so small but has some crumbs.

What shall we understand by crumbs? I do not wish to be arbitrary, or to dictate to you. I earnestly seek to keep within the bounds of the most practical reason. Let us take one of the children's loaves. Shall we give it all to the little dogs? That would be wrong in the light of this example. Shall we divide it into two or four parts? Shall we follow the good old Biblical rule and divide it into ten parts and give one-tenth to the little dogs? That, again, would be beyond this example. One-tenth is to cover all our religious benevolence, and Foreign Missions are only a part of that. Let us call it one-tenth of all. Then a crumb would be the one-hundredth part. That does not seem too large. One hundredth part of your income for the salvation, the civilisation of our fellow-men sitting in darkness, in ignorance, in

suffering, in hopelessness. Yet that proportion would far surpass anything ever given for this important work.

I ask for the crumbs in the name of the Saviour to whom we owe the crumbs, the loaf, our all. I ask for the crumbs in behalf of a people now in a position in which our own fathers once were and from which they were raised because someone gave them the crumbs from the Master's table. Let a fellow-feeling make us reasonably kind; let the feeling of Christian loyalty and gratitude to the Master make us liberally kind; let us say to the cause for which I plead to-day: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

XIX

OUR NEED AND ITS SUPPLY

But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.—Philippians iv. 19.

PAUL was a gentleman. He knew how to accept a gift graciously and how to make return with equal grace and simplicity. This gracious side of Paul's character appears particularly in this letter to the Philippians. The church at Philippi was the first that Paul founded in Europe; it is our mother church: the Old First. There was always a peculiar personal, affectionate relation between this church and Paul which continued through his life. It was his joy and crown. When he left them to establish churches in the farther west, they followed him with personal interest and pecuniary assistance. Twice while he was in Thessalonica and afterwards when in Corinth they ministered to his temporal need. They now hear that he is a prisoner in Rome. They well knew the privations which that involved. From their far-away home in the East they sent Epaphroditus bearing some contribution of money and messages of love to him.

Paul was very chary of gifts from churches. There were churches far richer than that of Philippi from which he would not take a penny. Mercenary themselves, they were ever ready to think others equally

so. To the church in Corinth Paul blankly states: "When I was present with you I was chargeable to no man. I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service." He was ready, however, to receive these repeated gifts from the church at Philippi, because he knew they trusted him and his motives. Epaphroditus, having delivered the little present, is about to return, and Paul seizes the opportunity to write them this letter, in which he heartily thanks them for their repeated kindnesses; and, as is natural, he sought to make some return. But he had nothing to send. He was a prisoner and poor, owning nothing in this world but an old cloak, a few manuscripts, and a Bible. "But," he says, "my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." It is as if a child receiving gifts and wishing to make some return, finding he had nothing of his own, would say, "but my father will remember you." This is the setting of our text. Rising out of it there are a few things to be noticed.

Man is a creature of much need. We are constantly coming up against this word. There is a world of meaning for us compacted into its four letters. No one is exempt. Paul is in need of one thing, the Philippians of another, and all of us of something. This need is ever renewed. However much we have to-day, however satisfied we may lie down to-night, we wake in the morning to a new need. The sun may rise brightly, the birds sing joyously, the air be fresh and sweet; but all the beauty will disappear from the scene if the music of the breakfast bell does not mingle with it. Our fields are wide and many, they are laden with the promise of a harvest; yet we

are always within six months of starvation. Let anything serious happen to the summer and harvest; let God withhold his sunshine or his rain, and all the world of man would be dead within the year.

This need covers all parts of our nature—body, mind, and spirit. The hunger of the soul is no less real than that of the body. Indeed, it is so much more keen that in the pangs of it we are often indifferent to the hunger of the body. We think of those who are in sorrow this morning and need comfort; in temptation and need grace; in sin and need mercy; under many cares and need wisdom; in doubt and need light; the many whose souls are troubled. We are all pilgrims starting out each morning with but one loaf of bread and one bottle of water, soon spent, requiring that we kneel on the threshold of each new day, praying, "Give us this day our daily bread."

It is our privilege to carry all our need to God. We need not here make any fine distinction between the need of body, mind, and spirit, for they are all comprehended under this word "all" of our text. It was Christ himself who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and to see in that prayer every hunger of our nature. We may be sure he did not intend to overlook any need, or to mock at any prayer. For every hunger God has spread a table of supply somewhere. If of the beasts of the field it can be said, "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayst give them their meat in due season"; if it can be said, "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry," much more may be said of man, made in his own image, child of his Father's love.

If you should pity a child because he had nothing of his own, but was wholly dependent upon his father, the child could not appreciate your sympathy nor enter into your anxiety on his behalf, because it is his settled conviction that his father is ever able and willing to supply all his legitimate need. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?"

But we do not always get all we want or all we ask in prayer. Very true. What, then, becomes of the doctrine of our text? Let us distinguish between want and need. The poet sings:

> "Man wants but little here below,
> Nor wants that little long."

Is that literally true? Is it true to your experience? to your observation? Is it not so that man wants much and wants it all the time? What the poet meant, however, is that man *needs* but little here below. This is a distinction with a wide difference. God often declines to supply all our *wants* because they may be unnecessary, fanciful, or injurious. A friend found a nest of four young birds blown by the wind from its place in the tree. In pity he took it home with him, intending to care for the birds. He had observed something of a mother-bird's method of feeding her young. Procuring food, he chirped over the nest in imitation of the mother, and all four birds opened their mouths wide. He dropped something into each. Repeating the process, all four opened their mouths and again he fed them. On each occasion he gave something to all four, with the

result that in the morning he had four dead birds in the nest. He knew he had made some mistake. Watching a mother-bird more closely, he discovered that, though all the mouths of her young opened each time she came, she fed only one at a time. She distinguished between their want and their need. She knew that her fledgelings would ask for that which, though right in itself, would not be right at that particular time, and kindly declined to supply the untimely want.

An unanswered prayer for something we very much *want* is not a sign that God does not readily supply all our *need.* We may not be able to distinguish between want and need; but God makes no mistake. Neither God nor the bird rebukes the opening of the mouths in want, but both follow their own wisdom in distinguishing between want and need. The supplies they carry are for the need. "My God shall supply all your need."

The measure of God's supply is his riches in glory. Paul was evidently deeply impressed by the riches of God; the word is constantly falling from his lips and from his pen: "riches of mercy," "riches of grace," "riches of glory," "unspeakable riches." A glimpse into the treasury at Washington gives us some idea of the wealth of this government; Paul evidently had repeated glimpses into the treasury of God and was impressed by its abundance. He felt himself the son of a rich father and permitted to draw on him for every legitimate need. The door of that treasury is open to all of us. We may look and satisfy ourselves. We can see more than Paul ever saw.

God's riches of glory are seen in the manifestations

of his power. He that would supply all our need must be rich in power. Very well. "Lift up your eyes on high." This world on which we live is twenty-five thousand miles in circumference. The planet Jupiter out yonder is over two hundred and fifty thousand miles in circumference. A step further, and the sun is one million three hundred thousand times larger than the earth. There is one star twelve hundred times larger than the sun. But these figures mean nothing to us; they are idle words. If you touch a hot iron with your hand you know it instantly, so rapidly does sensation travel. Professor Young tells us that if a child's arm were long enough to touch the sun he would not know it, with all the rapidity of sensation, until he was one hundred and fifty years old. Our world, these planets and suns, are only a few grains of sand on the illimitable shores of space, all thronged with worlds which already count into the hundred millions, beyond which the eyes and the arithmetic of man fail. And all are the product of God's power. Nor should we move under such a scene indifferent. God himself challenges us in our hours of need and of timidity to look into this treasury of his power. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."

More marvellous still is the fact that all these riches of power are put at the command of our prayer. All its wealth stoops to supply and bends subservient to our honest need. "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: Ask me of things to

come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me."

What need of our to-day is too heavy for that power? Can great or small have any meaning here? What does it signify to the sea whether you launch a pleasure boat or a fleet of battleships on its power? It carries them all as a little thing. What can it signify to God to-day whether our need is small or great, whether it is a child saying, "I pray the Lord my soul to keep"—that little soul—or whether it is John Knox laying a kingdom, or David Livingstone a continent on his power? Can we not safely cast all our care on such riches?

> "Art thou afraid his power shall fail,
> When comes thy evil day?
> And can an all-creating arm
> Grow weary or decay?"

God reveals his riches of glory in the displays of his wisdom. He that would supply all our need must be wise. Very well. Lift up your eyes again, and behold this world is moving at the rate of sixty-eight thousand miles an hour. There is one star above us moving at the rate of seven hundred and twenty thousand miles an hour. No, we need not try to keep up with it; thought itself can scarcely follow fast enough. And all the vast hosts on high, those many millions of worlds, are all thus moving. Colossal, countless, swiftly careering, yet there is no collision, no confusion. Sixty-eight thousand miles have we travelled during the past hour, yet so smoothly, silently, that we have not been conscious of it. So perfectly balanced and adjusted are the complicated motions of

the universe that we can calculate to the fraction of a second when the moon shall be eclipsed, or the morning star pass across the face of the sun ten thousand years to come. "Not one of them faileth," or comes a moment tardy to its place. Frederick of Prussia once tried to make a few similar clocks swing their pendulums exactly together; but with all his wisdom failed. Here there are so many pendulums of different lengths, swinging in different directions, in complicated motions, and not one of them faileth to strike at the same moment with all the rest the hour of eclipse or of transit. All guided by God's riches of wisdom.

And all that wisdom is at the command of our prayer, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."

What depth in our hearts is beyond his ken? What entanglement in our affairs can he not unravel? What moving of outside forces can he not control? What machinations of adverse influence can he not confound? He that guides Arcturus and binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades is at the service of our honest need.

A deeper glimpse of the riches of God's glory is seen in the displays of his love. If God would supply all our need he must be rich in power, in wisdom,

rich also in love. There are needs which neither power nor wisdom can supply. Though his power turned every stone to bread, man does not live by bread alone. Though his wisdom made every star shine with knowledge, man does not live by information alone. There are needs of the heart, the affections, of the conscience, of the whole moral nature, that can be supplied only by love. If a star fell from its place there is no power known that could lift it back, no wisdom that could fit it into its place again. Man is a fallen star, fallen from his place by sin, and from sin have come suffering and sorrow and guilt and all unhappiness. What, if anything, can lift him back? There lies our greatest need. Is there anything in God's riches of glory to supply this need? Lift up your eyes again, God is power; star telleth that to star. Lift up your eyes, God is wisdom; night unto night sheweth knowledge. Life up your eyes to Calvary, to the cross, to Jesus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This fallen star can be lifted, is lifted back again; not by power, not by wisdom; but by that greatest attribute of God, love. What does the prophet say? "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

Jesus is as real as the stars; as real as the laws of wisdom that hold them in their orbits; is as real a fact of human knowledge. He comes nearer to us than any of these things; they walk majestic in the awful distance, he sat in lowliness at the hearthstones of our homes. At best we can see only part of God's power; only glimpses of his wisdom; but in

Jesus Christ we see the very depths of his love. God was power before the world was created; but only there is it revealed. God was wisdom before chaos became an ordered world; but only there is it revealed. God was love before Bethlehem and Calvary; but there only is the fulness of it revealed.

And all that love is at our command, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

What need of *pardon* is too heavy for that love; whether it be John leaning on his bosom, or the penitent thief inclining his head toward him on the cross; whether it be one Mary anointing his head with spikenard, or the other Mary bathing his feet with tears? Great or small has no meaning here, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." What need of daily *grace* for right living is too large for this love to supply? Is any cup so large that it cannot be filled to overflowing by this river of God? What need of *consolation* is too heavy for this love to supply? "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

This word riches of glory carries us a step farther; it leads our thought out of this present scene to one that is to come; out of this scene of partial glimpses of the riches of God into one where we shall see him as he is. There are needs in our nature not fully satisfied here; there are prayers not completely answered while we are on the earth. Every hunger and

thirst of our souls is prophetic. What we now receive is but an earnest of an inheritance yet held in reserve for us. Here we see the riches of the glory of God as the belated traveller coming over the hill sees the sparks rising from the chimney of his home, a glimmer of its light in the window, and catches faint snatches of the mirth of the children awaiting his coming. It is satisfying to see it, to know that the light and the warmth are in preparation for him. But when he gets into the home and stands in the full blaze of the light and warmth of the hearth every need of mind and body is fully satisfied. We are on our way to our Father's home where there awaits us the exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The closing phrase of our text should never be overlooked—"by Jesus Christ." All the divine supply comes to us only through his ministration. All the promises of God are sure and secured to us, they are Yea and Amen, only in him. "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." This indeed is the most encouraging thought of all, that this riches of glory for our need is in the hands of Jesus. We know Him. We know something of his love, of his alert readiness to pity and to help.

"O Christ! he is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love;
The streams on earth I've tasted,
More deep I'll drink above;
There to an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory—glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

XX

PROGRESSIVE LIGHT

The people which sat in darkness saw a great light.—Matthew iv. 16.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—Proverbs iv. 18.

THE history of this planet is diveded into two parts: that which came before the sun shone on it, and that which came after. There was a long period in which this earth lay wrapped in perpetual cloud, the waters under the firmament were not divided from the waters above the firmament. Even then what life there was on the earth was dependent on what sunlight sifted down through the misty atmosphere. All things lived by the light of a sun which they saw not. Somewhere in God's long day the cloud became thinner, the air clearer, and out of a blue sky the sun looked down upon the earth, "that which sat in darkness saw a great light." Then all dimly living things rushed to a warmer and larger life. They lived by the light of a sun which they saw. That was nature's first Christmas. The evening and the morning were the first day. And now freshet and flood, tornado and volcano were to cease, while the planet entered on a new era of "peace on earth."

The life of man is divided into two parts: that

which came before the first Christmas and that which has been since. In the former period ignorance, superstition, oppression, injustice, immorality long prevailed. Even then there was no little religious and spiritual life, but what there was depended on Jesus Christ. The light of his truth and mercy and love streamed through the misty atmosphere of type and promise and symbol and sacrifice. They lived by the light of the Saviour they saw not. In the fulness of God's long day, in the unfolding of his purpose, that dispensation of cloudy symbol was rolled up, and on that rare morning in Palestine, over little Bethlehem, out of a clear spiritual sky, the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, shone upon the earth, "They that sat in darkness saw a great light." Then all dimly living religious things rose to a warmer and larger life. They lived by the light of a Saviour they saw. That was the first Christmas of the social and spiritual world. The evening and morning were the first day. And now all war and wickedness, passion and cruelty, injustice and oppression were to cease, while human society entered on the new era of "good will to men."

The religious life of the individual is divided into two parts: that which comes before our acceptance of Christ as our Saviour and that which comes after. There was a time when our souls were wrapped in clouds of ignorance, of uncertainty, of indifference, or of doubt about him. Even then what morality and charity and decency we attained were dependent upon Jesus Christ, his common grace affecting us through Christian ancestry, inherited impetus, Christian education, and the force of Christian dominance in so-

ciety. We lived by a Saviour we saw not. Then came the day of our conversion, a day to our souls like that cosmic day when at last the sun shone clearly in the sky upon the dripping earth; such a day as that when the light from heaven and the song of angels announced the first Christmas to the world; a day when ignorance, indifference, and uncertainty gave way to the clear shining of faith in him; that day when we were able to say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." We who sat in darkness saw a great light, and all the dimly living religious things of our spirits woke to newness of life. We live by the light of a Saviour we know. That was the first Christmas of the soul. The evening and the morning were the first day. Then all passion and weakness and unbelief and sin were to cease as our souls entered on an era of "peace and good-will" to God.

Thus the earth was to roll up to a perfect state when once the sun shone upon it. Human society was to pass to the perfection of peace and good-will when once Jesus Christ was born. Our own souls were to rise into the likeness of God when once the light of the face of Jesus Christ fell upon our hearts. This is the ideal side of Christmas day. These things were most surely promised and shall most surely be. But were they to be sudden or slow in their coming? Is God's day one of twenty-four hours, or one of a thousand years? This is where the hesitations of men arise, where confusion of judgment takes place, where shadows cloud this Christmas day. Man's day is so short, the art of civilisation and of character is so long, that what does not come in its perfection within our little day is despaired of by many.

The second half of our text must not be forgotten. "The path of the just is as the dawning light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." That is to say, all the progress of God's purpose in nature, in society, and in the soul is gradual. After the sun first appeared through the early clouds with large promise for a better day for the earth, the storm, the tempest, the volcano, and earthquake did not cease at once. They still raged in many places and after many centuries. Vesuvius, Pelée, and Kilauea still poured forth their destructive lava, as if the new order had not come upon the earth. This world has God's promise that the desert place shall blossom like the rose; but God's day is long, his methods slow—as men count slowness. Nothing good comes suddenly to its perfection. God waits the co-operation of time and man. Man was sent into this world to till it, to subdue it; a hundred generations of men must go into the swamps to drain them; into forests to level them; into the mountains to guide the wanton rivers out upon the dry places to make them fruitful, before the wilderness with its thorny cactus becomes a garden with its rose. The path of God in nature is as the dawning light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Yet each year sees new gains, each century sees great gains. A thousand evidences prove that we are well on the way to a new earth, where all the forces of nature shall be tamed and harnessed to the interests of industry, of health, and of cosmic peace.

After Christ was born in Bethlehem, and the sun of the first Christmas shone upon human society with its promise of a better day of "good will to men,"

war and oppression, cruelty and slavery did not cease at once. The world has God's promise that wars shall cease, that men shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and that men shall be brothers the world around; yet, after nineteen hundred years, war and oppression rage in some places. The opening of this twentieth century found even the Christian nations of the world in the tug of war, and these Christmas days see such nations involved in a diplomatic dispute that at any moment may drench the Oriental world with blood. In the most Christian lands class is mercilessly arrayed against class; industrial war, far more destructive of prosperity and of life than the formal battles of military strife, shake the foundations of society and strain the laws of God and man. In view of these things some are asking how we can sing of a Prince of Peace, or observe a Christmas with anthems of joy. Let us remember, however, that God's day is long, and that his method here too is slow; that which is perfect comes by gradual steps. Here, too, God waits the co-operation of time and of man. Nothing good comes to society by any sudden miracle of perfection, but by successive inspirations and revolutions and gains. Admitting that there is much yet to be overcome, let us not be blind to the gains that are surely made. Rough as war is at its best, yet, when Christ was born in Bethlehem, the Spaniard, the Filipino, the Boer, being defeated, instead of being treated with leniency and humane consideration, would have been transported to far lands and sold into hopeless slavery. While not blind to the horror of war at its best, let us neither be blind to the amelioration, the restriction,

the mercies with which it is accompanied, and by which it is followed. Listening to the clash of arms that still continues, let us not lose sight of that principle of arbitration, slowly but surely taking root in the convictions of the civilised nations and already not without potent effect. Whereas we cannot mark this Christmas with the announcement that the gates of Janus are permanently closed, let us not forget that when Christ was born in Bethlehem those gates of war had stood open continuously for five hundred years. Whereas we cannot say to-day that universal peace prevails, we can say that society has made long strides in that direction. God's path in the history of man is as the dawning light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. We can expect no sudden miracle here any more than in the material world. We can look for the lilies of peace among men only as we look for the rose in the desert. God is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness.

After Christ was born in our individual souls that day of our conversion, temptation and sin did not cease at once. The soul indeed has the promise that temptation shall lose its power, that passion shall give way to principle, that weakness shall be lost in moral strength, that it shall attain to the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. Yet here, after ten or twenty years of Christian striving, temptation still has its power and sin its victories over us; the law of the flesh still wars against the law of the spirit. Is there, then, no end to this ceaseless conflict? Is there no place where we can lay the armour down? No, not yet at least. For here, too, God's day is long, his method gradual.

As over the convulsions of nature the progress of peace is as the dawning light, as over the revolutions of society the progress of God's will is as the dawning light, so here too the path of the just, of justice, of inward righteousness, of perfect moral character, is as the dawning light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. These Christmas days mark the fact that the sun has touched its southern limit—that it is even now returning to our northern latitudes. Notwithstanding the snow, the ice, the biting wind, spring is already on its way with hastening feet. Notwithstanding there is yet no blossom on the tree, no violet in the grass, spring is in the air. But the tree and the sun and the soil must labour together through many weeks before we gather apple-blossoms from the tree or violets from the grass. Slowly, yet surely, comes the perfection in June to crown the beginning in December. When we believe in Christ, when we enter on that first Christmas day of the soul, the lush summer of the soul is already on its way to us despite temptation and conflict and temporary failures. But God and his grace and our wills must co-operate through many days before the blossoming of virtue and the fruit of Christlike character come to the heart. The path of what is just and what is right and what is holy is yet only as the dawning light. To-day we have only the first small returns of the Christmas sun from the south; but that light is ordained of God to shine more and more until the wished-for perfection crowns the small beginning.

XXI

THE EASY YOKE

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.—Matthew xi. 29, 30.

THE yoke is that crooked beam of wood put on the necks of oxen by which they draw the cart or the plough. It is the symbol of service, of submission to another's will. We do not go far in this life when we find someone seeking to lay a yoke on our shoulders. Nature and society assume that we have come here to do something; that no man liveth to himself. Most of us rise each morning to put on someone's yoke. Some yokes are easy and some burdens light, and some are heavy enough.

There is no calamity in this. No sympathy need be expended over the fact that this is a life of service. The calamity would be the idle, the useless, the yokeless life. For, next to sin, idleness is greatest in its influence to disintegrate the powers of body, mind, and conscience:

> "An angel's wing would droop if long at rest,
> And God himself inactive were no longer blest."

The prophet says that it is good for a man to bear the yoke. It is good for the man himself. Aside from the product of his activity, aside from the gain that may thus come to others, the chief good is what the yoke does for the development of his own powers

of body, faculties of mind, virtues of character. The prophet says that it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Our own mature experience confirms the statement. For then the powers of body and mind are pliant, capable of adaptation, of strengthening and toughening for the service until service becomes easy, becomes a second nature to us. Coming to the breezy summit of middle life, we look back upon many things with regret; but no man regrets the good honest hard work he performed. That and the results of it are his own. He may have been disappointed, and robbed of much by the way, but he cannot be robbed of the discipline and the character which he earned through bearing the yoke. Forever that is his. When the father would lay the yoke of business on the shoulders of his son, the young man may be reluctant to bear it and be restive under it; but when the son, now capable and efficient, sees his father touching the seventies and wishes that the older man might lay down the yoke and take things easier, he knows not how to approach him on the subject. He will ask some mutual friend to suggest to his father the wisdom of letting the younger man bear the burden. Even the friend scarcely dares make the suggestion because he knows it will grieve the veteran's soul. For with whatever reluctance we may take up the yoke, we lay it down at last with far more regret; it has become life and character and joy to us.

And here in our text, on the very threshold of the Christian life, we meet this yoke. Among the first words Christ has to say to us is, "Take my yoke upon you." Here, too, no man liveth to himself. The

Christian life also is one of service, of submission. Men do not sit and sing themselves away to everlasting bliss; the way thither is the way of the yoke. Christ is very frank about this, he allures no man to follow him by false pretences. When men would follow Garibaldi to the liberty of Italy, he warned them that there would be hunger and thirst and fatigue, battle and wounds and death to be endured. Pizarro, in leading his veterans to the conquest of South America, drew a line across the deck of his ship, pictured the hardships and burdens men would have to bear who would go with him. He invited those willing to follow him on these conditions to cross the line to his side, and permitted the others to go back to Panama. Those who would follow must be willing to bear the yoke. When men would follow Christ, he frankly said, "Take my yoke upon you"—the yoke of service, of self-denial, of submission. "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."

Neither is there any calamity in this. Nothing has overtaken us as Christians but such as is common to all men. No sympathy need be expended over the trite fact that the Christian life is one of service and submission; that that service is sometimes heavy and long continued, and that it takes us far away from friends. There is not a little unmanly murmuring at this point; we bear the yoke of business, of society, and of pleasure to a degree of self-sacrifice and fatigue oftentimes extreme. Although we murmur about it a little in the evening, we are ready to return to it again the next day; for this is the way of the world and this is the way we must go if we are to be in the

world of business and of society. But when Christ lays his yoke on us and it begins to draw on our effort and on our self-denial there is then a puling and complaining as if something unwonted had come upon us. The calamity, the dreadful calamity, is the idle, the formal, the empty profession of Christianity. This is the specific danger of this day—not the denial of Christ; but the formal profession of Christianity without bearing this essential yoke of service and submission to the will of Christ, that counterfeit of faith —the faith without works which is dead. Two fruit trees in the orchard—apple trees in September, one laden down with fruit, some branches bent, taut, and some broken under the burden they bear. The other tree straight, graceful, green, its branches rising skyward, but not an apple; twenty years in the orchard and never an apple. The one tree has the yoke on its neck, the other has not. Which is to be envied and which is to be pitied? On which has the calamity fallen? As with trees, so is it with men.

The yoke of Christ in its more specific sense means three things. First: that we are to confess him before men as Saviour and Master. Each has his own theory on this matter of the public profession of Christ, and his arguments to establish that theory. And one man's theory may be as good as that of another; but Christ, also, has a particular theory and argument about it. Those who professed to be his disciples he immediately sent out to be witnesses for him; that which they heard in the ear they were to declare upon the house-tops; they were to give what cup of cold water they had to give in the name of a disciple of Christ. Christ was emphatic about this

matter, " Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." That is Christ's theory and argument, and they must be allowed to outweigh ours whatever they may be, for it is with Christ we have to do.

It seems strange at first sight that this public confession of Christ as our Saviour and Master should be called a yoke, or a cross. It might appear to be rather our very joy to confess ourselves the believers and followers of one so absolutely great and good. But taking the world and human nature as they are we know there is a hesitation, a shrinking, a shirking of this yoke. There is some psychological twist in our nature as to this not easily explained. It were easy to condemn it in others if each did not find it in vigorous existence in himself. No devotee of any other religion is ashamed of its public profession. The Chinaman is not ashamed of Confucius. The Burmese are not ashamed of Buddha. The Mohammedan is not ashamed of his Prophet. The Christian traveller on the desert will go into his tent and offer his evening prayer in a low voice lest his Arab guide overhear his devotions. That Arab guide, on the contrary, will spread his prayer mat at the very door of the Christian's tent, and there in a loud voice, as if intent on being heard, he will pray to Allah. The Christian is the only religious being on earth who knows what it is to be ashamed of his Lord. How is this explained? Is it a temptation of the devil? Is it that Satan has no interest in tempting the pagan to be ashamed of his gods and that he has a supreme interest in making

the Christian ashamed of his Lord? Then this very shame we feel is a subtle testimony to the divine truth of the religion we profess. To overcome this shame calls for a degree of courage and of self-denial that makes it of the nature of a yoke.

The yoke of Christ means that we are to obey his commands. Now Christ commands nothing which is not ultimately for our own good, and we know it. A life lived in accord with his commands is the ideal life, that which we most admire in others, and most desire for ourselves. To obey his commands should be as easy and as natural for us as for the tree to bend to the influences of the wind, and rain, and sunshine of the successive seasons. Yet Christ calls this obedience a yoke because he knows, and we know, that there are selfish and self-willed tendencies in us leading the other way. In each of us there is a little king, a little despot, who seeks to make his own will his only law. Every child, however amiable, knows what it is to meet his father's commands with an expressed or an unuttered "I will not." Although he may know the father's request is for his ultimate good, yet to obey it is of the nature of a yoke. We all know where this early yoke galled our young shoulders. We carry this tendency of our nature into the region of our religious life. To overcome it and to make the will of Christ the law of our souls requires the stooping of the shoulders and the taking on of the yoke of obedience.

The yoke of Christ means that we are to submit to his dealings with us in his daily providences over our lives. At first sight this might seem no yoke; he is wise, he is kind, he is our friend, his plans for us

must be for our good. It would appear that we should be the happiest of creatures in taking each day what that day might bring, knowing that it is sent or controlled by one who seeks only our best. When the Greek sailor lost his way on the dark and stormy Ægean and saw some shining one coming from Olympus across the water to his ship, he gladly put the tiller into his more sure hand, knowing that he would thus be guided most safely and speedily to his desired haven. But Christ calls this submission a yoke because there is in each of us an independency, a constitutional wish and will to plan our own lives, to shape our own course, to arrange our own circumstances, to forecast our own future. "Soul, take thine ease . . . thou hast much goods laid up for many years." When our plans are interfered with, when our pleasures are interrupted, when our prospects are disappointed, although we may know it is of the providence of God, it is not easy for us to say, "Not my will but thine be done." It is of the nature of a yoke. Christ himself knew the weight of this yoke when, that night in Gethsemane, he said, "Let this cup—this yoke—pass from me." If we would see the deepest depth and the highest height of the character and example of Jesus Christ, it is in that supreme conquest of his own will brought into perfect submission to the will of the Father. If we would know where his yoke fits closest on our shoulders and draws heaviest on our souls, it is in making similar submission.

This yoke is meant to be easy. It does become easy in fact as we continue faithfully to bear it. First: because we bear it not from constraint, nor from mere

authority, but from love. It is said of Jacob that for seven years he bore the yoke of Laban's service for the sake of Rachel, and that the years seemed to him but a few days for the love he bare her. There is no love, however, like that which the saved man bears to the Lord who saved him. It is stronger than that which binds husband to wife, parent to child, friend to friend. It has survived the consuming power both of persecution and of martyrdom. It has carried the yoke through fire and death. It is as strong to-day as it ever was. It would carry the Christian of to-day through similar tests. When Christ will prove the love of his disciples once more as he has often done before, it will not be found wanting. Our tests are of different kinds and in other directions. It is as difficult to live for Christ in the corruptions of society, in the temptations of business, in the formalities of the church, as it was to die for him in the court of Nero or in the amphitheatre of Rome. This public profession of Christ, this obedience to his commands, this submission to his will is of the nature of a yoke; but we bear it not from necessity, nor from obligation, nor from duty; but, as Jacob served for Rachel, from love. The cares, the anxieties, the labours that we endure for our children are a yoke which we put on every morning and which we do not always put off at night. We have carried it since they were born and will bear it while we live, yet we do it not grudgingly or complainingly, but for the love we bear them.

" To make a happy fireside clime
For weans and wife,
Is the true pathos and sublime
Of human life."

When our love for them is reciprocated by their love for us, the yoke becomes doubly easy and our burdens light. Between the yoke and our shoulders lie these two pads, our love for them and theirs for us. Herein is love, not only that we love Christ and bear the yoke for the love we bear him; but that he first loved us. So the yoke becomes easy.

Again this yoke comes to be easy for, at last, it comes to be agreeable to our own best inclinations. Love alone makes the yoke easy, and when love is asked to serve in that which in itself is agreeable to its own inclinations the yoke becomes doubly easy. When the aging Isaac called his sons before him that they might serve him once more before he passed away, that bluff and hearty man Esau came promptly at his father's request. With all his faults he loved his father, and for love of him was ready to do anything his father might ask, to bear any yoke the old saint might lay on his shoulders. But when he found that his father's request was that he should take his bow and arrows and go out among the hills to find game of which to make venison, then the yoke was very easy; for Esau was a cunning hunter and dearly loved the chase. The yoke was agreeable to his own inclination. He would have hills to climb, swamps through which to flounder, streams to wade, the heavy game to carry home at night. But did ever a true hunter stop to think of hills and swamps and streams, or the weight of the game before him?

Now our Lord never asked us to bear any yoke for him which does not at last become agreeable to our own true inclinations. To be an honourable man, to give honour where honour is due, to confess gra-

ciously our obligation to one who served us in love —that surely is agreeable to our own best inclinations. And that is all that Christ asks in asking us to confess him before men. To obey the commands that ask only that we do right, speak the truth, live in honesty and charity with our neighbour—that surely is agreeable to our own best inclination. And that is all that Christ asks in asking us to obey his commands. To feel the responsibility and solemnity of life, to see the complicated circumstances through which we must make our way, and to commend our way to the wisdom and the love of God for guidance—is not that also agreeable to our own chastened inclinations? Is not this the highest expression of our strongest inclinations?

> "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
> Lead Thou me on;
> The night is dark, and I am far from home;
> Lead Thou me on."

To take the lamp of life and go out with it into the night, away on the dark mountains where men are stumbling in ignorance, in superstition, and in fear; to lead them into the straight path, the path of life and hope—could anything be better suited to our own most humane inclinations? And that is what Christ asks in asking us to take on the yoke of service.

Certainly it requires effort, self-denial, sacrifice to do it. So the climbing of the slippery hills, the wading of the cold streams, the hard scramble through the brush, the burden of the captured deer, requires effort, self-denial, the sweat of the hunter's face. Yet hear him in the jubilance of it, the enthusiasm and passion of it, as he dries his wet garments at the even-

ing camp-fire, relating the incidents of the day to his fellow hunters. "He led me up the steep and slippery hill; but I kept him in sight: and there he is. He plunged into the marsh; from tuft to tuft of grass; all covered with the mire, I followed him; and there he is. He swam the river in its swiftest place; through the blinding rush of water I followed him half drowned; but there he is. Fainting with hunger and sore with fatigue, I carried him on my back through the twilight; and there he is." He casts himself on the bed of spruce boughs under the frosty sky to dream of the day that has been, and to long for another day of such sweet toil. He does it and he likes to do it; the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

To meet and conquer our own timidity and hesitancy about confessing Christ is the hunter climbing the steep hill; we do it until we like to do it. To meet and conquer the temptations of the day, to keep a straight course of truth and right and honour in obedience to Christ's commands, is the hunter pushing his way through the thorny thicket; but we do it until we like to do it. To bear our sorrows patiently, to accept them as sent of God, is the hunter, faint yet pursuing, bearing the heavy game through the twilight, with visions of the camp-fire and supper and sleep in the ambrosial woods. It is to say with Paul, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. So at last the yoke becomes easy and the burden light.

XXII

LETTERS OF CREDIT

For all the promises of God, in him are yea and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.—2 Corinthians i. 20.

TWENTY-FIVE hundred people on the docks one summer Saturday, bidding good-bye and going aboard different ships for a trip to Europe, to the Orient, or around the world; depending for their necessary expenses on little bits of paper—travellers' checks, letters of credit, little books of railroad and hotel coupons. They required to be carried over lands and seas; to find entertainment at many hotels; to make many purchases by the way; some would be taken ill and go to hospitals, incurring large expense, and all they had to go on were those little pieces of paper—printed promises assuring them that they would be accepted on railroads, at hotels, or turned into money at any bank whenever or wherever they were presented. Paper promises, that was all. They travelled by faith, and surely at a brave venture of faith.

We start on this long journey we call the Christian life, depending on similar promises. It is a journey of many needs, expected and unexpected, a journey in which we meet temptation, trial, sorrow, the shadow of death, the darkness of the grave, the solemnity of the future judgment, and all we have to go on are these little pieces of paper—the printed promises of

the Bible, assuring us of all necessary supplies on the way. For what is the Bible but one of those books of coupons we buy for a journey, travellers' checks, a letter of credit? Sometimes the travellers' coupons are put up in different colours: a yellow one for the hotel room, green for breakfast, white for dinner. The promises of the Bible may be gathered into three classes:

First, promises of pardon of past sins: "All we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." And we believe these promises and go on in our hopeful way.

Promises of divine grace for the present needs of each passing day: "As thy day is so shall thy strength be." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "He will not suffer us to be tempted more than we are able, and with the temptation will make a way of escape." "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." And we believe such promises and go on our unknown way.

Promises that go beyond all present needs and experiences, into the life that is to come: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." And after death: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." And we believe these large promises and go on our adventurous way expectant.

Thus we start out and continue on our great journey, carrying only this book of printed promises as the hope of our needed supplies. We walk by faith, not by sight. But this going out into the Christian life trusting that these promises will be realised in substantial fact of mercy and grace is not any greater venture of faith, nor does it lay any greater strain on our rational nature, than is laid on the traveller going out on his world journey, trusting that his paper letter of credit will be cashed in due time at some bank. Hard-headed, practical, prudent men trust to both and do so every day. The faith in the one case is no greater or less than in the other. Promises and faith in them are the method of civilisation. We all walk by faith, not by sight.

But are these promises good? That is the pertinent question. Will the railroad accept this coupon for my fare? Will the hotel accept this one for my entertainment? Will the bank in London or in Cairo give me the needed money on this letter of credit? That depends on the real values that lie, or do not lie, somewhere back of these paper promises, and by which alone their worth or worthlessness is measured. Their value depends on the financial worth of the bank or agency issuing them.

The faith on which men do business is not credulity nor sentiment; it is based on real values; its paper promises are adequately secured. The cashier of a bank is a narrow-minded man, a bigoted man, as some men count bigotry. He may be most courteous or most critical, most cheerful or most chilly towards you and the paper you present to him for money. Whether he is one or the other depends on the name

of the bank on the face of your check or the name of the endorser on the back of it. Your business is done with him on certain promises on paper, his business with you is done on his knowledge of the real value somewhere back of that promise. Anyone who can write can write a check or issue a letter of credit; to give them value there must be somewhere the solid coin of the realm. That is the only way we can safely do commercial business.

And that is the only way we can safely do religious business. Anyone can write a promise of pardon for sin, of grace to help; any imaginative spirit can write a prospectus of the future. And anyone can accept these promises and believe them and set out on the solemn and endless journey, depending on them. But if in religion we be as particular and as prudent—as narrow-minded, if you will—as we are in commercial affairs, we will ask about the right to make such a promise, of the real value behind them, of the maker's power to redeem them in the day of final settlement. And that day is sure to come, sooner or later.

The faith of the man who believes in the Bible, in Christ, and in the church of Christ is no better or worse than the faith of the man who believes that he can get along without the Bible or Christ or the Christian church. The faith of the man believing the promises of the Bible is no better or worse than the faith of the Arab believing the promises of the Koran. The difference lies in the thing believed; in the substantial value behind the thing believed. One man's check may be engraved in the highest style of art and signed in Spencerian elegance; another man's check

may be poor in its lithography and chirography; the cashier pays little attention to these elegancies of art, he is thinking of the shining metal which alone gives the paper value. And it is with the cashier we have to do. The eloquence, the artfulness, persuasiveness of the one issuing the promise and urging us to accept it are of no avail for us when we present it to that inquisitive, particular, narrow-minded man whom we expect to cash it. It is with him we have principally and finally to do, and we had better keep him in mind when we accept such plausible promises.

There are elegantly engraved, flourishingly signed, eloquently urged religious promises in the market of to-day. It is not the elegance or eloquence of your religious faith, but what real value it has in the opinion of God that tells. For it is with God we have principally and finally to do in religion.

So far as the promises of the gospel and our faith in them are concerned, the answer to all such questions of their worth is Jesus Christ. All these promises of God in him are yea and in him Amen. He is the security behind them. In him they are "yea." In him they begin; in his name they are issued; they are valuable with the value his name gives them. Your letter of credit was good and cheerfully cashed for you because it was issued by a bank well known for its capital. In the name of that bank it was "yea." It is a cheerful thing to hear that word yea when in a foreign land you ask, Can you give me money on this letter?

In him they are "Amen." In his name these promises have been honoured. He is a bank that has never failed. Here is an old-time traveller who says,

"I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." Another after far travel in the Christian life, depending on these promises, could say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." Our fathers went out depending on these promises and found them good in the prolonged experience of pardon and of grace. By them they were enabled to rise above the love and the power of sin; to make their way righteously through temptation; to reach old age crowned with righteousness and charity, and to go out with visions of peace and joy with God. This bank of Christ has done business in this world these many centuries and no letter of credit, no travellers' check of promise has ever been dishonoured of God. "In him they were Amen." And it is with God we have to do.

These promises have their certainty of fulfilment in Christ because he has fulfilled the conditions on which they are suspended. The wages of sin is death. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. So say the Scriptures; so says the conscience of man in a hundred lands. The promises of pardon for sin are many and rich. But they are all based on the fact that Christ voluntarily took our place under the Law and paid the penalty our disobedience incurred. Behind the promises are the cross and the real sacrifice it bore. That that sacrifice of himself was accepted of God in our behalf is put beyond successful denial by his resurrection from the dead. Anyone can write a promise of pardon; many wise men have taught moral truth; and some good men

have died in pity and in love for their fellow-men; there were three crosses on Calvary that rare day. Why do we lean with all religious hope on the central cross? Because Christ in his teaching, in his works of mercy, in giving himself to die for us, based the acceptance by God of what he did in our behalf on his resurrection on the third day. Other men were wise; loved their fellow-men with a passion of love and died for them; but of such only Christ was raised from the dead at the time foretold. The opening of the grave and the raising of the dead are the sole prerogative of God. That resurrection is God's endorsement and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as atonement for man's sin.

The promises of the needed grace for the passing day are based on the fact that after his resurrection Christ ascended into heaven and is there making continual intercession for us. These promises put us in touch with a living Saviour.

The promises of future glory on which we depend are based on the fact that Christ has entered into that glory and is there now preparing a place for us, to return again to take us to himself, that where he is we may be also.

There, then, is the security back of these promises —the person and the work of Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension, by virtue of which the promises are yea and Amen. The promises on our currency are but paper; in the treasury of the government is the coin that gives them value. The promises of the Bible are but paper; Christ is not a paper man; the place of his birth, his death, the evidence of his resurrection are with us, as

sure in their reality as the coin in the government treasury.

There may be those who depend on other religious promises than those of the gospel of Christ. If they would have their promises as reliable and valuable, as acceptable to God, they must in some way get the founder of their religion to be wise, sinless, crucified, and raised from the dead. A promise is as good only as its security. A promise is as good as it is, not in the opinion of the one making it, but in the opinion of the one expected to fulfil it. The promises which we plead before God are yea and Amen in Christ, because Christ fulfilled the conditions God required and because God has declared them good by raising him from the dead.

What then? If we have started on the Christian life depending on these promises, we are safe. If we continue on our way relying on them, we are safe. If we pass into the life to come and to the final judgment resting our hopes of peace with God on them, we are safe, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us . . . even Jesus."

XXIII

MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S MERCY

God, be merciful to me a sinner.—Luke xviii. 13.

YOU remember the context. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, . . . or even as this publican. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me the sinner. Each compares himself with the other. The Pharisee, in contrast with the publican, counted himself the saint in the sight of God. The publican, in contrast with the Pharisee, confessed himself the sinner. Let modesty and conviction prompt us to stand with the publican to-day.

God, he says. That solemn word may not always be the first in our thoughts; it must surely be the last. God is a presence not to be put by; a thought not to be got rid of. There are circumstances in our lives, days in our years and hours in our days when, driven by some inward storm of sorrow or of sin, we come with this man to the foot of the altar stairs and whisper this first word of our text—

God: And what is God to our mental vision when we thus call upon him in awe or in need? Do we know him just for what he is, for the best of what he is, for all that he is? Such knowledge is too great for me, said one of the saints at the altar of prayer, and we can fully appreciate what he felt. Surely, to know him a little better, to see him a little clearer, to know what to expect when we pray to him with this publican, is the prevailing, the passionate, desire of our hearts. Suppose that the Sabbath with its rest from labour, the church with its service of worship, with its song and sermon, did nothing else than bring this thought of God more solemnly to mind and heart, would they not minister to our greatest need and our deepest desire? When we go into a picture gallery to look at a masterpiece, some guiding friend, interested in it and in us, will suggest that we stand here or there in order to see it in the proper light, and as the painter himself would have it seen. So should the sermon, the service, the song be so many suggestions to the silent, expectant congregation to stand where their hearts might feel and their souls see something more of God as God would have himself seen and known by men.

There are three sources whence we derive our knowledge of God: The book of nature, this splendidly illustrated volume of earth and sea and sky, which spells out for us his attributes of power and wisdom. The book of our own moral nature, spelling out his attributes of righteousness and holiness. It seems easy to get from these two sources that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and

truth. Theoretically, this is what we might get from these sources. But man is so blinded by the dazzle of his own hopes and by the darkness of his own fears, so affected by his own prejudices and passions, that, at best, he sees but through a glass darkly, and distorts even what he sees. If we turn to the pictures of God which man has made for himself, and to the concrete images through which he expressed his mental conception, we find them all lamentably, pitifully defective and distorted. If we think of the mythologies, the demonologies, the idolatries whereby man represented God to his own soul we can sum them up in one sentence, Fear God, for his *anger* endureth forever. As you wander through the museums of antiquity, looking at the statues and paintings of the gods, statues speaking the highest and the best as seen and felt by master minds, you will notice that there is a smile on the face of only one of them, and that one is Bacchus, and that is the repulsive, leering smile of drunkenness and basest passion.

If to-day we have a worthier conception of God it is not because we read nature and human nature better than these men did; but because we have that third and best source of information, the Bible. Even to those who do not read it, and to those who do not believe it, there comes this better conception of God, unconsciously sifting in upon them from the general Christian atmosphere in which they live. They are as plants growing green in a place which, though not lighted, is yet warmed by the sun from which they turned their faces.

The Bible is given for one specific purpose. It has something to say about the stars; but it is not a text-

book on astronomy. It has something to say about the earth; but it is not a text-book on geography. It has much to say about the movements of nations; but it is not a text-book on history. The Bible is like a railroad time-table, which gives incidental information about the country through which it passes; but its main purpose is to tell us how to get to certain towns and cities. The Bible gives much incidental and valuable information of the times and scenes through which it came; but its specific purpose is to tell us what God is, what we are in his sight, and what we may expect of him as we stand at the altar stair with this publican whispering a prayer to him. The Bible is a picture of God and of man painted by God himself. What *we* are: that leads us to the second word of our text—

Sin: God be merciful to me a *sinner.* The theme of man's sin runs through all the pages of this book like a red thread. It begins here in Genesis, on its first page. It passes along through the story of the flood, through the thunders of Mount Sinai, through type and sacrifice of Exodus and Leviticus, through the penitential psalms, through the denunciations and pleadings of the prophets. It passes on to Calvary, and is tied fast to the cross.

Did it require a Bible to convince this publican that he was a sinner? Scarcely. For even without a Bible men caught lurid glimpses of the fact and consequences of sin. Paul, in speaking to the Gentiles, could assume a natural "fearful looking for of judgment." And men without the Bible have set forth the fact and consequences of sin in terrible symbols. It is now Prometheus chained by his own sin to the rock,

and the vulture of consequences forever tearing at his ever-growing vitals. It is now Ixion bound by his own sin to a wheel forever revolving. Or it is Sisyphus rolling the stone up the steep ascent, getting it to the brink, the very point of rest, only to see it again and again returning to the foot of the hill; telling us in its own sad way that there is no rest for the wicked. Why should I speak of the Furies, the Harpies, the black shadow of Nemesis, and all those solemn symbols by which the uninspired prophets of men have set forth man's conviction of the fact and consequences of sin? As Cicero said, that, in the great speeches of Demosthenes, there is always something immense and infinite, and not of man: so, in the great figures of these prophets of men there is something commensurate with the facts as revealed on Sinai and Calvary. This publican could have come from any age and any land to the altar and say, with awful pathos, God . . . me . . . a sinner.

If this conviction of sin does not burn in our own consciences to-day, it is because we have suppressed not only the precepts of the Bible, but even the suggestions of nature and the natural instincts of our own souls. Every man honest with himself, listening to what his own natural conscience tells him, will come with this publican, and smiting on his breast say, God . . . me . . . a sinner.

What is God to such a sinner? What, if anything, in God does the prayer of such a sinner touch? That God is, that man is a sinner, and that under the conviction and anguish of sin man should pray, scarcely needs the exposition we have given. But this question, What in God does such a prayer touch? is of the

essence of the matter, and leads us to the third word of our text—

Mercy: God be *merciful* to me a sinner. Where did he get that word? Where did he learn, that, in God, there is mercy for a sinner? Is it said that this is the commonest knowledge, that all men know it? Very true. But where did all men get this knowledge? What would men know of God's mercy without the Bible? If left to the thoughts of men, the best men, the most farseeing of men, what would we know of God's mercy? Perhaps they caught a passing glimpse of it, or what was suggestive of it. Eurydice, new married to Orpheus, trod on a snake, was bitten and died and carried to Hades. Yes, always that far the eyes of men unaided could see. They knew the emerging happiness, and then the bite, the wound, and the dark consequences of that old serpent of sin that quenched the happiness in Hades. Then Orpheus for love of her tuned his pipes and dared the dread descent to rescue her if possible. With music and pleading he begged the Plutonian powers that she might be given back, not indeed forever, that was more than even human love dare ask: but for the natural term of earthly life, promising that then he would bring her back to them. "If not," he said, "I cannot go back without her." The old story runs that, at the pathos of his pleading and music, the lost spirits wept in sympathy. Tantalus, in spite of his unquenched thirst, paused a moment in his effort to reach the eluding water; Ixion's unresting wheel stood still a minute; Sisyphus rested on his rock and the vulture paused a little in his torture of Prometheus; then, for the first time, the Furies, those representatives of retribu-

tion, wept tears of pity. To the pleadings of Orpheus the infernal powers yielded back Eurydice, but with the condition that he should not look upon her face until they had reached the earth. And he, going before, played his sweetest strains, while she followed from darkness toward the light. As we read that fine old story we feel that man, at last, was about to discover a new attribute in God, the attribute of mercy, and to find a way by which a soul sunk in the power and consequence of sin might be raised to life and light and joy. But as the hopeful pair had well-nigh reached the top, when the first breath of the upper world had kissed their faces, Orpheus, impatient, turned to look upon her, and poor Eurydice sank back again out of his sight, and

> "All alone
> He makes his moan,
> And calls her ghost
> Forever, ever, ever lost."

And what does the old story mean? That man, at his best, in his tenderest imagination, cannot compass or complete the thought of divine mercy. He can complete the thought of sin, and paint its consequences; but fails to find a way up out of it. He can send Orpheus to Hades to plead for Eurydice, or this publican to the temple to plead for himself; but he cannot give Eurydice back, or give the hope of pardon to this publican smiting his breast. We sometimes think we can live this life aright and hope for a better life in the future by virtue of natural religion, without a Bible and without a Christ. In the very surfeit of our Christian privileges we wantonly turn to these

pagan methods. And this is what men, the best pagan men who ever came to this world, could reach of the divine mercy without the Bible and without Christ—Eurydice sinking back again,

"Forever, ever, ever lost."

When we open the Bible it is found that divine mercy for sinning souls is its twin theme. Wherever that red thread of sin runs through its pages this white thread is twined round and round it. It begins here in Genesis, in the same chapter and verse with sin, and follows that to Noah's ark and altar; to the smoking sacrifice at the foot of Sinai; through psalm and prophecy again; until, with the red thread of sin, it is tied, sure and fast, to the cross of Calvary. Mercy follows man through all his wanderings with a music sweeter and a persuasion more powerful than that of Orpheus. Incarnate in Christ it comes down to the lowest of men and to men's lowest need. Christ not only threatens to die for his lost Eurydice, but dies for her. In the name and in the power of the sacrifice he paid for the soul, he rescues it, and leads it upward out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of Hades into heaven. In the gospel, Christ calls men to rise out of sin and its consquences, and to follow him into perfect forgiveness and peace with God, calls them with a music of patient entreaty so ineffably sweet that

"Orpheus self . . . might hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have *quite* set free
His half regained Eurydice."

For what does our text say as to the result of this

publican's prayer for mercy? That question leads us to the last word of our text—

Justified: "He went down to his house justified." There, at last, is the thought of divine mercy compassed and completed by Jesus Christ. What earnestly seeking men had seen dimly is thereafter seen clearly. Paul went out into the Gentile world in the passion of the great truth, speaking of God as "the Father of mercies," as if mercy were the very essence of his relations to men. And so it is to men who will have it so. There are judgment and justice and wrath in God; but these are not turned toward men, until men have declined and despised the overtures of mercy.

What imagination can help us to enter into the experience of the man who first felt real mercy, the infinite mercy of God, falling with cool healing on his guilty soul? We can remember some summer evening when the air was sultry, with distant thunder breaking the hot stillness. Through the stifling air sped flashes of lightning, each coming nearer. Men and animals, even the very plants, cringed in the withering atmosphere. Then the luscious sound of the first large drops of rain, falling, a drop here and there, more frequently, plentifully, carrying cool life with them, the leaves vibrating to them, the parched earth drinking them in. When the shower was over the air was washed clean, the sun shone, the trees lifted up their wilted leaves, the birds sang again among the branches, and men threw open doors and windows to the sweet influence, and went back to their toil with joy. Such must have been the joy of the man who first felt the soft falling of God's mercy upon his fevered soul.

" It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath."

In that experience this publican went down to his house justified. In that experience the prodigal felt the father's arms on his neck, his kiss on his cheek. In that experience the Magdalene, yonder in the picture, is prone on the ground, her face resting on the palms of her upholding hands, between her elbows the volume of the gospel, there, through suffused eyes, drinking in the marvellous story of God's mercifulness to one who is a penitent sinner.

These influences of mercy are about us all to-day. Only waiting for us to stand with the publican and call for it. And not only when sin has scorched and seared our souls; but, also, when bending under unusual burdens of the heart; when life is going hard with us; when the lights of love and of friendship are flickering in some blasting wind; when health and hope are quivering in infirmity. In such hours we may hear the dropping of this gentle rain from heaven. God knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and as a father pitieth his children so the Lord is ready to put the arms of his great mercifulness about us.

" O God! how beautiful the thought,
How merciful the blessed decree,
That grace can e'er be found, when sought,
And naught shut out the soul from thee."

XXIV

THE LOOM OF THOUGHT

As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.—Proverbs xxiii. 7.
Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.—Proverbs iv. 23.

THE bee is a honey-making creature; it roams over many fields, gathers its harvest from many flowers, comes back laden with honey and wax, and stores them up. That is the bee's sole hope for his future winter. As the honey he makes, so is he. The spider is a web-making creature; out of his own substance he weaves a web in a corner for the capture of food. And that web is the spider's only hope of future sustenance. The caterpillar is a cocoon-making creature; out of his own nature he weaves the silken fibre about himself; weaves therein his own wings. And that is the caterpillar's sole hope of being a future butterfly in the free air. These are the constitutional and characteristic functions of those little creatures.

Man is a thinking creature; that is his constitutional function. He eats and drinks, he laughs and weeps; but these are only the accidents of his life. The underlying fibre and fabric of what he is, and is to be, is thought. There is a little weaver up here in the brain sitting at a loom, filling his shuttles with thought-stuff. The rush of his shuttles and the clank

of his loom go on all day and much of the night; he weaves even in our sleep, filling his shuttles with dreams and thrusting them into the web he is weaving. He is a tireless creature; asleep or awake he weaves, drunk or sober, angry or pleased, sane or insane, he goes on weaving.

We must think; just as we must breathe as to the body, we must think as to the soul; it is not optional, it is instinctive. The shuttles are forever flying back and forth; no shuttle goes empty; each one carries a good thought, or a bad thought, like a coloured thread, into the web. When that web is finished we call it character—Karma. That is what the man is. "Every man is the son of his own works," says Cervantes; we may amend by saying, Every man is the son of his own thoughts. As he thinketh in his heart so is he. As the bee must live on the honey he stored up, as a butterfly must wear the wings he himself wove, as the spider must live well or ill by the quality of the web he wove for himself, so man must bear and wear the character and destiny which he wove for himself on the loom of thought. It may be a frivolous or a sober garment—he must wear it and be known by it. As he thinketh in his heart, so is he to all clear, perceiving eyes. Plato says, "He who by nature or training, or both, was a tall man while he was alive, will remain as he was after he is dead; and the fat man will remain fat, and so on; and the dead man, who in life had a fancy to have flowing hair, will have flowing hair. And if he was marked with the whip and had the prints of the scourge, or of wounds in him when he was alive, you might see the same in the dead body. . . . And I should infer that this is equally

true of the soul: when a man is stripped of the body, all the natural or acquired affections of the soul are laid open to view. . . . The judge in that day shall be naked—

"Holding a sceptre of gold, and giving laws to the dead."

He with his naked soul shall pierce into the other naked souls and the judgment will be just. The soul that is marked with the whip and is full of the prints and scars of perjuries and of wrong shall go into Tartarus. If the soul be straight and upright he shall go to the islands of the blest. . . . To live and die justly is a hard thing and greatly to be praised. Such good and true men, however, there have been, and will be again."

Our thoughts, then, are the characteristic thing in us, the dominant and determining thing. The clothes we wear can be laid off at any time. The man poor in this world's goods, and poorly clad, coming to fortune can be transformed by his tailor in twenty-four hours into the appearance of a prince; but the clothes are not the man; they are no part of him; *he* is not transformed. The tissues of the body can be sloughed off and changed; they are no part of us. They are finally all removed and dissolved in the dust. But the fabric of thought which we daily weave abides, surviving poverty and riches, sickness and health, death and the dissolution of the grave. This character which we weave out of thought-stuff is immortal. It is not only a part of us, it is essentially us. As he thinketh in his heart so is he. No man, then, is better or worse than he is in the character of his inmost thought. The outward appearance may

deceive the world; the inward fact is known to himself. Hence the emphasis and solemnity of this text, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

Where does this little weaver in heart and brain get the thought-stuff for his shuttles? Many telegraph wires run under and over our streets, over the mountains and under the oceans, coming from scenes of war and of peace, of industry and of learning, of sorrow and of joy, each carrying some swift current. And these wires are gathered at last into some central office of many clicking instruments. The operator translates these currents into intelligence, and sends them out in the form of messages of commerce, of war, of crime, or of love. So our five senses are main wires going out into the world about us, gathering observations, sensations, and experience from the streets of the city, the scenes of the country, the companions we meet, the books we read, the pictures at which we look. Another wire goes down, like an ocean cable, into the depths of our own nature, bringing up mysterious messages given by our own consciousness, speaking of God and good, of right and wrong, and of judgment to come. Thus there are wires from heaven above, on which God and good angels are sending messages; wires from hell below, on which the devil and his angels are sending suggestions, promptings; wires from men and women about us, conveying subtle trains of thought and of feeling. And the heart of man is the central office into which these wires run, pouring in there this raw material of thought-stuff. There is plenty of material for the shuttles of this little weaver. The most

learned has not too much; the most ignorant has not too little. The bins of both are brimming full.

And this busy weaver up here takes what you give him; he is not particular; it is not his province to discriminate; he puts into his shuttles just what you first put into the bins. He steadily fills his shuttles with that which you give him, good or bad, and steadily weaves it for you. The old weaver wove the rags our grandmothers gave him into a carpet or a rug; the weaver arranged the rags as to colour, he did not choose the strips themselves; the thrifty housewife did that with care before sending them to him. With careful hand she chose what was wool and rejected what was cotton; chose what was desirable, rejected what was undesirable in colour; knowing that the weaver would work up only what she gave him, and all that she gave him. And being woven he would send it home to please or to plague her all the days of her life. She kept that rag-bag with all diligence, for out of it came the issues of her home.

On these wires come thoughts good and bad. Day and night the supply never ceases, the loom is never at rest, the shuttles are never idle. But we are not at the mercy of this incoming mass of thought-stuff. If the message is not to your interest you can hang up your telephone and let it ring. You can stuff the bell and silence even the ringing. You can switch off your telegraph instrument and let the current pass or go into the ground. So in the central office of heart and brain we can accept or reject the messages coming in upon us; we can shut our eyes, close our ears, we can refuse our attention. In the republic of the brain there are legislative faculties, the reason, the con-

science, and the will. We can call a congress of these faculties to pass on these incoming suggestions, to accept them or reject them, to say what we shall put into the weaver's bin and what we shall not put in. Master among these faculties stands the will, with its high prerogative of choice. Every fibre in the bin has passed there with his consent. Many ships come to our shores with immigrants from many lands. We are not required to allow all to land. We reserve the right to refuse admission to the pauper, the criminal, the diseased, and the anarchist. Self-preservation requires and justifies the exclusion act. For once in, the national character is coloured by this incoming taint. So we reserve to ourselves as men the right to discriminate between the suggestions which present themselves to the soul. We have the right and the power to keep our hearts with all discriminating diligence. For once in, they mingle in the web of character, and once there they surely appear again in the final issue and tissue of character. As he thinketh in his heart so is he.

By our thoughts we are judged. We judge other men by their deeds, for that is all we can see. Even then, we take the deed only as an index of what the thought and motive may be. The deed is but the thought completed and hung out as a sign of what the weaver is doing in the heart. We judge a tree by its fruits; but fruit is just the sap of the tree woven into the outward form of an apple or a pear. When a man is tried in a court of justice we seek to reason back to the man's thought, motive, intent. Did he, or did he not, act with criminal intent? The outward action is modified by that. The Koran says,

"When a man dies those who survive him ask what property he has left behind. The angel who bends over the dying man asks what good deed he has sent on before him." Christ has taught us that the judgment of God asks, what thoughts and intents of his heart does he bring with him? As he thinketh in his own heart so is he.

We judge ourselves by our thoughts. We know the parentage of the deed. We know that the deed existed in thought before it existed in action. We know it was woven on this inner loom. We know with what we filled the shuttles before it was exhibited in the web. In the court of the inner conscience our thoughts accuse or else excuse one another.

> "Not in the clamour of the crowded street;
> Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng;
> But in ourselves are triumph and defeat."

The primary and ultimate conflict of moral character therefore lies in this region of our thought. There are ten thousand thoughts that do not go out in deeds. There are many blossoms on the cherry tree that do not become fruit. By natural selection the tree chooses what blossoms it shall mature into cherries. By spiritual selection we choose what thoughts shall be accepted and matured into actions. Yet even the thought *not* matured into deed may be an abiding thread in the web. The cherished thought may be prevented from becoming the outward deed by worldly prudence, by care for reputation, by lack of opportunity; but the thought itself is ours, and appears in the web of character. The tree chooses what blossom shall be a cherry; some untimely frost,

some too greedy robin may thwart the purpose; but the tree has credit for its effort; it claims the cherry in its account. The cherished thought of good or bad is there to the credit or discredit of the man. As he thinketh in his heart so is he.

In the Old Testament times the Rabbis of the synagogue took notice primarily of the outward deed; the washing of the outside of the cup and the platter; the observance of outward moralities; not ethics but religious etiquette, not righteousness but outward rites, was the test of character. Jesus Christ brought in a keener test. He led men to the thought lying back of the deed, existing, full-formed, even when there was no deed, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, steal, commit adultery; but I say unto you that whosoever is *angry* with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. Whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart." As he thinketh in his heart so is he. To the outward deed we could often plead successfully, Not guilty. But what about this thought admitted, cherished, indulged? The Lord looketh upon the heart.

Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. The door to be watched by the strongest and sharpest of guards, is not the door by which the finished thought goes out in deeds; but the door by which the raw material goes in to be worked up by this weaver into the web of character. Hence the care we should take about what books we give our children to read; what pictures we give them to see; what scenes we allow them to frequent; what

company we permit them to keep. Long ago the Psalmist prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." His anxiety was about the ingoing door.

The most marvellous truth of Christianity is that the heart can be cleansed, the character changed. Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. There are those of whom it is said, They have not defiled their garments—this inner garment of thought—and they shall walk with him in white; for they are worthy. There are also those of whom it is asked, Who are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is not the product of the natural. Nature knows no alchemy with which to change character once it is woven into the warp and woof of the soul. This is the work of the supernatural, and the greatest miracle. Not the creation of matter, not turning water into wine, not raising the dead lays the heaviest demand on reason and faith. All these are easy to believe. When we see a Magdalene transformed, an impulsive Peter, a hot-tempered John, an inquisitor like Paul changed in the inner fibre of their character, that is the greatest miracle. Such miracles of inward change we see taking place every day. It may take place in our own souls to-day if we will. The mercy of God has not ceased from among men; the blood of the Lamb has not lost its cleansing secret; the Holy Spirit has not grown weary in the washing of regeneration.